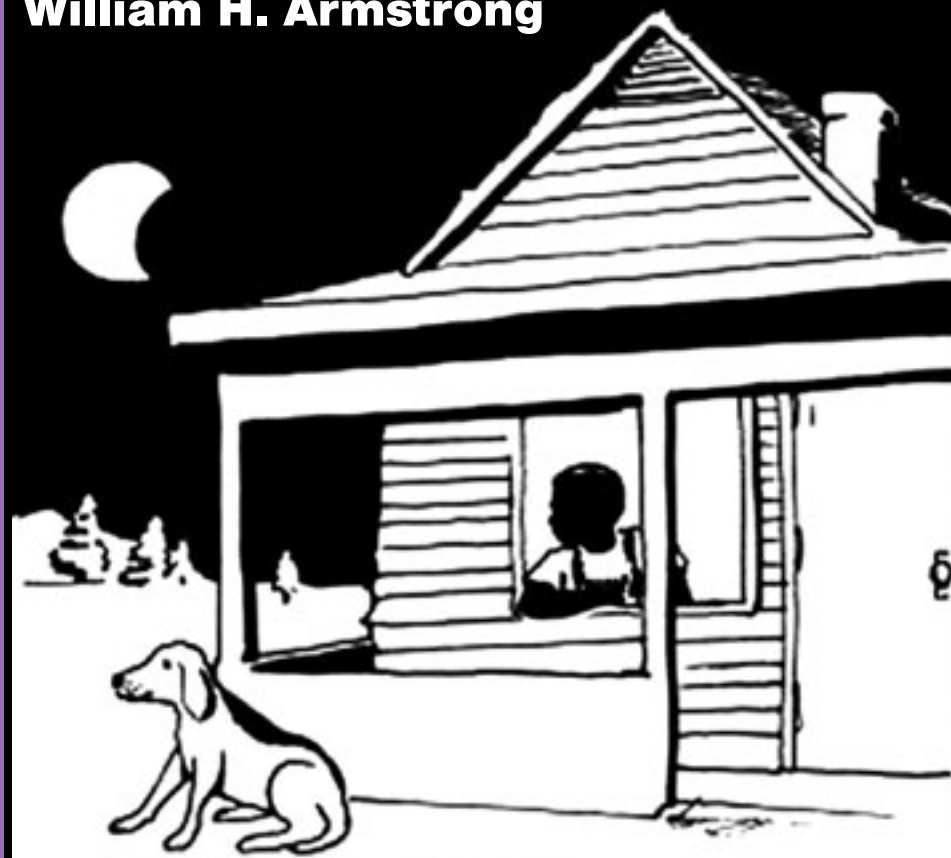


Novel·Ties

Sounder

William H. Armstrong



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with the novel *Sounder* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and the author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think the book will be about? When and where do you think this story takes place?
2. Read the Background Information on page two of this study guide, and do some independent research on slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction Era. This will provide you with a better appreciation of the plight of the family portrayed in this novel.
3. The characters in *Sounder*, except Sounder himself, are not given names. As you read the book consider the reason the author only named the animal, but referred to the human characters as "the boy," "the mother," etc.?
4. Read the quotation at the beginning of the book: "A man keeps, like his love, his courage dark." Why would this quote apply to blacks living in the South before the 1960s when some civil rights changes occurred? Do you think that courage can be shown in different ways—that courage is not always physical, but can sometimes take more subtle forms?
5. *Sounder* is a story that was told to the author when he was a little boy. It was told by an African-American man who taught in a one-room schoolhouse. Were you ever told "passed down" stories by an older person? What were they?
6. Bring into class photographs of dogs that are bred for specific kinds of work. Include seeing-eye dogs, rescue dogs, guard dogs, and hunting dogs. What qualities of the animals make them special for each task? What is the economic importance of the "coon dog" to poor rural families? What could the loss of such an animal mean to a family?
7. Read the first seven articles to the Constitution of the United States. Consider the social implications of each. As you read the novel, record the many ways in which Southern legal practice before the 1960s violated the constitutional rights of African Americans.
8. Although the mother in this story is illiterate, she has learned stories from the Bible through the tradition of storytelling. These are the stories she passes on to her children in that same oral tradition. To understand the flavor and message of these Biblical tales, become familiar with the story of Noah and the flood and the stories of David and Joseph.

Chapter I (cont.)

6. Why did the cooking smells at breakfast seem different one morning?
7. Why was the mother humming?
8. What evidence indicated that the boy loved and admired his father?
9. What were the boy's hopes for the future? Do you think this was a realistic goal?

Questions for Discussion:

1. What evidence shows that the boy and his family were very poor?
2. Do you have a sense that this is a loving family or one that has no feeling for one another? Explain why you feel as you do.
3. Where do you think the father obtained the ham bone?
4. What evidence do you have so far of the unequal status between the boy's family and the family in the big house?

Literary Device: Simile

A simile is a comparison between two or more unlike objects using the words "like" or "as." For example:

The white man who owned the vast endless fields that scattered the cabins of his Negro sharecroppers far apart, like flyspecks on a white-washed ceiling.

What is being compared?

How does this make you feel about the lives of the sharecroppers and the landowners?

Literary Technique: Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing in literature refers to the suggestions of things that will happen later in the story. What do you think the mother's continual humming and the boy's feelings of loneliness foreshadow at a time when the family could be enjoying the luxury of a ham?

Writing Activity:

In this loving family of few words, imagine what the thoughts of each one might be on the morning of the special breakfast. Choose one character and write a journal entry for that person expressing his or her feelings on that day.