



Activity One - Swans

Many books for young readers feature animals such as dogs, cats and horses, but not many have a swan in their title. Yet most people would agree that swans are one of nature's most beautiful birds.

These large water birds are members of the family Anatidae, which also include ducks and geese. The swans of the Northern Hemisphere are pure white in plumage, although those from the Southern Hemisphere are mixed black and white.

The **Trumpeter Swans** are the rarest swan in the world. Once they were abundant in North America but by the early 1900s were nearly extinct. Huge numbers had been shot for their down, feathers or meat. Although making a comeback because of conservation efforts, they are still considered vulnerable in many parts of Canada and the United States.



Consider this...

Did you know that even though swans typically mate for life, divorces do sometimes occur - especially after a nesting failure.

Your task is to **create a poster** encouraging the protection of the Trumpeter Swan (or another of the swan species that needs protection). Your poster should contain an attractive picture and heading as well as information on the swan and why it needs our protection. Finally you should include information on how someone who is interested might receive further information on the swan (i.e websites such as The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).



Activity Two

Almost Heaven - West Virginia

This activity can be done with students working in small groups.

The setting of *The Summer of the Swans* is West Virginia, in the eastern part of the United States. It is a beautiful region of North America, the only state that is located entirely within the Appalachian Mountain Range. For this reason it is nicknamed The Mountain State. Much of the state is covered by a mixed hardwood forest of oak, maple and chestnut trees.

Thousands of tourists visit this breath-taking state every year, attracted by the beautiful mountains, valleys, wildlife, historical sites, and friendly people.

Your task is to investigate the state of West Virginia more carefully, highlighting some key sights you think tourists would be attracted to. Then **design a colorful and informative brochure** advertising the attractions of West Virginia.

Be sure to include a picture or two, a heading, and a number of sights that will draw the people from all over the world.



Consider this...

*Almost heaven, West Virginia
Blue Ridge Mountains
Shenandoah River -
Life is old there
Older than the trees
Younger than the mountains
Growin' like a breeze.
John Denver*



Activity Three - The Brain

“If the human brain were so simple that we could understand it, we would be so simple that we couldn’t.” (Emerson M. Pugh)

We learn in ***The Summer of the Swans*** that when Charlie was three years old he had such a high fever that his brain was permanently damaged. This affected his ability to think and to communicate.

The brain is an enormously complex organ. It is the control center of the human nervous system, responsible for (among other things) our behavior. Essentially it regulates all human activity. Even though many mysteries of brain function persist, every part of the brain has a known function.

Your task is to write a brief report (approximately one page in length) on the human brain. You may wish to include one or more of the following subtopics:

- appearance
- parts and their function
- damaging the brain (and diseases)
- how the brain has been viewed historically



Consider this...

The human brain contains roughly 100 billion neurons. Each is linked to as many as 10,000 other neurons.

“Experience is food for the brain.” (Bill Watterson)

NAME: _____



Activity Four - Coal Mining

Coal mines must have figured prominently in the lives of the people who lived in the area where ***The Summer of the Swans*** is set. In fact at least two members of Sara's family worked (and died) in a local coal mine.



First discovered in West Virginia in 1742, coal has been the basis of an important industry for about 200 years. It is found in 53 of the state's 55 counties and provides about 40,000 direct jobs, including miners, mine contractors, coal preparation plant employees and mine supply companies. In 2005, 141 million tons of coal was mined in the state.

It certainly has come with a price, however. In the 20th century alone, over 1000 miners have perished in West Virginia coal mines, including 361 miners who were killed on December 8, 1907 in Monongah. (A grim Christmas for the families of these poor miners.)

Your task is to research some aspect of the coal mining industry in West Virginia. You may consider how coal is excavated (underground and surface mining); careers in mining; the processing of coal; the uses of coal, etc. Another angle you may wish to consider is researching one of the many **mining disasters** that occurred in West Virginia over the past 100 years, and write your report on that particular event.

The Internet will probably be an invaluable source in researching this topic.

Your report should be approximately one page in length.

NAME: _____



Activity Five - An Alternate Ending

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

The conclusion of *The Summer of the Swans* is quite memorable and does an admirable job of piecing together a number of loose ends. What is quite effective as well is how it leaves the reader wondering about other issues (i.e. Joe and Sara's budding relationship; Sara's difficult relationship with her dad; Charlie's long-term future.)

What if Betsy Byars had woken up on the wrong side of the bed on the day she wrote the novel's concluding chapters? What if it didn't end the way it is described in these pages, but had taken another *turn in the road*? Although we will never know the answers to these questions, you will be given the opportunity of putting your imagination to work in coming up with what might have happened if the author's imagination had worked its way in an entirely different direction.

If working with a group brainstorm possible alternative endings to the novel. Remember to consider all of the principal characters. From your list of ideas choose one ending to present to the class. Write a detailed synopsis of your alternate conclusion presenting as much detail as possible. After presenting it to the class, you may wish to get their input as to additional changes that might be made to further improve your alternative ending.

Have fun!

NAME: _____



Activity Six - Survival in the Woods!

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

Charlie certainly endured the adventure of a lifetime, didn't he? Being lost in the woods is an ordeal that many people have experienced over the years. Being lost at night and being handicapped as well, was simply overwhelming for this character.

What if such an event were to happen to you?

Imagine that you will be left in the woods in an area similar to that in which Charlie was lost. The woods are so large you know you will have to spend two or three days before either being rescued or walking out to civilization. You are given the opportunity to take with you six things (all must be small enough to fit in an average-sized backpack). What will you take with you? (Cell phones and communication devices of this sort are useless because a signal is not available in this remote area.)

Secondly, what will you do to increase your chances of survival? You will be spending one or two nights in the woods. It may turn cold or rain (weather is unpredictable - you should take this into consideration). How might you contact your rescuers? Outline what you would do to increase your odds of survival.

Your report should be about a page in length.
