

# Story Squares #1 for Grades 5-6

## Multiple Learning Styles for Reading Comprehension

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# Grades Five/Six

## **The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963**

by Christopher Paul Curtis

The “Weird Watsons” are a typical African-American family living in Flint, Michigan in the 1960s. While Joetta and Kenny are seemingly well-behaved children, Momma and Dad have their hands full with Byron, their eldest son. When Byron’s antics repeatedly cross the line, Momma and Dad decide he should spend the summer with his grandmother in Birmingham, Alabama.

After many hilarious encounters, the family begins their journey across the country. However, another journey is under way – the Civil Rights Movement. The Watsons get a first-hand look at the civil inequalities in the South when the Birmingham Church Bombing occurs during their visit. The trip to Grandma’s proves to be a life-changing event in the lives of each member of the Watson family.

This book is recommended for fifth- and sixth-grade students who have an understanding of the Civil Rights movement. While fourth-graders would understand the plot, the serious themes of the book would be better appreciated by older students.

## **Loser**

by Jerry Spinelli

*Loser* is the life story of Donald Zinkoff, from kindergarten through sixth grade. It is the story of an awkward child that the reader will grow to love and feel sorry for as he gets older. Donald is a boy who becomes a loser to the other children in school.

There are always the classmates people remember as being nerds or geeks, but Zinkoff is in a class of his own. It’s not that he does anything terribly wrong; he just is who he is. The popular kids, the bigger kids, the wealthier kids, and even some teachers just can’t seem to understand him. Donald Zinkoff loves school but is not very good at it. He loves making friends but doesn’t have a best friend. He loves racing but he never wins.

This book is recommended for fifth- or sixth-graders. It is a fairly easy read, but has deep underlying issues that deal with everyday lives of children.

## **On My Honor**

by Marian Dane Bauer

Two boys go off on an afternoon adventure. While trying to enjoy a hot day, they decide to take a detour and head to the Vermillion River. Although warned to stay out of trouble, the boys choose to go swimming. While Tony and Joel are racing each other, Tony falls behind and drowns, leaving Joel to search for him. When Joel cannot find his friend, he has the difficult job of figuring out how to tell his and Tony’s parents.

Joel keeps the day’s events to himself for most of the story. He is heartbroken, but fears the anger of his parents for disobeying them and the pain he will bring Tony’s parents. In the end, Joel has to tell the adults about the events of that fateful day and live with the consequences of his choice.

This Newbery Award-winning story is emotionally difficult. It raises many questions about death, right versus wrong, making good decisions, choices and consequences, peer pressure, and following rules. This story is recommended for fifth- or sixth-graders – not for the difficulty level, but for the themes involved.

# The Watsons Go To Birmingham-1963

by Christopher Paul Curtis

Choose \_\_\_\_\_ from each square.

1

- 1 Explain in several sentences why the title of each chapter is significant.
- 2 As you read, keep a record of all the bad things Byron does.
- 3 Define the following words and use each one in a sentence: emulate, pomade, cussing, dispersal, jive, pervasive, strove, sanitation, eavesdrop, haphazardly.
- 4 Research the Birmingham Church Bombing and write an essay about it.
- 5 Make a list of 20 interesting verbs found in the story. List the page on which each is found.

2

- 1 Do you think Momma's punishment of burning Byron was right or wrong? Explain.
- 2 Have you ever hurt a friend? What did you do and how did you remedy the situation?
- 3 How would you have handled Larry Dunn and the stolen gloves situation?
- 4 Put yourself in Kenny's shoes. Keep a journal of Kenny's true feelings about the important events that happen to him.
- 5 Which chapter was your favorite? Why?

3

- 1 Create a three-circle *Venn diagram* comparing Joetta, Kenny, and Byron.
- 2 Explain why Joetta chooses the white doll over the black doll.
- 3 What were the positive and negative effects of the trip to Birmingham?
- 4 Byron tells Kenny there is no such thing as a "Wool Poll." Kenny disagrees. Who is right? Defend your opinion.
- 5 Predict what will happen when the boys start school in the fall. What will change? What will remain the same?

4

- 1 Act out your favorite scene from the story. Be sure to rehearse and use the appropriate props.
- 2 Create a *scrapbook page* for each Watson. Tell what is important to each person in photos, drawings, and words.
- 3 Rewrite the story for a second-grader. Be sure to use illustrations and main ideas.
- 4 Create Momma's *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* notebook. Write down all the important events of their trip.
- 5 Illustrate the funniest part of the book and explain it in a detailed paragraph.

# Loser

by Jerry Spinelli

Choose \_\_\_\_\_ from each square.

1

- 1 Make a list of ten things for which you might count down the days.
- 2 Write an interrogative sentence using each of the following words: clunker, hoist, hazardous, acquire, precision, propel, atrocious, scowl, thermos, puny.
- 3 Make a list of ten things that have happened to you that you would count as a "bad time."
- 4 List 15 adverbs and the verbs they describe from the story, as well as the pages on which you found them.
- 5 Make a list of ten positive and ten negative character traits that describe Donald Zinkoff.

2

- 1 Without giving any names, write two paragraphs about a person you know who reminds you of Zinkoff.
- 2 Write a journal entry telling how you would feel if you were a child who never won anything.
- 3 Write a three- to five-paragraph narrative about your first day of school in any grade.
- 4 Zinkoff imagines the inside of his brain as a moving part. Write a descriptive paragraph telling about what you imagine your brain to be like.
- 5 In junior high, Zinkoff is a nobody. Write a journal entry about a time you felt like a nobody.

3

- 1 After delivering the mail, Donald gets into the Clunker and cries. Why do you think he does this? Explain your answer fully, incorporating character traits in your response.
- 2 Mr. Yalowitz, Zinkoff's fourth-grade teacher, is different. Why do you think he understands Zinkoff more than his other teachers?
- 3 Write a one-page summary of your favorite chapter.
- 4 In fourth grade, the other kids really start to notice Zinkoff's faults. What did other students notice about you by the end of fourth grade? Write a paragraph about it.
- 5 On fourth-grade Field Day, Zinkoff is given the anchor leg of the race. What do you think would have happened if he had run a different leg (or not at all)?

4

- 1 Zinkoff wrote 100 letters for Take Donald Zinkoff to Work Day. Create a letter that Donald may have written.
- 2 Zinkoff created a Furnace Monster in his imagination. What is something of which you are afraid? Draw it and write why it scares you.
- 3 Create ten of your own events for a Field Day. Make sure they are events you could actually do at your school.
- 4 If Hector and Zinkoff are going to be friends, what are some unique things Zinkoff could do to intrigue Hector?
- 5 Zinkoff skips fifth-grade Field Day. Create a six-scene *cartoon strip* showing what the other kids at school might think happened to him.

# On My Honor

by Marian Dane Bauer

Choose \_\_\_\_\_ from each square.

**1**

- 1 Find ten different contractions in the book. List them, along with the two words joined to form the contraction and the page on which you found them.
- 2 List five or more things that make the Vermillion River dangerous.
- 3 Find ten unfamiliar words in the book. List and define each word.
- 4 After you finish reading to page 30, tell what you would do next if you were Joel.
- 5 List 15 different action verbs from the story in alphabetical order. Write the pages on which you found them and then use each in an original sentence.

**2**

- 1 Why do you feel sorry for Joel when he rides away from the river? Explain your reasons in two to three paragraphs.
- 2 Describe the importance of Joel's father to the plot of the story.
- 3 Give at least five examples of things you would be afraid to tell an adult, even if it could help you or another person.
- 4 What are five things Tony and Joel could have done for the day instead of going to Starved Rock?
- 5 In two paragraphs, describe the scene from the story that you feel was most important. Then explain why you feel it was important.

**3**

- 1 List five ways that Tony and Joel are alike and five ways they are different. List some personality traits.
- 2 After reading through page 30, predict what you think will happen through the rest of the story. Write a paragraph stating your prediction.
- 3 If you were Mr. or Mrs. Zabrinky, what five questions would you ask Joel about Tony's whereabouts?
- 4 In a paragraph, tell how Joel's life will be different from now on.
- 5 On page eight, Joel's father tells Joel that he will be "on his honor." Explain what this means in two or three sentences.

**4**

- 1 Give each chapter a title.
- 2 Every person has their own beliefs about an afterlife. Draw a picture of what Tony sees as his afterlife and write a one- to two-sentence caption for it. Do the same for your own belief.
- 3 If Tony could come back to spend one more day with Joel, what do you think they would say to, or do with, each other?
- 4 Draw what you think the boys' tree house would have looked like if they had finished it.
- 5 Joel is very upset at the end of the story. What do you think would happen the next time he sees either of Tony's parents? Explain in a paragraph.