

Novel·Ties

Small Steps

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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 *Small Steps* 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 own 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 QUESTIONS AND 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? Have you read any other books by the same author?
2. *Small Steps* continues the lives of Armpit and X-Ray, two of the main characters in the book *Holes*. Before you begin reading *Small Steps*, brainstorm with your classmates to recall anything you remember about these two characters.
3. Do some research to find out what may happen when a teenager becomes involved in the criminal justice system. How does the system try to rehabilitate young offenders? What kinds of problems exist within this system?
4. A stereotype is an oversimplified image of a group of people, usually held in common by some part of society. How can stereotypes be harmful? What do you think people can do to overcome stereotyping? Have you noticed any examples of stereotyping in your community or in the media? As you read *Small Steps*, notice how the main character, Armpit, becomes the object of stereotyping.
5. One important character in this novel has a disability that limits her range of physical activities. Do you know anyone who has such a handicap? With a small group of classmates, discuss how a person might adjust to having this type of problem.
6. The author of this novel studied for a law degree before turning his attention to writing novels for young readers. How do you think his education in the legal field might have shaped his interest in teens who find themselves in trouble with the authorities?
7. In *Small Steps*, the author explores the theme of forging a personal identity. What do you imagine happens when society tries to impose an identity on an individual? In what ways might social expectations conflict with a person's idea of who he or she would like to become?
8. Have you ever made a rash or unwise decision on the spur of the moment? What consequences did your decision lead to? What did you learn from this experience? As you read, notice whether any of the characters make rash decisions.
9. Characters in this story find themselves bending the rules and even outright breaking the law at times. What might cause a person to act in this way? How could acting outside the law create a danger to oneself and to others?
10. One of the main characters in the novel is a songwriter and recording artist. How might the ability to translate ideas and emotions into art help a person to survive difficult experiences?

CHAPTERS 1 – 5

Vocabulary: Draw a line from each word on the left to its definition on the right. Then use the numbered words to fill in the blanks in the sentences below.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. irrigation | a. maintained in strict secrecy |
| 2. recidivism | b. onset of physical maturity |
| 3. leverage | c. feel anger or bitterness |
| 4. confidential | d. having a protective attitude |
| 5. resent | e. return to a previous activity, such as a crime |
| 6. puberty | f. spoken or performed without preparation |
| 7. defensive | g. power or ability to act or influence people or events |
| 8. extemporaneous | h. system of supplying land with water |

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- The large population of new voters gave the young candidate some _____ in the recent election.
- When a person reaches _____, his or her appearance usually begins to change significantly.
- The proceedings of the committee were kept _____ in order to prevent newspaper coverage.
- When the scheduled speaker canceled at the last minute, Joanna was challenged to give a(n) _____ speech in her place.
- The problem of _____ among criminals has caused prisons to become overcrowded and dangerous.
- I _____ it when my older sister borrows my clothes and returns them in such bad shape that they can no longer be worn.
- When we offered to help the struggling man, his behavior was oddly _____ and ungrateful.
- The people of ancient Egypt developed an effective system of _____ that allowed them to grow bountiful crops.

Read to find out how Armpit's life is about to change.