

TEACHERS GUIDE

The Conspiracy of the Secret Nine

by Celia Bland

COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY

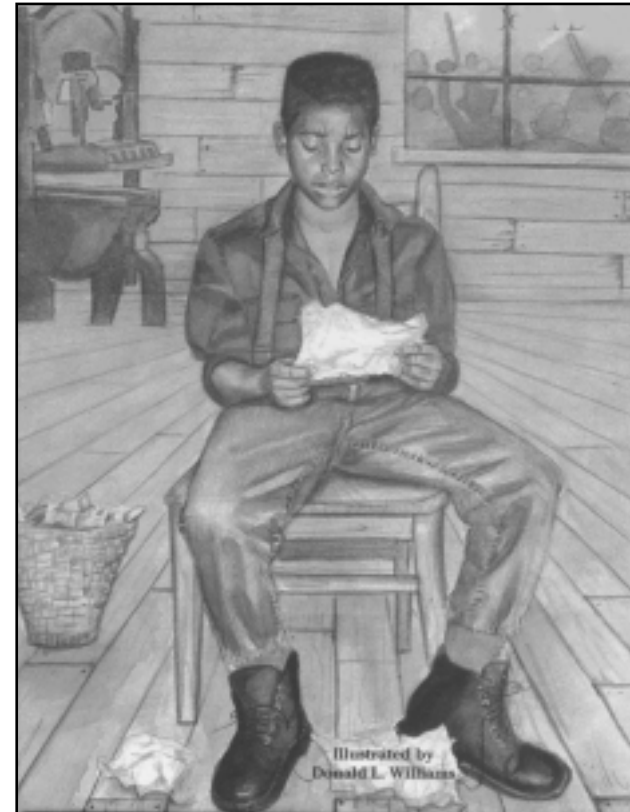
The Next Chapter

The Conspiracy of the Secret Nine has an ending that will surely leave students wondering what happens next. Troy Worth is on a train, leaving the city where he was born and raised, perhaps never to return. Since students will want to read more on Troy's new life, have them create it! Break the class up into groups of 4 or 5 students and ask them to continue the story where it leaves off.

Ideas to review before the groups begin:

- Which character(s) are you going to focus on?
- Do you plan to write about the next few days, weeks or years in the characters' life?
- What "voice" will you use—first person, third person, omniscient narrator?
- How will you work together as a group--will you discuss ideas first, or brainstorm individually? Who will be the official scribe of the group? What will you do if you all don't agree on an idea?

You might ask the groups to make a cover and bind the stories. Display them in a reading corner and be sure students have the opportunity to read other groups' endings. You could insert a blank piece of paper inside each cover and encourage readers to respond to the groups' writing. (For example, "What a clever idea! I am so happy Troy got to work on a newspaper in Philadelphia. I wonder if Mr. Strong ever found out?") This continues the dialogue and reflection regarding the story and empowers students to reply to each others' writing in a thoughtful way.



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The Conspiracy of the Secret Nine by Celia Bland, is a mystery set near Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898. At the beginning of the story, Wilmington was governed by liberal Republicans who worked to insure that desegregation was instituted at every level of government and business. Many prominent African Americans lived in Wilmington, including lawyers, elected officials and the editor of the *Daily Courier*—one of the few African American daily newspapers in the country. There were also many segregationists in Wilmington who were determined to reverse the progress of African Americans by electing a racist governor.

The main character in the book is Troy Worth, an eleven-year-old African American boy who witnesses the changes in his city first-hand. Perhaps most painfully, he notices the coldness in his good friend Randy Hollis, whose father is a leader in the conspiracy to take power away from Blacks in Wilmington. Troy overhears conversations and secretly attends meetings of both the Democrats and Republicans in town. Finally, he helps to save the editor of the *Daily Courier* before fleeing from the racists in Wilmington on a train to “Yankee-land”.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading ***The Conspiracy of the Secret Nine***, discuss with the class what they already know about desegregation. After sharing definitions and associations with that word, focus them on the period of time just after the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era. What do they think would be the mood in different cities regarding this issue?

Other questions for discussion might be:

- What is a conspiracy?
- Look closely at the cover illustration. What do you think is happening both inside and outside of this building?
- Discuss the definitions of some of the terms that students will be reading—Who are the Ku Klux Klan?
- What does lynching mean? Why were some people referred to as carpet baggers?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Literature • Social Studies • Art • Writing

1. After reading the story, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature, a mixture of fact and fiction. Some of the characters in the book actually existed and many of the events really occurred. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and characters in the story using sources such as encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, historical documents, newspapers, etc. Have a mini-lesson about how to use these sources and a class “debriefing” . . . what names and events could they read about in other sources and which were most likely created by the author?

2. Some ideas for students to research:

- This story took place in 1898. What else was happening at this time in the U.S. and in other parts of the world?
- What was happening in the late nineteenth century in other cities regarding desegregation?
- When, where and how did the Ku Klux Klan originate? What was done to prosecute members who committed crimes?
- Where is Wilmington, North Carolina? Find it on a map and figure out the distance between there and other cities.
- How were the daily lives of children, women and/or slaves changed during the Civil War?

3. Respond to the story. Ask the class what interests them, surprises them or gets them angry about the book. Organize their comments on chart paper in a web format. Ask groups of students with similar interests to get together to talk more about their ideas. Assign them the task of sharing their discussion with the rest of the group in some creative way—they could write a letter, a poem or a newspaper article, or draw posters or flyers, or stage a debate or play.

4. Keep a journal or write a diary entry as Troy Worth. Choose one of the days in the story and recount the events of the day, adding personal reactions and feelings.

5. What did the last edition of the *Daily Courier* (that never was printed) contain? Individually or in pairs, write the headline and cover story that you think would have been printed, had the angry mob outside not arrived.

6. Ask pairs or small groups of students to choose a short scene in the book to make into a play. Give them time to reread the scene and to practice recreating it. Relying on few, if any props, encourage them to recreate the mood of the scene through dialogue and body language.