



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **“I Have to Change!” The Role of the Adolescent in the Family**

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Adolescence is one of the most difficult stages in life. It is a period filled with both physical and emotional growth, a turbulent, confusing passage from childhood to adulthood. The teen years are rife with anger, self doubt, frustration, confusion, and alienation. Adolescents are in constant pursuit of independence. Every human being must pass through this stage of youth, for it is during adolescence that the child becomes the adult. Autonomy is the desired end result and obtaining this freedom is vital and necessary for future survival in the adult world.

This unit will look at the emotional and cognitive aspects of adolescents as they are found in the world of children’s literature. The fictional young people examined here are all looked at in the context of their family situation. Four novels ( *By the Shores of Silver Lake* , *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* , *Nobody’s Family Is Going to Change* , and *Sounder* ) will serve as the foundation of this teaching unit, which will also look at the developmental and intellectual needs of the middle school student.

The average middle school student is just entering adolescence. When these students enter junior high as 5th graders, they are still children interested in toys, games, make-believe play, and the latest cartoon shows. In just three short years, an amazing transformation takes place. When the 8th graders graduate, they leave behind their dolls and trucks and replace them with records, dances, make-up, clothing, and serious thoughts of the opposite sex. The subject that interests these young people most is “themselves” or stories and situations about other people the same age and going through similar experiences.

The students’ interest in teenage encounters can be used successfully to motivate and encourage them to read, write, analyze, discuss, and to express themselves. At the Conte Arts Magnet School, I want to provide my students with educational opportunities that will be meaningful. This curriculum unit has been designed to meet the needs of my average level 6th grade English students, who are right on the edge, developmentally, between childhood and adolescence. As we meet only 3 1/2 hours per week, this unit will serve as the year’s curriculum. Though supplemental activities will be needed in the areas of grammar and spelling, most of the class work will come from the chosen works of literature and the topic of family. I encourage other teachers to mold this unit to fit the needs of their students. They might easily adapt this project for use with older students or substitute different novels, yet still employ the same philosophies, objectives, and activities. The unit has been purposely designed in an open-ended manner. The children will take from it what they need and teachers should feel free to do the same.

The heart of this unit is the adolescent, himself, and his relationship to his family. The adolescent will be viewed within the context of the family because the family plays a vital role in a teenager's search for self. Much of the frustration a teenager feels while passing through adolescence is unrecognized and ambiguous. The child blames not himself, but his parents and siblings for much of his uncertainty. Parents, in particular, are singled out. Just a short time ago, Mom and Dad were seen as benevolent protectors but now they are interfering persecutors. This is because they are the people who set the limits, who must say "no." The teenager, in seeking independence, will constantly test and push those limits, thus causing conflict. These conflicts are necessary for the child's growth, but all too often cause pain and turmoil within the family structure.

Since the early Greeks, literature has explored the crisis of the adolescent within the family. The need to assert oneself and to be an autonomous individual can be seen in *The Odyssey* with the plight of Telemachus and his concern over his birthright to the throne and his fatherless kingdom being consumed by too many suitors. The Greek playwrights often had as pivotal characters, youths having to make challenging decisions that went against their families' codes. This is true in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Euripides' *Electra*, and Aeschylus' trilogy, *The Oresteia*. In these tragedies, children become men and women as they seek revenge for a father's murder or break the King's law in honoring a dead brother. Much of modern psychology is based on the primitive and primal feelings the Greeks explored in their mythological literature.

Shakespeare wrote of the classic adolescent rebellion in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both the young lovers ignore the quarrels of their parents as well as the family law about fraternizing. They meet, fall in love, and marry in secret. Their rebellion brings about their deaths, but it also allows them to grow up. For Juliet, it is the first time she stands on her own and makes independent decisions.

The other teens in the play can be seen as "classic" images of youth that have been repeated again and again in literature just as Romeo and Juliet have often become the stereotype for the young, star-crossed lovers. Mercutio is the smart-alecky, sharp-tongued, clever yet glib young man. Benvolio is the loyal pal who tries to keep the peace, but is still quick to act and should not be crossed. Tybalt is the hot-headed firebrand who tries to solve his problems with his fists. Modern novelists for teens, such as S.E. Hinton in her book, *The Outsiders*, owe much to William Shakespeare.

Many novelists have used adolescence and the rites of passage as the text for their work. These writers run the gamut from Jane Austen (*Pride and Prejudice*) and Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*) to 20th century novelists such as Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*) and Harper Lee (*To Kill A Mockingbird*). Many of the authors who write exclusively for young people have explored adolescence from the child's point of view. Judy Blume is number one among young people for her books that deal with the peculiar problems of growing up. She has covered almost every subject that young adolescents could possibly be interested in and has made a fortune doing it. Her books include *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (menstruation), *Blubber* (being the odd man out), *Iggie's House* (racism), *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* (sibling rivalry), and *Freckle Juice* (insecurity over one's physical appearance).

This unit will look at the novels of four recognized and respected authors of literature for young people. These authors have often been honored with the highest award for children's literature, the Newberry Medal. Their books may not be as "relevant" as Judy Blume's but once children have been exposed to them, they are as loved. These authors are all excellent writers who may choose to write for children yet do not talk down to them or puree their work to make it more palatable. These men and women write gutsy, fun, interesting, meaningful, and literary books to be read by children of all ages.

The authors are William H. Armstrong ( *Souder* ), Louise Fitzhugh ( *Harriet the Spy* , *The Long Secret* , *Sport and Nobody's Family Is Going to Change*), Elizabeth George Speare ( *The Bronze Bow* , *Calico Captive*, *The Sign of the Beaver* , and *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* ), and Laura Ingalls Wilder ( *By the Shores of Silver Lake* and the other books in the "Little House" series).

This unit is literature-based because I see a real need for young people to be exposed to the classics of children's literature. Many students in the lower grades experience reading only through the use of basal readers. This unit is designed to introduce them to reading and interpreting novels while giving them the background and foundation they will need when they begin to read adult literature in the 7th and 8th grades.

I have created this unit to fill several needs I see in my classroom. I know that other teachers will find these objectives to be similar to their own. They are indicative of a developmental approach to education.

ONE: to present students with challenging, interesting, and stimulating pieces of literature to read, analyze, and discuss.

TWO: to make the classroom literature meaningful, yet to also stimulate the students' interest in books and good authors so that they will continue to read outside of school and during their free time.

THREE: to explore the developmental learning levels the students are working on using the criteria of the child psychologist Jean Piaget. Knowledge of these levels will assist the teacher in planning educational activities that will stimulate students and give them work that is developmentally appropriate.

FOUR: to assist students in understanding some of the changes they will undergo in entering adolescence and to see these changes in relationship to the family. The family will be viewed from not only a personal perspective, but a historical and sociological perspective as well. By the end of the school year, students should feel more comfortable about themselves and have a better understanding of how families function.

FIVE: to listen to the students and to plan activities based on their needs, ideas, and interests. This unit is teacher-designed but will work successfully only if the students are an integral part of the planning. Since a primary goal is for the child to develop into a motivated self-learner as a result of reading and exploring these family works of literature, this unit must be child-centered. It can only skeletally be planned far in advance. Specific activities must grow directly out of students' interests and needs. therefore, the teacher and her class must be very flexible and willing to work together.

SIX: to encourage students to express themselves and their opinions and to share their ideas about the families presented in the four novels. The students should be made aware that their choices are important and vital to this course of study. Their feelings and reflections will be discussed in small and large groups, written about in journals and other creative writing assignments, dramatized in class improvisations and playlets, and explored in projects such as oral and written reports. Students should also be urged to communicate their feelings about and perceptions of their own families.

The philosophical approach I am taking in the teaching of this unit is somewhat unique. Literature is usually taught in a Read-Analyze-Discuss-Evaluate pattern. I will follow this traditional method of teaching, yet at the same time I have developed a new thrust in using it. Recently, I was exposed to the educational theories of the Swiss child developmentalist and psychologist, Jean Piaget. His learning theories are most often applied to young children and the study of math and science, yet I discovered his work could also be applicable and meaningful in the teaching of literature.

My ideas about using Piaget's theories are based on the teachings of Dr. Catherine Fosnot, a professor at Southern Connecticut State University. She is gifted in her ability to translate Piaget's theories into layman's terms and to make them viable for the average classroom teacher. I have found his theories to be very relevant. Implementing classroom activities based on his ideas has made me a better teacher. My unit will attempt to share with other teachers how this developmental approach to learning can be taught and why it is so important.

Jean Piaget was a gifted observer who devised several of his learning theories after watching his own children at play. He found many traits and behaviors to be common among children. For instance, all three year olds are animistic in that they give human qualities to inanimate objects; e.g. dolls are thought to be alive, clouds have feelings and it rains when a cloud cries, etc. In grouping these behaviors and the common ages at which they occurred, Piaget devised four levels of learning that all human beings progress through in their cognitive development. The stages are sensorimotor (Age 0-2), pre-operational (Age 2-7), concrete operational (Age 7-11) and formal operational (Age 11-Adult).

The average middle school student is well into the concrete operational stage and is preparing to enter formal operations. A child who is using concrete operational thinking patterns is very structured. He is into the "here and now" and can not yet think hypothetically. He is very logical and will only be able to solve problems using schemes he has already mastered. He can classify and likes to put things in order. He likes to work with patterns and organizational tasks such as picture puzzles, word finds, building blocks, models, paper dolls, and coloring books. There must be a tangible end-result to all activities.

The concrete child likes games with rules. He needs to know and understand the boundaries. This child likes true or realistic stories about characters similar to himself. Beverly Cleary is a very popular author with concrete children, as she writes honestly about being a child in books such as *Henry Huggins*, *Ellen Tebbits*, and *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. The concrete operational child can differentiate his own ideas, feelings, and points of view from others. He is not completely egocentric, yet he cannot really empathize with people unlike himself. He has problems slipping inside someone else's shoes.

Concrete operational children can sometimes be an enigma. They love fairy tales and worlds of make-believe as can be seen in their passion for the t.v. characters, He-man and Rainbow Brite, yet they accept these fantasies in an unquestioning manner. They do not want to discuss the greater meanings found in folklore. They think you are crazy if you want to analyze a fairy tale. Fairy tales are blindly accepted, they are simply what they are. Older children, though, who can think hypothetically, love to interpret the tales of the oral tradition. They are fascinated with the theories of Bruno Bettelheim and like to discover the deeper, hidden meanings found in all fairy tales.

This is not to say that the concrete child is not imaginative and cannot pretend as in make-believe, but some of the uniqueness we see in a younger child's play has been left behind in this quest for order and rationale. The concrete child is always experimenting with his new found logic and trying to make the world fit into the prescribed patterns he's already discovered.

Here lies the difference between the formal adolescent and the concrete child. People who think concretely must have solid reasons based on their own experiences for proof. When they believe a fact to be true, it is true, never to be fully developed or questioned. People who think formally must look at all the angles, compare and contrast, and they are driven to discover the hidden truths behind facts.

The child who achieves formal operational thinking can now think like most adults. He can reason,

hypothesize, and think what if. He is able to look at all the possible solutions to a problem and systematically try all the elements to see which ones fit. This child can compare and contrast. He will enjoy and understand works of literature such as science fiction. He will be able to tackle logic puzzles and to understand basic concepts of abstract reasoning. He will be able to tackle subjects such as physics. He can now empathize and relate to others unlike himself.

Not all people enter the formal operations stage. Many adults do not progress any further than concrete operations in their ability to think and reason. People cannot be taught to think hypothetically. This is a process that must be learned through interaction with the world around you and through the inner distillation of knowledge. People enter the different phases of learning at their own pace. But even though a teacher cannot directly teach hypothetical reasoning, she can do much to guide a student to that ultimate end.

Teachers can help children to move from concrete thinking to formal operations by constantly challenging them. Children need to learn in an environment that is flexible, open, daring. They need to be shaken up; their logic confronted while they are exposed to situations that will allow them to flip-flop on previous held notions. Students should share their opinions often so that they can see how others think and feel. They need to explore open-ended questions; exercise their brains by reading, thinking, speaking, and writing and, as a class, analyzing the end results of all this work.

The study of literature can be an important tool in getting children to think hypothetically. Literature comes from the collective consciousness of all men. Reading allows the child to experience life in a manner that may not be possible for him in any other way. Through books a reader can travel through time, to new and fantastic worlds, and he can meet people that have much to share. Literature forces the reader to compare and contrast, to identify, to personify, to question, and to wonder why.

The four novels presented in this unit will serve the needs of the teacher attempting to use Piagetian philosophies. Because the leading characters are interesting, sympathetic adolescents these books will appeal to the concrete child, but each child will relate to the hero's family situation in his own way. Each student will find elements that connect directly to his real life, and yet definite challenges to the current mode of thinking exist. These books were selected because they cover a wide range of heroes, time spans, situations, and family problems. Each book has a pivotal theme that students will respond to. These books with the discussions and activities that will follow each reading, will shake the students up, forcing them to interpret character motivations and to form opinions. This thinking and exercise will give further opportunities for the concrete child to think formally.

### **BY THE SHORES OF SILVER LAKE by Laura Ingalls Wilder**

I have chosen this book to begin the unit for several reasons. Other teachers should feel free to teach these novels in whatever order works best for them and their students. As 5th graders, my 6th grade students read *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, the novel that precedes *By the Shores of Silver Lake* in the "Little House" series. Starting with this book allows my students to reacquaint themselves with the Ingalls family which they already know and love. It is also at a fairly easy reading level and will not frustrate those children who are not "readers." I want to hook them now before we move on to the books on a more difficult level. The book is still exciting enough for those students who are stronger readers; no one will be bored with it.

*By the Shores of Silver Lake* is a very sweet book that deals positively with difficult family issues (serious illness, moving, parents in disagreement, money troubles). It is fiction grounded in fact as Laura Ingalls based this and her other books on her own childhood as a pioneer girl in the 1880's. It is a realistic portrayal of

frontier life.

The book begins as Laura is just about to turn 13. The idyllic life seen in the earlier books has turned into a harsher reality. Laura is no longer the “Little Half-Pint” who can play in the creek or have other adventures. She is being asked to grow up and assume adult responsibilities even though she is still a child. This is a theme that many modern children will be able to relate to. They come home to empty houses and often have to start supper, clean, and look after younger siblings. Like Laura, these children have many adult responsibilities to assume that they are not yet ready for. Class discussions and writing assignments will focus on this issue.

The students will start to keep journals at this time that they will write in throughout the year. The journals should be approached from a developmental point of view and writing topics should not be assigned by the teacher. Children need to be encouraged to write about whatever they would like to. One class period a week can be set aside exclusively for journal keeping. Students will write for the entire period independently, but they can sign up to meet with the teacher for a writing conference.

During the writing conference the teacher reads the child’s work and makes appropriate comments while analyzing the child’s needs. The teacher and student then set goals for the child to work on in future writing sessions. These goals could include drafting, working on grammar or spelling errors, choosing a new topic, or simply continuing with the present piece.

These journals are not to be treated simply as diaries. Using this approach allows a child to keep all of his ideas in one place. It is easier for him to analyze and keep track of his work when it is done in one notebook. In his journal the child will explore, through writing, the topics of most importance to him as he also refines his changing thoughts about growing up and being part of a family.

*By the Shores of Silver Lake* is like a journal in that it chronicles Laura’s last days of childhood and her passage into adolescence. It is a story of how one family unites to fight life’s hardships. Laura’s sister, Mary is recently blind after a bout with scarlet fever that has left the whole family weak. Times have been hard for the farmer and Pa must sell their beloved homestead to take a job with the railroad. Too many years of drought and grasshopper plagues have destroyed the family’s dream. But Pa is not down and out. He wants to move west and stake a claim share in the Dakotas, but Ma wants her girls to go to school and be civilized. Ma particularly wants Laura to go to school, for she must now be Mary’s “eyes” and take over the family’s goal of one girl becoming a schoolteacher like Ma.

Laura deals with the disappointment and changes in her life very maturely. My students will be asked if they would behave in the same manner. The differences in the Ingalls family as they are seen in the novel and on the T.V. series, *Little House on the Prairie*, will also be topics for class discussion.

#### *Some Questions and Issues for Discussion*

1. How does Laura feel about being Mary’s “eyes”? Do you have to look out for a brother or sister?
2. What are some of Laura’s new responsibilities? What responsibilities do you have at home?
3. Does Laura still want to play or is she really as grown-up as her parents wish her to be? Do you ever want to play? If so, how?
4. How does Laura feel about moving again and leaving behind her house at Plum Creek? Have

you ever had to leave behind something you were fond of?

5. Does Laura want to be a school teacher? What do you want to be when you are older? What do your parents want you to be?

### ***THE WITCH OF BLACKBIRD POND* by Elizabeth George Speare**

This second novel to be read makes a strong connection to the 6th grade Social Studies curriculum which is a study of Connecticut. “Witch” is set in Wethersfield in the late 1600’s. It presents a strong contrast to family life today as the book looks at life among the rigid Puritans. This novel will be used to look at the family from a historical perspective and will give the students a chance to see how family life has not always been as it is today. The historical period of this book could be used by the children to report on the aspects of this long ago life they are most interested in.

Following the reading of *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* , the students will divide themselves into small groups. Each group will reflect on the novel and select an aspect they wish to explore in detail and then present orally to the class. The book operates on so many levels the children will have a rich variety of topics to choose from. Students may wish to research the lifestyle of the Puritans looking at their clothing, food, homes, skills, weapons, etc. They might want to pursue the history of sailing and the trade ships or look at witchcraft and present information on the Salem witch trials. Others might want to compare the family of the 1680’s with the family of the 1980’s.

Whatever the choice, each group will research its subject and present its findings to the class. Visual aids such as models and charts will be required. This type of exploration will greatly enhance the reading of “Witch” and make it more meaningful for the students.

*The Witch of Blackbird Pond* is the story of a 16 year old orphan named Kit. This novel reads like a beautiful fairy tale and students may want to compare it to actual fairy tales and the families presented there. Kit has had to flee Barbados and is forced to live with her only relatives, her Aunt Rachel and her Uncle Matthew. She leaves Barbados because her grandfather’s fortune has been lost and she is at the mercy of an old lecher’s proposal. She has jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

In her new Wethersfield home, Kit is a bright bird among pigeons. Hers is a story about not belonging, not being accepted. Her aunt and uncle do not know what to do with her, and Kit feels lonely and homeless until she meets the old Quaker woman, Hannah Tupper. The discussion of this book will center around this theme of not belonging to a family unit, even one you may be part of.

Kit is put to many tests and challenges, as are many heroes of fairy tales, before she is accepted by her adopted family. The book ends with her autonomous and starting a family of her own.

There is much in this novel to explore. When is someone worthy of your family’s respect? Why is it so hard to earn? What does it take to be alone? Why does Kit earn her own family only when she has learned to stand on her own and be an individual? The questions this novel raises will make interesting class discussions. Students

should also be asked to act out scenes from the book. Its exciting action and fairy tale characters lend themselves to the creation of rich dramatizations.

### *Other Questions for Discussion*

1. What was Kit's life like in Barbados with her grandfather? What was her life like in Connecticut with the Woods family? Which family would you choose to live with?
2. Why doesn't Kit fit in with the people of Wethersfield? How is she different? How is she the same? What would it feel like to be an orphan like Kit and to not fit into a family?
3. Which girl, Mercy or Judith, tries hardest to be a sister to Kit? Why is Judith jealous of Kit? Have you ever been jealous of your brother or sister?
4. Several people fall in love in this novel. How do they behave towards one another? What was a date like in 1687? How do people fall in love and marry today?
5. How is *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* like a fairy tale? What fairy tales does the book remind you of? In this tale who is the wicked witch? Who is the fairy godmother? Who is Prince Charming? What character in a fairy tale would Prudence be? Where does Kit fit in?

### ***NOBODY'S FAMILY IS GOING TO CHANGE* by Louise Fitzhugh**

This novel is very witty, painful, and modern in dealing with sex roles. The heroine, Emma, is seeking acceptance like Kit. Emma never finds it from her family, though. She learns that first she must love herself. Her family may never change its attitudes about what girls and boys should be, but she can change. She has to change or she will not survive.

Emma is a concrete child at the beginning of the novel, just beginning to explore her own possibilities. She is too content and accepting of her painful existence. She blames everything on her father. But as she begins to wrestle with her own demons she can see the brighter days ahead. Emma grabs ahold of herself and realizes that she is the one in charge. Nothing will change unless she envisions her own future goals and strives to achieve them. In wondering why and thinking what if, Emma saves herself.

Students will quickly identify with Emma. Her inner voice, as presented in the book, is perfect for dramatizations. Students will be asked to write monologues using Emma's thoughts as they are presented in the book. These speeches will be performed with students acting as Emma. Taking these monologues one step further, the class will be asked to write their own monologues based on personal experience. This book presents an excellent opportunity for students to discover how a novel becomes a drama. *Nobody's Family Is Going to Change* was first transformed into a teleplay for an ABC afterschool special. It also became the Broadway musical, *The Tap Dance Kid*. Students should read and view these professional dramatizations because in the musical there is a song Emma sings that is an excellent example of the inner-voice monologue.

*Nobody's Family Is Going to Change* is the story of a present-day black family living in Manhattan. Emma is the oldest child in the family and the only daughter. She is fat, very bright, lonely, and disgusted with herself.



She wants to be a lawyer and fantasizes about it constantly. Her father is a lawyer who doesn't encourage her because "women don't make good lawyers." Emma desperately wants her father's approval but they just do not seem able to understand one another. They are too much alike.

Emma's little brother, Willie, also has a sex role dilemma. He wants to be a dancer like his Uncle Dipsey and is good enough to be offered a role in a Broadway show. But his father disapproves and this brings all the family tension out into the open.

Because this novel deals with a modern family in a modern situation, I feel students will really empathize with the children in this family. In fact, the author stacks the deck so the parents are all too often two-dimensional. This problem was solved in the ABC afterschool special based on the novel. Like the Broadway play, it is called *The Tap Dance Kid*. In *The Tap Dance Kid* the parents are seen as real people and their problems are brought out into the open. Students should look at this family's dilemma from both the children's and parent's points of view. Viewing the t.v. show (which is available on VCR) will present the important issues the novel raises in a more sensitive and realistic manner.

### *Some Questions and Issues for Discussion*

1. Why doesn't Emma's father want her to be a lawyer? Why doesn't he want Willie to be a dancer? Do parents always want what is best for their children?
2. Is Emma a "nice" person? Do people like her? Would you want to be her friend? Does she allow people to get close to her? Is she like her father or mother? How?
3. Why does Willie want to dance? How does it make him feel? Does anything make you feel this way?
4. What is Emma's and Willie's relationship like? Do they love one another? Do they like one another? What is your relationship with your brother or sister like?
5. Will this family change? Will they solve their problems? How? Do some families stay the same? Why or why not?

### **SOUNDER BY William H. Armstrong**

The final novel to be read and explored is a very serious, somber piece. It is haunting and the best written book of the four. I found it very sad and I think that *Sounder* will move students profoundly.

The novel is set in the 1930's and is the tragic story of a black sharecropping family. The title comes from the name of the family hunting dog, but it is symbolic of the themes the book sensitively presents. Sounder is the family pet and best friend of the leading character, "the boy." When Sounder is wounded and the boy's father is arrested for stealing a ham to feed his starving family, the boy becomes the family's "Sounder." Overnight he is no longer a child but a man of the house, "sounding out" the world around the small family cabin. He searches for food and a job to support the family, earning an education along the way. His most important quest is for his father who has been forced from home to work on a chain gang. With each journey away from

home the boy grows stronger. When his father finally does return, beaten and maimed, the boy is now the man who takes care of not only himself, but also of his family.

*Sunder*'s prose is sparse and bare. It is harsh for life is harsh for the boy and his family. The novel deals with prejudice in a very affecting way. The reader also sees how a family can still love and hang together in times of great adversity. Family obligations and responsibilities are important themes in *Sunder*.

This book was made into a very fine film about ten years ago. Students will view this film and discuss it. The harsh reality of the prejudice shown here and a family's ability to rise above it will be important topics of discussion.

#### *Some Questions and Issues for Discussion*

1. Why doesn't the author of *Sunder*, William H. Armstrong, tell the reader the boy's name?
2. How does the boy become "the sounder" for his family? Would you be able to leave home and be "the sounder" for your family?
3. How are the dog, Sounder, and the boy's father alike? Can animals be so close to people that they become part of the family?
4. Was the punishment the boy's father was given fair? Was it right of him to steal the ham? Why did he do it? What would you have done if you were in the father's situation?
5. Where do we see people's prejudice in the novel? How do these incidents affect the family? Are the members of this family strong or weak? How do you think your family would behave if it were in a similar circumstance?

The unit will culminate with a sharing of the writings, dramatic pieces, and other works that have grown from the exploration of these four family novels. A final discussion would include comparing and contrasting the adolescents found in the books with ourselves. I would particularly like to see Emma and her egocentric behavior compared to the boy in *Sunder* and his unselfish actions.

The characters in these novels begin as concrete children and move into the realms of abstract thinking and in coping with life's dilemmas. Like my students, Emma, Laura, Kit, and the boy are all on the verge of thinking hypothetically. They are learning to be independent and autonomous; to think like an adult. At first all children are overwhelmed, but through perseverance and with endurance they are able to conquer their fears and to win their own battles. As my students share these problems and experiences with growing up in the family, I hope they will begin to look at their own lives and start to move from the concrete to the abstract; to think what if, to dream whatever is necessary to create the solutions to their own problems.

## Bibliography

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Armstrong, William H. *Souder* . New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969.

Bringuier, Jean-Claude. *Conversations with Jean Piaget* . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

This book is a series of personal interviews that Bringuier conducted with Jean Piaget. It is very informative, yet highly entertaining.

Dalsimer, Katherine. *Female Adolescence: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Literature* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Dalsimer looks at a variety of female adolescent heroines in classic pieces of literature such as *Romeo and Juliet* and Jane Austen's *Persuasion* . She discusses the different stages of adolescence while analyzing the main characters and their behavior.

Fitzhugh, Louise. *Nobody's Family Is Going to Change* . New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974.

Ginsberg, Herbert and Opper, Sylvia. *Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development* . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979.

An excellent text that explains in detail all of Piaget's ideas about how people learn.

Purves, Alan C. and Monson, Dianne L. *Experiencing Children's Literature* . Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984.

This is an interesting book written for teachers to help them teach literature to young people in a more creative and meaningful manner.

Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* . New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1958.

Wadsworth, Barry J. *Piaget for the Classroom* . New York: Longman, Inc., 1978.

The practical application of Piaget's theories in the classroom is presented here in a very helpful way by Barry J. Wadsworth.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *By the Shores of Silver Lake* . New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1939.

## Other Resources

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Catherine Fosnot: courses available at Southern Connecticut State University, EDU 529, Piaget for Teachers, EDU 573 Language Arts: A Developmental Approach.

*The Constructivist: How to Apply Piaget to Children's Learning* , The newsletter of the New England Piaget Conference, Inc.

In the February 1986 issue, Vol. 1, No. 2, the reader will find an article I wrote on using Piagetian techniques in the teaching of folklore. The article is titled, *Language Arts Based on the Oral Tradition* .

For copies of the newsletter or further information about the New England Piaget Conference, Inc. contact: Dr. Rose Park, Coordinator, 25 Forest Road, Weston, Connecticut 06883.

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