

# Rednecks

## Reading Guide

A Lesson from the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum's  
Education Advisory Panel



This lesson is designed to meet West Virginia State Standards

[wminewars.org](http://wminewars.org)

# *Rednecks* by Taylor Brown

## Unit Plan

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### **Week 1: Setting the Stage – Historical Context and Introduction**

#### **Focus:**

Build background knowledge of the West Virginia Mine Wars and introduce *Rednecks* by Taylor Brown. Students will begin exploring how fiction can reflect and reshape our understanding of history.

#### **Key Standards (WV CCR ELA 11th grade aligned):**

- ELA.11.RL.1 – Cite strong textual evidence.
  - ELA.11.RI.2 – Determine central ideas and summarize.
  - ELA.11.W.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts.
  - ELA.11.SL.1 – Initiate and participate in collaborative discussions.
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#### **Essential Questions:**

- What historical events inspired *Rednecks*?
  - How do setting and context influence a story?
  - Why might an author choose fiction to tell a true story?
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## Weekly Overview

| Day | Focus  | Activities  | Assessment  |
|-----|--|---|---|
| Mon | Introduction to the novel & historical context | Mini-lecture & video clip; Primary source jigsaw        | Exit slip: 1 takeaway from today's history lesson |
| Tue | Primary source exploration & vocabulary        | Station rotation w/ historical texts & vocabulary chart | Vocabulary journal                                |
| Wed | Genre study: What is historical fiction?       | Close reading of first chapter; Genre chart             | HW: Reading response (first impressions)          |
| Thu | Setting & characterization                     | Group work: analyze setting in opening chapters         | Annotated setting map                             |
| Fri | Synthesis & reflection                         | Timeline activity; Journal reflection                   | Timeline submission + journal entry               |

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## Lesson Plan Details

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### Day 1: Introduction to the Mine Wars

- **Objective:** Students will understand the historical background of the WV Mine Wars.
  - **Activities:**
    - Mini-lecture: Overview of the Battle of Blair Mountain.
    - Clip from PBS "The Mine Wars" (~10 min).
    - Jigsaw: Students read short excerpts from different primary sources (e.g., newspaper article, union flyer, miner's letter) and present to the group.
  - **Assessment:** Exit slip – "One surprising fact and one question I still have."
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### Day 2: Primary Sources + Vocabulary

- **Objective:** Students will explore and interpret vocabulary and documents related to the novel's setting.
  - **Activities:**
    - Stations:
      1. Vocabulary journal station (coal script, union, company town, strikebreaker, etc.)
      2. Analyze photo archive from the WV Mine Wars
      3. Read a passage from *Bloodletting in Appalachia*
      4. Make connections to themes from *Rednecks* preview
    - Whole class debrief.
  - **Assessment:** Submit vocabulary entries with definitions and a sentence/visual.
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### Day 3: What is Historical Fiction?

- **Objective:** Students will understand the traits of historical fiction and begin reading *Rednecks*.
  - **Activities:**
    - Mini-lesson: Features of historical fiction (anchor chart creation)
    - Read Chapter 1 aloud together or in small groups
    - Genre chart: Fill in with examples from the text
  - **Assessment:** Reading response prompt: "What feels real or fictional about the opening chapter?"
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### Day 4: Setting and Characterization

- **Objective:** Students will analyze how the setting of *Rednecks* shapes character actions and tone.
  - **Activities:**
    - Group work: Close read a passage that develops setting
    - Complete a “Setting and Mood” graphic organizer
    - Annotated map of the novel’s geography using context clues + historical resources
  - **Assessment:** Turn in the map and organizer
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### Day 5: Timeline & Reflection

- **Objective:** Students will synthesize their knowledge of the historical context and its connection to the story.
  - **Activities:**
    - Collaborative creation of a historical timeline (Battle of Blair Mountain events, unionization, Matewan Massacre, etc.)
    - Journal prompt: “How does knowing this history change how we read the novel?”
  - **Assessment:** Exit ticket + timeline turn-in
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### Suggested Materials

- Primary source excerpts
- Vocabulary chart/journal template
- Historical fiction genre anchor chart
- Setting and Mood graphic organizer

- Annotated timeline worksheet
  - Map handout of West Virginia with major sites
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## Week 2: Character & Conflict

### Focus

Analyze how Taylor Brown develops characters and portrays various conflicts within the historical context of the West Virginia Mine War.

**Essential Questions:- How do individual characters embody the broader social and political struggles of their time?- In what ways do personal and societal conflicts intersect in the narrative?**

### Reading:

Chapters 5–10 of *Rednecks*

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## Weekly Overview

### Monday: Character Introduction & Analysis

- **Objective:** Identify and analyze key characters, focusing on their backgrounds, motivations, and roles in the narrative.
- **Activities:** - Introduce characters such as Doc Moo, Frank Hugham, Beulah, Mother Jones, and Sid Hatfield. - Use a character chart to note traits, motivations, and relationships. - Discuss how these characters reflect the historical context.
- **Assessment:** Complete character chart entries for each introduced character.

### Tuesday: Exploring Conflict

- **Objective:** Examine the types of conflict presented in the novel and how they drive the narrative.
- **Activities:** - Define types of conflict: man vs. man, man vs. society, man vs. self, etc. - Identify examples of each conflict type in the assigned chapters. - Group discussions on how these conflicts affect character development.

- **Assessment:** Write a short response analyzing a specific conflict and its impact on a character.

### **Wednesday: Character Relationships & Development**

- **Objective:** Understand how relationships between characters evolve and influence the story.
- **Activities:** - Create a relationship map linking characters and noting the nature of their interactions. - Discuss in pairs how these relationships reflect larger societal issues.
- **Assessment:** Update character charts with insights from relationship mapping.

### **Thursday: Thematic Connections**

- **Objective:** Connect character experiences and conflicts to over-arching themes such as justice, power, and resistance.
- **Activities:** - Identify passages highlighting key themes. - Group presentations on how specific characters embody these themes.
- **Assessment:** Prepare a brief presentation or poster linking a character to a central theme.

### **Friday: Synthesis & Reflection**

- **Objective:** Synthesize understanding of character and conflict to appreciate the novel's historical and literary significance.
- **Activities:** - Class discussion on how character conflicts mirror historical events. - Reflective writing on personal responses to character struggles.
- **Assessment:** Submit a reflective journal entry connecting personal insights to the week's discussions.

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### **Materials Needed**

- Character chart template

- Conflict analysis worksheet
  - Relationship mapping tools (e.g., graphic organizers)
  - Theme identification handout
  - Reflective journal prompts
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## **Week 2 Materials: *Rednecks* by Taylor Brown \*need to create**

1. **Character Chart Template** -A structured organizer for students to track key characters, their traits, motivations, and development
  2. **Conflict Analysis Worksheet** -Helps students identify and analyze various conflicts (e.g., man vs. man, man vs. society) within the novel
  3. **Character Relationship Mapping Tool** -A graphic organizer for visualizing relationships and interactions between characters
  4. **Theme Identification Handout** -Guides students in connecting character experiences and conflicts to overarching themes
  5. **Reflective Journal Prompts** -Provides prompts for students to reflect on character struggles and their relevance to historical and contemporary issues
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## **Rednecks – Week 3: Theme & Symbolism**

### **Focus:**

Analyze how Taylor Brown develops central themes and uses symbolism to convey deeper meanings in the novel.

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### **Essential Questions:**

- What are the central themes of *Rednecks*?
  - How does Brown use symbols and motifs to reinforce these themes?
  - How do historical and cultural contexts shape the novel's message?
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### **Weekly Breakdown**

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#### **Monday: Identifying Emerging Themes**

##### **Objective:**

Identify and track key themes in *Rednecks* through class discussion and textual evidence.

##### **Activities:**

- Begin with a class brainstorm: "What major ideas are surfacing in the novel so far?"
- Introduce a **Theme Tracker** handout. Example themes:
  - Struggle for justice
  - Class warfare
  - Solidarity and betrayal
  - Violence as resistance

- Power and corruption
- Students work in pairs to find 2 quotes for at least two of these themes (from ch. 11–15).
- Share selected quotes with the class.

**Assessment:**

Theme Tracker worksheet – students submit 2 quotes per theme with short explanations.

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## **Tuesday: Introduction to Symbolism**

**Objective:**

Analyze the role of recurring symbols and motifs in reinforcing the novel's themes.

**Mini-Lecture Topics:**

- What is a symbol? What is a motif?
- Common literary symbols vs. culturally specific ones

**Activities:**

- Introduce a list of potential symbols in *Rednecks*:
  - Red bandanas
  - Coal dust/soot
  - Guns and weapons
  - Mountains
  - Miners' lamps
  - Union buttons
- Small group breakout: Each group gets one symbol, finds examples, and explains its meaning.
- Each group presents their findings using a mini-poster or digital slide.

**Assessment:**

Exit slip: "What's one symbol that stands out to you and why?"

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**Wednesday: Connecting Theme and Symbolism****Objective:**

Explain how Brown uses symbols to deepen his themes.

**Activities:**

- Review posters or slides from the previous day.
- Whole-class modeling: Connect a theme (e.g., resistance) to a symbol (e.g., red bandanas) using a paragraph frame:

In *Rednecks*, Taylor Brown uses the symbol of \_\_\_ to highlight the theme of \_\_\_. This is shown when...

- Students write their own analytical paragraphs using one symbol and one theme.

**Assessment:**

Submit analytical paragraphs for feedback.

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**Thursday: Character, Theme & Historical Context Triad****Objective:**

Make connections between character arcs, themes, and historical events.

**Activities:**

- Provide 3 short historical accounts (real events/figures) that align with moments in the book (e.g., a quote from a miner's letter, a Mother Jones speech, news coverage of Blair Mountain).
- Students work in triads: each student takes one of the 3 "triad pieces":
  1. A character moment

2. A theme
  3. A historical source
- Their goal: explain how these three connect in a short written or verbal presentation.

**Assessment:**

Triad quick-write or group mini-presentation.

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## **Friday: Creative Symbolism Project – "The Red Bandana Files"**

**Objective:**

Synthesize understanding of theme and symbolism through creative expression.

**Activities:**

- Introduce "The Red Bandana Files": a visual or digital project where students create an artifact that represents a theme in the novel through symbolic imagery. Choices:
  - Illustrated poster or collage
  - Symbolic poem or letter
  - Digital slide with voiceover explaining the symbol's meaning
- Include a one-paragraph written explanation that answers:
  - What theme does your artifact represent?
  - What symbols did you use and why?

**Assessment:**

Rubric-based evaluation of the project and explanation. Option to present or display around the classroom.

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## **Materials to Create for Week 3:**

1. Theme Tracker Worksheet

2. Symbol Analysis Group Template
3. Analytical Paragraph Frame
4. Triad Discussion/Quick-Write Template
5. Red Bandana Files Project Guide + Rubric

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## **Rednecks – Week 4: Narrative Structure & Point of View**

### **Focus:**

Examine how Brown structures the novel and uses various points of view to convey different perspectives on labor conflict, justice, and identity.

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### **Essential Questions:**

- How does the structure of *Rednecks* affect the way the story is told?
  - What is the impact of multiple perspectives and narrative shifts?
  - Why might Taylor Brown choose to fragment or alternate the storytelling?
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### **Monday: Mapping the Structure**

#### **Objective:**

Identify the structural elements of the novel and begin analyzing narrative pacing and order.

#### **Activities:**

- Begin with a whole-class timeline mapping: plot major events so far.
- Introduce the **Structure Mapping Sheet**—students use it to track flashbacks, shifting time periods, or nonlinear jumps.
- Discuss: Why doesn't Brown tell the story in a straight line? How does this affect our understanding of the characters or events?

#### **Assessment:**

Students complete the Structure Mapping Sheet and submit a brief reflection: "How does structure shape the story so far?"

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## Tuesday: First-Person, Third-Person, and Shifting Perspectives

### Objective:

Analyze how point of view influences the reader's perception of events and characters.

### Activities:

- Review definitions and effects of 1st person, 3rd limited, and 3rd omniscient.
- Read two contrasting short excerpts from the novel, ideally with different POVs or tones.
- Small group breakout: each group identifies the narrator, tone, reliability, and biases.
- Groups share back. Discuss: How do we know what we know? Whose voice do we trust?

### Assessment:

Group poster or slide showing narrator analysis.

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## Wednesday: Voice and Bias in Historical Fiction

### Objective:

Explore the tension between storytelling and history—how point of view influences historical narrative.

### Activities:

- Short nonfiction article or primary source (e.g., a real miner's letter or a Mother Jones excerpt).
- Compare it to a scene in the novel that mirrors or contrasts it.
- Students complete a **Voice & Bias Chart** to compare:
  - Purpose
  - Tone
  - Reliability
  - Intended audience

- Whole-class discussion: Does *Rednecks* tell history “truthfully”? Can fiction do that?

**Assessment:**

Short response: “What does the novel get right—or change—about the historical voices it represents?”

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**Thursday: Literary Experiment – Shift the POV**

**Objective:**

Use creative writing to demonstrate understanding of point of view and voice.

**Activities:**

- Choose a scene from the novel (you may pre-select 3–4 options).
- Students rewrite the scene from a different point of view:
  - e.g., from the mine owner’s POV
  - from a child’s POV
  - from a journalist’s POV
- Peer-share and discuss the impact of shifting the voice.

**Assessment:**

Submit a rewritten scene with a paragraph explaining what changed and why.

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**Friday: Socratic Seminar – Whose Story Is It?**

**Objective:**

Synthesize the week’s learning by debating narrative power and truth in historical fiction.

**Activities:**

- Prepare for a Socratic Seminar using the question:

“In telling the story of the Mine Wars, does *Rednecks* give voice to the people who matter most?”

- Students refer to their work from the week—structure maps, POV charts, creative rewrite, etc.
- Inner/outer circle format with live peer feedback.
- End with a short written reflection.

**Assessment:**

Participation rubric + reflection (can be submitted Monday if needed).

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## **Materials to Create for Week 4:**

1. Structure Mapping Sheet
2. Narrator Analysis Group Template
3. Voice & Bias Comparison Chart
4. Creative POV Rewrite Prompt + Rubric
5. Socratic Seminar Prep Guide + Participation Rubric

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# **Rednecks – Week 5: Historical Accuracy & Creative License**

## **Focus:**

Analyze how Taylor Brown intertwines historical facts with fictional elements, and assess the impact of creative liberties on the reader's understanding of real events.

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## **Essential Questions:**

- How does *Rednecks* align with or diverge from historical accounts of the West Virginia Mine Wars?
  - What are the effects of blending fact and fiction in historical narratives?
  - How does the novel influence our perception of the term "redneck" and its origins?
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## **Monday: Historical Context Deep Dive**

### **Objective:**

Understand the events of the West Virginia Mine Wars and the Battle of Blair Mountain.

### **Activities:**

- Present a brief lecture or multimedia presentation on the historical background.
- Distribute a **Historical vs. Fictional Events Chart** for students to complete as they learn.
- Group discussion: What are the key events and figures in the actual history?

### **Assessment:**

Completed chart highlighting major historical events and figures.

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## Tuesday: Comparing Text to History

### Objective:

Identify and analyze discrepancies and alignments between the novel and historical records.

### Activities:

- In pairs, students select specific events or characters from the novel.
- Research historical accounts of these selections.
- Fill out a **Comparison Worksheet** noting similarities and differences.

### Assessment:

Comparison Worksheet submission.

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## Wednesday: Author's Intent and Creative Choices

### Objective:

Explore Taylor Brown's reasons for fictionalizing certain aspects of history.

### Activities:

- Read excerpts from interviews or articles where Brown discusses author's approach
- Class discussion: What motivations might Brown have for altering historical facts?
- Students write a short reflection on the impact of these choices.

### Assessment:

Reflection paragraph submission.

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## Thursday: Debating Historical Fiction's Role

### Objective:

Engage in a structured debate on the merits and drawbacks of historical fiction.

### Activities:

- Divide the class into two groups: one supporting the use of creative license in historical fiction, the other opposing.
- Provide time for groups to prepare arguments using examples from *Rednecks*.
- Conduct the debate, ensuring each side presents and rebuts points.

**Assessment:**

Participation in debate and a post-debate self-assessment.

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## **Friday: Creative Project – Reimagining History**

**Objective:**

Apply understanding by creating an alternative narrative of a historical event.

**Activities:**

- Students choose a real event from the West Virginia Mine Wars.
- Write a short story or script that reimagines the event with a different outcome or perspective.
- Incorporate at least two historical facts and one fictional element.

**Assessment:**

Submission of the creative piece along with an author's note explaining their choices.

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## **Materials to Create for Week 5:**

1. **Historical vs. Fictional Events Chart**
2. **Comparison Worksheet: Novel vs. History**
3. **Author's Intent Reflection Prompt**
4. **Debate Preparation Guide and Self-Assessment**

## 5. Creative Project Guidelines and Rubric

# One-Pager Assignment: *Rednecks* by Taylor Brown

## Purpose:

Show what you've learned from *Rednecks* by creatively and thoughtfully combining text and visuals onto one page. Your one-pager will highlight important literary elements while allowing you to express your understanding through both writing and illustration.

## Your One-Pager Must Include:

- **Title and Author:** Title and author
- **Characters:** Choose at least two major characters. Provide a brief description of each. Include a mini-analysis: What does this character represent? How do they contribute to the story's themes?
- **Theme Statement:** Write a clear theme statement (e.g., the story reveals how isolation can distort reality). Support your statement with a short explanation or quote.
- **Historical focus:** Include a statement, analysis, illustration, or timeline relating to the historical events of the book. You can compare fact vs. fiction, explore composite characters, etc.
- **Setting:** Identify the setting of the story and a brief analysis of its importance
- **Plot Summary:** Write a short (4–6 sentences or bullet points) summary of the story's key events in chronological order.
- **Illustrations:** Include 2–3 original illustrations (hand-drawn or digital) that represent important elements of the story (characters, setting, symbols, themes, etc.).
- **Border with a Motif or Theme:** Decorate the border of your page with a design or images that reflect a motif (coal, red bandanas, union, etc.) or a central theme.

## Design Tips:

- Can be done digitally or by hand
- Organize your content neatly.
- Use color intentionally to support meaning.
- Your visuals should connect directly to the story — avoid random, unconnected imagery.
- Fill the page. There should be minimal blank space.

# Conflict Sort

Instructions: Read the following scenarios or quotes and determine the type of conflict each represents. Sort the scenarios into the proper group.

Cut into group headings.

|                   |                    |                 |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Person vs. Person | Person vs. Society | Person vs. Self |
| Person vs. Nature | Person vs. Fate    |                 |

Scenarios/Quotes:

Cut into slips for students to sort.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| A character believes their fate was sealed by being born into coal country. | Ma Blizzard faces down a line of armed guards.                     |
| The union struggles against anti-labor government forces.                   | Sid remembers a past decision that haunts him still.               |
| A miner argues with a fellow worker over whether to strike.                 | The community bands together to resist oppressive mining policies. |
| A Pinkerton agent questions the morality of his orders.                     | A storm halts the miners' progress toward Blair Mountain.          |
| Sid reflects on whether he's doing the right thing by joining the march.    | Roscoe defies a company order, risking his job and safety.         |

# Conflict Web Graphic Organizer

Use this organizer to explore two major conflicts involving one character from the novel. You will visually map each conflict, showing its type, description, key moment (with a quote or summary), how it progresses or evolves through the story, and its connection to historical context or real-life events.




Character: \_\_\_\_\_

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Conflict 1  |  |
| Type: Person vs. Person / Society / Self / Nature / Fate  |  |
| Description: Briefly describe the conflict and what causes it.  |  |
| Quote or Summary: Provide a relevant quote or summarize a scene that illustrates this conflict.                               |  |
| How it develops/changes:<br>Development: How does this conflict change or escalate over time? How does the character respond? |  |
| Connection to history: How does this reflect real events or struggles from the West Virginia Mine Wars?                       |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Conflict 2  |  |
| Type: Person vs. Person / Society / Self / Nature / Fate  |  |
| Description: Briefly describe the conflict and what causes it.  |  |
| Quote or Summary: Provide a relevant quote or summarize a scene that illustrates this conflict.                               |  |
| How it develops/changes:<br>Development: How does this conflict change or escalate over time? How does the character respond? |  |
| Connection to history: How does this reflect real events or struggles from the West Virginia Mine Wars?                       |  |

# Peer Feedback Guide

During the gallery walk, leave one of each of the following kinds of feedback on your classmates' Conflict Webs:

-  Spark of Insight: Something interesting or thoughtful you noticed
-  Clarify This: A question about a confusing or unclear point
-  Next Step: A suggestion for adding depth or clarity