

Educator Discussion Guide

Charlie and the Grandmothers

By Katy Towell

Illustrations by Katy Towell

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2018

Grade 3-6

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ABOUT THE BOOK

After the death of his father, Charlie Oughtt became scared of everything. His phobias keep him up at night, yet his little sister Georgie is the polar opposite. One day Charlie notices that all of the children in town who have gone to visit their grandmothers have never returned. He is convinced that something's up. Suddenly, Charlie's mother wants to send him and Georgie to visit their grandmother, but their grandmothers are long dead! Charlie and Georgie are forced to "visit their grandmother" with promises of adventure on a beautiful farm. Georgie and Charlie have arrived at their supposed Grandmother Opal and Grandmother Pearl's house where they are subjected to the women's odd habits and rules. The longer they stay the more that Charlie notices seemingly magical occurrences in the house. When Charlie accidentally breaks one of the grandmothers' unusual rules, the situation nosedives into an increasingly strange adventure where Charlie must learn to conquer his fears if he and Georgie are to survive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katy Towell was born and raised in Oklahoma, and she now lives in Portland, OR. Her other works include *Skary Childrin and the Carousel of Sorrow* (2011) and a few animated shorts on YouTube. According to her website, she's currently working on more novels.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://www.skary.com>

Accessed June 15, 2017

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Seasons and Weather Patterns

Ask your students to think about what time the sun set last night and what time it rose this morning. Ask them how the weather, daylight, and time change affect different seasons. Discuss with students how seasons and weather patterns are affected by the climates of various places. Divide the classroom into 4 groups and give each an Old Farmer's Almanac. Explain the uses of a farmer's almanac, the various information it contains, and where to find one. Assign each

group one of the summer solstice, winter solstice, spring equinox, or fall equinox. Have each group look up the weather information for their assigned day and share the average high and low temperatures as well as the average rain fall with the class.

Farm Life

Ask your students what kind of animals can be found on a farm and what kind of work is done on a farm. Ask them how they think farming is different now than it was 100 years ago and how it might be the same. Discuss with the class the variations of farming over the years here in Louisiana and in other regions of the country. Focus on specific technology and methods that marked a time period, and discuss the factors that caused farmers to innovate.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What character traits do Charlie and George each possess?
2. What calms Charlie down the most? Why is this so special to him?
3. What kind of work did Charlie's dad do? How is this work dangerous?
4. How did Charlie try to convince Georgie and his mother that children were disappearing? Could he have done something different?
5. Why didn't Grandmother Opal text them to ask them to visit? What time period do you think the book is set in and why?
6. How do you think Georgie and Charlie felt on their way to visit Grandmother Opal? Support your answer with examples from the book.
7. What were the differences between Grandmother Opal and Grandmother Pearl? In what ways do the Grandmothers affect the plot?
8. Why did the Grandmothers have some of the children smash clocks?
9. Compare and contrast the qualities of bed bugs in reality and the bed bugs in the story.
10. What were the phantoms from the Lonely Hollow? How did they live?
11. Why and how did the phantoms help Charlie out of the Lonely Hollow?
12. Which characters help Charlie escape and how do they do so?
13. At the end of the book, did Charlie get rid of all his fears? How do you know?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Health and Physical Education:

Charlie's fears and anxiety keep him up all night. Learn about the recommended amount of sleep for kids and the effects of sleep deprivation at <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Supports-Childhood-Sleep-Guidelines.aspx>. If possible, have a pediatrician present to the class on the subject. For the next week, have students keep a sleep journal and each day have them report how they feel.

Art:

Explain the difference between warm and cool colors. Show works of art that uses predominately warm or cool colors, and ask how it affects mood. Discuss what colors the illustrator could have used for the Queen and what it would tell us about the Queen's personality. Have students create their own characters using colors of their choice to reflect the character's personality.

Science:

- Introduce the topic of weather and climate and explain the differences. For more description show this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbAWny7FV3w>
- The grandmothers supposedly live on a farm, but it's more like a barren tundra. Imagine this story takes place in another area with a different climate, maybe your home town or anywhere in Louisiana. What would the climate at a farm in Louisiana be like? How does this affect the crops that can be grown there? Discuss/explore varying farm geography and the differences and similarities in climate and product to that in the book.

Social Studies:

Charlie and the Grandmothers takes place in the Victoria Period. Explore the text and use excerpts and details in illustrations which show aspects of the Victorian period. Demonstrate aspects of Victoria farm life with the BBC Documentary, Victorian Farm, found on youtube.com.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4apIM4I0laY>
Show complete episodes or highlights from episodes to help facilitate discussions about how Victoria farm life differs from the farm in the book and farms today.

English Language Arts:

Explain what narrative stories are and how to write one. Have students write their own narratives with this prompt: A grandmother you never heard of invited you and your siblings to come visit. Like Charlie, once you are there you must face your fears to escape and rescue your siblings. What fears will the "grandmother" use against you and how will you escape?

Math:

In the book, the grandmothers' farm is the only thing in sight for miles around. Students are going to learn how to calculate the perimeter of an area. The **perimeter** is the length of the outline of a shape. To **find** the **perimeter** of a rectangle or square you have to add the lengths of all four sides. (Definition from www.mathplanet.com)

Take the class outside, have students imagine they're at the grandmothers' farm. They are tasked with determining the perimeter of the farm so it can be fenced. They will use the open space they are in at school. Specifics of a full lesson can be seen here:

https://www.teachengineering.org/activities/view/nyu_farmland_activity1. Please note that you do not need to purchase Lego Mindstorms to get ideas from this lesson plan.

Here is another example lesson and video of calculating perimeter,

<https://www.mathplanet.com/education/pre-algebra/inequalities-and-one-step-equations/calculating-the-area-and-the-perimeter>.

Vocabulary:

Cyclone	Rendition	Severity	Phantom
Distraught	Diabolical	Kettle	Perdition
Spores	Damask	Simultaneous	Labyrinth
Encyclopedia	Infernal	Sulfur	Cog
Peddler	Nuisance	Vantage	Inconceivable
Cyclone	Rendition	Severity	

RELATED WEBSITES

An Interview with Author and Illustrator Katy Towell

http://www.oregonlive.com/books/index.ssf/2015/07/charlie_and_the_grandmothers.html

An overview of Oregon reporter Amy Wang interviewing Katy Towell on her inspirations and creative process.

Katy's Deviant-Art Page

<http://katytowell.deviantart.com/>

The author's Deviant Art social media page chronicles the artist's latest works.

Short Story Podcasts by Katy

<http://www.podcasts.com/crookedsixpence.com>

Explore various scary short stories by Katy before her books were created.

Rural Life Museum

<http://www.lsu.edu/rurallife/>

Explore information about Louisiana's Rural Life Museum.