

A TEACHER'S GUIDE to the books of BARBARA O'CONNOR

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA O'CONNOR has been writing books for children for more than twenty-five years. She is the author of many middle-grade novels and her books have won numerous awards, including ALA Notable Books, *School Library Journal* Best Books, *Kirkus* Best Books, Bank Street College Best Books, Parents' Choice Gold Awards, and NCTE Notable Books. She has been nominated for Young Readers' Choice Awards in thirty-eight states. Barbara O'Connor draws on the memories of her South Carolina childhood to create stories, settings, and characters that captivate young readers. Visit her online at barbaraoconnor.com.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide supports the use of O'Connor's books as part of a standards-based curriculum. Specifically, it is designed to help students comprehend complex texts, ask questions, expand their vocabulary, participate in discussions, and cite specific evidence to support their oral or written interpretations of a text. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy has identified these as descriptors of students who are college- and career-ready. Questions and activities are aligned to the four strands of the CCSS: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. These strands are all interconnected. Student discussion supports reading comprehension and effective written responses. Language skills and vocabulary support each of the strands. The guide provides an introduction to each book and CCSS-aligned questions and activities for before, during, and after reading. The Extending Learning section at the end applies to all of O'Connor's books and provides opportunities for students to make connections among them. **The standards listed throughout the guide reflect the standards for grade five but activities can be applied to grades three through seven.**

There are many ways to use O'Connor's books in your classroom. They can be read aloud to students, employed in small instructional groups or literature circles, or used for independent reading. Students should use reading notebooks to respond to questions and activities to keep track of new vocabulary. They should always be encouraged to support their thinking and responses with specific references to the text. During discussions, they should listen respectfully to the ideas of others and modify their thinking if necessary. It is helpful to have discussion routines in place such as "turn and talk," "think-pair-share," or Socratic seminars.

Finally, and most important, remember that you know your students better than anyone else. This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. Please feel free to adapt it as needed for your classroom. We hope you and your students enjoy this acclaimed author's books.



HC 9780374302733 • e-Book 9780374302757
Ages 9–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Eleven-year-old Charlie Reese has lived all her life in Raleigh, North Carolina. When her father is sent to jail and her mother is unable to care for Charlie and her sister, Jackie, Charlie is sent to live with her aunt Bertha and uncle Gus in the small town of Colby in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Although her aunt and uncle welcome her with love, Charlie yearns for her mother to “get her feet on the ground” so she can return home. She especially misses Jackie who is living with her friend’s family for her senior year of high school. Charlie’s anger spills out against the kids at school who make fun of her and occasionally even against those who are kind to her. She worries that the wish she has been making every day since fourth grade may not come true. But a loving home, true friendship, and a stray dog that captures her heart make Charlie wonder if what she has been wishing for is what she really wants.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Charlie angry about going to live in Colby? How is her life with Uncle Gus and Aunt Bertha different from her life back home in Raleigh?
2. Charlie’s been making the same wish every day for two years but won’t tell anyone what it is. What do you think her wish might be? Why?
3. Why does Charlie name the stray dog Wishbone? Why is it so important to her to capture him?
4. As Charlie adjusts to life in Colby, she wonders, “Where in the world do I belong?” What makes her feel this way?
5. How does Charlie’s wish finally come true?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

DETERMINING THEME

Explain to students that the theme is the main idea or underlying meaning of a fictional story. It expresses a view about life and how people behave. A story may have multiple themes. One way to determine a theme is to select a word that expresses a subject in a book and expand it into a message about life.

Work with students to generate a list of subjects that are explored in *Wish*, for example, family, friendship, love, acceptance, hope, and loss. Divide students into small groups. Assign a subject to each group and have them create a theme message for this book. They should cite specific details and events from the story to support their theme. Each group shares its results with the whole class.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: At the end of the story, Charlie tells Jackie that she had been so busy making her wish that she hadn’t seen things the way they really were. What does she mean by this? Use specific details from the text to support your response.

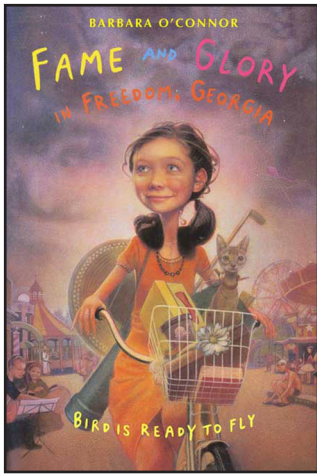
CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.9a Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]”).



PB 9780374400187 • e-Book 9781466809932
Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Burdette “Bird” Weaver is a sixth grader living in Freedom, Georgia. Often ignored or made fun of at school, Bird’s only friend is her neighbor, Miss Delphine. Bird tells Miss Delphine that she is going to make friends with Harlem Tate, the new boy in class, who is on his way to being an outcast, too. Becoming Harlem’s friend is harder than Bird anticipates but she finally convinces him to be her partner in a spelling bee that she hopes will gain her fame and glory in her small town and a trip to Disney World as well. While preparing for the spelling bee, Bird learns about Harlem’s family background and she realizes her new friend is much smarter than he seems. Although she doesn’t achieve her two goals, Bird does learn what it means to be a friend and that some things are more important than fame and glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Bird decide to be friends with the new boy? What does Miss Delphine mean when she says “that boy is gonna be a tough nut to crack” after she and Bird visited Harlem’s house?
2. What is Bird’s backup plan to convince Harlem to be her friend? Is it successful?
3. Why is winning the Freedom Middle School Spelling Bee important to Bird? What does she discover about Harlem as they prepare for the event?
4. Bird says that Miss Delphine has a way of looking through the outside of a person to find the good part inside. How does that influence Bird’s feelings about Harlem, Ray, and Mr. Moody?
5. Although Bird and Harlem don’t win the spelling bee, Bird thinks that she has achieved fame and glory in Freedom, Georgia. Why does she think that? Do you agree with her?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

During reading, have students keep track of what they learn about Bird and Harlem, noting specific details from the text to support their thinking. At the end, have them use their notes to write a brief comparison of these two characters and to describe how each character developed in response to events in the story.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: What do you think is the central theme of this book? Use specific details from the text to support your response.

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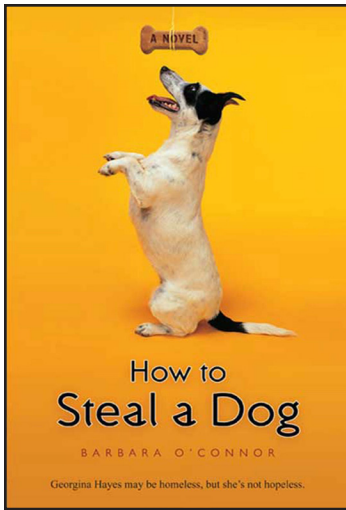
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PB 9780312561123 • e-Book 9780374706791
Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Georgina Hayes's life has been turned upside down since her father left home and her family was evicted from their apartment. She is living with her mother and brother, Toby, in their car, and is afraid that her friends and teacher might find out about their circumstances. After seeing a missing-dog poster offering a reward of five hundred dollars, Georgina hatches a scheme to help her family. She and Toby will choose a dog to “borrow” and then its owners will offer a reward that will enable her family to get an apartment. Georgina's plan starts to unravel when things don't work out as she has anticipated and her conscience makes her increasingly uncomfortable as she worries about the effects on the dog and its owner. With the help of a wise adult, Georgina comes to realize what she needs to do to make things right.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Georgina's life change when her father leaves home?
2. What is Georgina's plan to help her family get a new place to live? Why does her plan cause her to feel conflicted?
3. How does Georgina's plan begin to unravel after she and Toby steal Willy? How does each decision she makes lead to unexpected consequences?
4. Mookie tells Georgina, “Sometimes the trail you leave behind you is more important than the path ahead of you.” What does he mean by this?
5. What does Georgina decide to do about Willy in the end? How does she know that this is the right decision?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

CHARACTER EVALUATION

During reading, have students write down the steps of Georgina's plan to steal a dog in their notebooks, as she does in hers. Have them imagine that they are responding to Georgina about her plan. Beside each step, have them write what they think about it and tell her if they foresee any possible problems. Have students share their notes with a partner.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: There is a saying that the end justifies the means. Do you think this is the author's message in this book? Use specific details from the text to support your response.

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

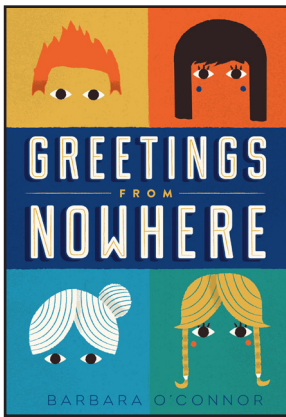
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HC 9780374399375 • PB 9781250062802
e-Book 9781466809307 • Ages 10–13

ABOUT THE BOOK

Aggie is the elderly owner of the Sleepy Time Motel in the Great Smoky Mountains. The motel is deteriorating since the death of her husband. She mourns his passing and the glory days when visitors filled every room. Unable to pay the bills, she places a For Sale ad in the newspaper. Soon, three groups of visitors converge on the motel: Willow and her dad, who wants to buy the motel to start a new life after his wife left; Loretta, who along with her parents is visiting the places her birth mother loved; and Kirby and his mom, whose car breaks down as she's taking him to a school for troubled boys. Although they don't have a lot in common, Aggie, Willow, Loretta, and Kirby become friends during the short time they all spend at the motel and their lives are transformed by their friendship. The story is told through alternating narratives, which provides insight into each character's thoughts and feelings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do we learn about Aggie, Willow, Loretta, and Kirby after reading the first four chapters? What changes are each of them experiencing in their lives?
2. What events bring Willow, Loretta, and Kirby to the Sleepy Time Motel? What does each one think about the motel at first?
3. Kirby steals and lies and is on his way to a school for boys with behavior problems. Why do you think Kirby acts the way he does? Who is able to see the good in him?
4. Willow asks Aggie why she can't stay at the motel. Aggie replies, "Well, you know, life marches on. And sometimes we have to join the parade whether we want to or not." What does Aggie mean? How does this lead to Willow telling Aggie about her mom?
5. Aggie, Willow, Loretta, and Kirby start out as strangers. How do they become friends and how do their friendships transform their lives?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Discuss with students how O'Connor wrote this book in alternating narratives. Have students write the names Aggie, Willow, Loretta, and Kirby on separate pages in their notebooks. During reading, have them jot down what they learn about each character and any questions or insights they have about them. Provide time for students to come together occasionally in small groups to share their notes. Ask them to discuss how the four narratives help them to understand each character's point of view and determine how the characters are similar and different.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: Describe how their time together at the Sleepy Time Motel proves to be a turning point in the lives of Aggie, Willow, Loretta, and Kirby. Use specific details from the text to support your response.

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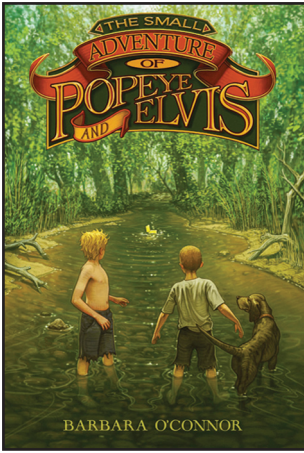
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CCSS.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

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CCSS.W.5.9a Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]").



PB 9780312659325 • e-Book 9781429947923
Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Popeye lives with his grandmother in Fayette, South Carolina. His summer vacation stretches out before him as one long, boring day after another, with nothing to do and no one to play with. All that changes when the Jewell family's mobile home gets stuck in the mud next to Popeye's house. Popeye has never met anyone like the Jewells, especially Elvis, the eldest of six children. Elvis is everything Popeye isn't. He's confident, swears, breaks rules, and has five rowdy siblings to boss around. Popeye is thrilled when Elvis wants to be his friend and suggests they have a small adventure. When a series of homemade boats with secret messages inside them come down the creek, they set out to discover who is sending them and what the messages mean. Popeye finds that his small adventure changes his life in unexpected ways.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Popeye's summer change when he meets Elvis? Why do you think he wants to be like Elvis?
2. Why is Popeye excited about finding the first boat in the creek? Why does he call it serendipity?
3. Where do the messages in the boats lead Popeye and Elvis? How are the messages clues about the person who wrote them?
4. Why does Popeye's adventure cause him to have qualms at times?
5. Even though Popeye feels like his life will return to normal when Elvis moves away, he also feels like it will be different. How will it be the same? How will it be different?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY BUILDER

Before reading, tell students that Popeye's grandmother teaches him a new word every week. During reading, have them write each of these words and their definitions in their reading notebooks and notice how each word is used in the story. Post the words on the vocabulary wall for reference and reinforcement.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Have students use a graphic organizer during reading to map Popeye's and Elvis's character traits, supplying evidence from the text to support each trait. After reading, have them use their organizers to respond to the following prompt: Compare and contrast Popeye and Elvis. Describe how they are alike and how they are different. Use specific details from the text to support your response.

CCSS.L.5.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

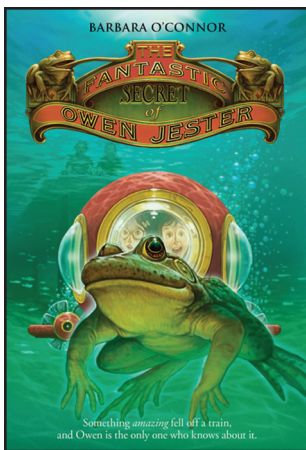
CCSS.L.5.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition).

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.9a Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]").



HC 9780374368500 • PB 9780312674304
e-Book 9781429994682 • Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

It's summer vacation and Owen Jester's family has just moved into his grandfather's house. He is sure his summer is doomed to be boring, but two things happen that promise to liven things up. First, he captures the biggest bullfrog in Graham Pond and keeps him caged in his room. While this makes Owen happy, Tooley the frog doesn't flourish in captivity. The second thing that happens is that Owen hears something mysterious fall from a passing train. When he finally finds it on a steep wooded hill near the train tracks he realizes it is truly fantastic: a two-passenger submarine. Owen must enlist the help of his two best friends and, reluctantly, Viola, the know-it-all girl next door, to get the heavy submarine down the hill to the pond where they can try it out. And all the while he has to keep it a secret from his parents and the railroad company. Meanwhile, Tooley gets sicker every day and the men from the railroad company are searching for the missing submarine. Will Owen get to ride in the submarine and what will happen to Tooley?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Owen find Viola irritating? What strategies does he use to keep her from following his friends and him? Why do you think she tries to follow them anyway?
2. Why does Owen have second thoughts about keeping Tooley in the cage he and his friends built? How does Viola add to his worries?
3. What is the mysterious object that falls from the train? What problems do Owen and his friends face in trying to use this amazing machine?
4. Why does Owen finally allow Viola to help them with the machine? Was this a wise decision? Why or why not?
5. Does this story end well for everyone?

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH REPORTS

Have students conduct research on submarines, finding out how they are made and how they operate. Using information gathered from multiple print and online resources, have them write brief reports on what they have learned and present their reports to classmates during sharing sessions.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: How does Owen change during the summer of his adventure? Use specific details from the text to support your response.

CCSS.RI.5.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

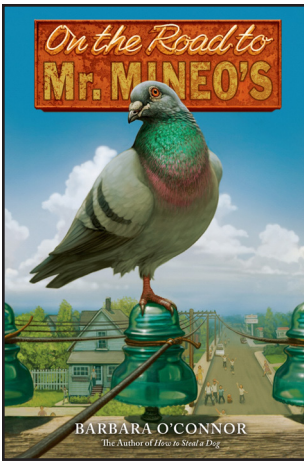
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CCSS.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.W.5.9a Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]").



HC 9780374380021 • PB 9781250039934
e-Book 9780374356569 • Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Stella and her friend Gerald live in the small town of Meadville, South Carolina, where things are pretty much the same day after day. All that changes, however, when Stella sees a one-legged pigeon on the roof of Gerald's garage. Her idea is to catch it and keep it as a pet because her parents won't allow her to have a dog. Gerald is wary of Stella's ideas because they usually involve something bad happening, but he reluctantly agrees to help her capture the pigeon. Soon Stella's mean brother Levi and his friends get wind of their plan and decide to catch the bird before Stella and Gerald can. Also, unbeknownst to Stella and Gerald, there are others interested in finding the pigeon. Mr. Mineo, the pigeon's owner, is distraught that he's missing. Mutt Raynard, an acknowledged liar, wants to convince his family he really did have a one-legged pigeon land on his head. Ethel and Amos Roper want to find the little brown dog that has been staying in their barn and is friends with the pigeon. The separate narratives are told in alternating short chapters. Eventually, the stories converge to make one story with a satisfying outcome for each character.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are best friends Stella and Gerald different from each other? Why does Gerald wish he could be more like Stella?
2. Why does Gerald dread it every time Stella says she has a good idea?
3. Stella and Gerald, Mr. Mineo, Mutt Raynard, Levi and his friends, and Ethel and Amos Roper all go on quests. What are they each searching for and why?
4. What happens when they all meet on the road to Mr. Mineo's?
5. Do Stella and the others get what they want in the end? Explain.

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Prior to reading, explain to students that the author alternates telling the story from the point of view of different characters. Have students write the following names on separate pages in their notebooks: Stella, Gerald, Mr. Mineo, Mutt Raynard, Ethel Roper, and Levi. During reading, ask them to take brief notes about each narrative. After reading, have students summarize each narrative and tell how all the stories come together at the end.

WRITTEN RESPONSE

Ask students to respond to the following prompt: Describe the setting of the story and explain how it is important to the plot. Use specific details from the text to support your response.

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CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

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EXTENDING LEARNING

AUTHOR STUDY

- Have students conduct research on Barbara O'Connor to learn about her life and how her personal experiences have influenced her writing, then create an author chart with this information. Ask students to share what they've learned with the rest of the class.
- O'Connor's books all take place in the South. Have students write a description of the setting of one of her books, including the landscape, climate, and places people live, then create an illustration to match the description. Display these near the author chart.
- O'Connor's characters speak in authentic Southern dialect. Have students work with a partner to find examples of characters using Southern dialect then share their findings with the class during sharing time.
- Have students choose two books that deal with the same theme and write a brief opinion piece comparing the books and describing how the theme is developed in each one.
- Many of the characters in O'Connor's books struggle with their conscience. Ask students to choose a character and describe his or her struggle and how it is resolved.
- Have students write a letter to O'Connor telling her about their favorite book and why they liked it.

CCSS.RI.5.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

CCSS.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

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WRITING WORKSHOP

Barbara O'Connor's books can be used as mentor texts during a unit on narrative writing.

- In a series of mini-lessons on how to write strong leads to grab the reader, display the opening paragraphs from *Greetings from Nowhere*, *How to Steal a Dog*, and *Fame and Glory in Freedom, Georgia* on a document camera or Smart Board. Ask students to explain why each opening is so effective. How does it make them want to read more? What questions do they have? Have them choose a piece of their own writing to revise for a stronger opening.
- In a series of mini-lessons on endings, read aloud the last few pages of *The Small Adventure of Popeye and Elvis*, *Greetings from Nowhere*, and *The Fantastic Secret of Owen Jester*. Ask students how each ending creates a specific mood and how each one provides a sense of closure. Have students use what they've learned when writing their own endings.
- When teaching students how to vary sentence length to provide interest and emphasis in their stories, display pages 34 and 35 from *The Small Adventure of Popeye and Elvis* on the document camera or Smart Board. Read aloud the last paragraph on page 34 and all of page 35. Point out the short sentences in a vertical sequence and ask students how they add to the narrative. Have students look for other examples in the book and share them with the class. Encourage them to use this technique in their own writing.

- In a series of mini-lessons on writing dialogue, choose examples of characters speaking in authentic dialect from O'Connor's books to display and read aloud. Discuss with students how this creates characters that are realistic. Encourage students to incorporate dialects when writing dialogue in their narratives.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.W.5.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 5 here.)

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

- During reading, have students keep track of new words they come across and write them in their notebooks. Have them write a definition of the words based on the context in which they are used, and then look the words up in a dictionary to confirm or discount their definitions.
- Post the new vocabulary words on a classroom vocabulary wall. Use the following suggestions to reinforce word learning:
 - Every time students use a word in their writing or speaking, have them put a sticker next to the word on the vocabulary wall.
 - Play a game where a student provides an example or non-example of a word on the vocabulary wall and other students have to guess what the word is and use it in a sentence.
 - Invite students to sort the words by parts of speech or other categories, for example, words with negative connotations or words that are antonyms.
 - Have students choose a word that is a character trait and describe a person who has that trait, for example, a person who is callous is hard-hearted and thinks of no one but himself.
- During reading, have students keep track of idiomatic expressions, such as “the elephant in the room” or “I smell a rat.” Provide opportunities for them to share these with the class and discuss what these expressions mean.

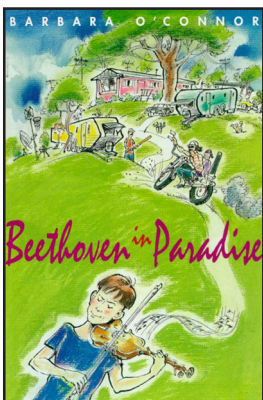
CCSS.L.5.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.L.5.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

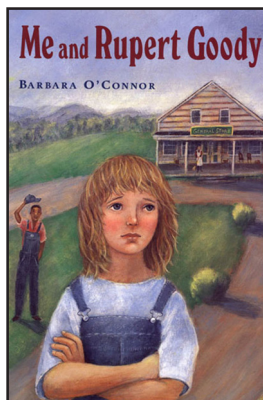
CCSS.L.5.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships.

CCSS.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

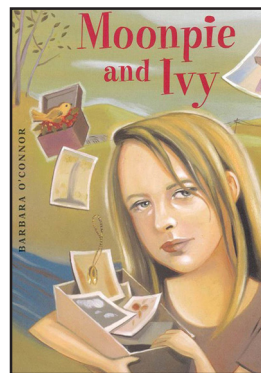
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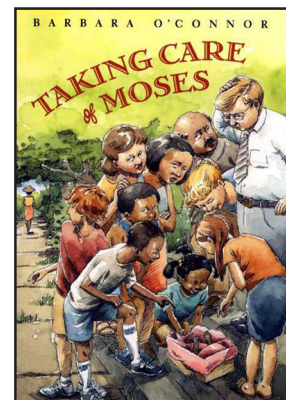
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