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Study Guide

for

**The Summer of
the Swans**

by Betsy Byars



 **Glencoe
McGraw-Hill**

New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Betsy Byars



I often think of my books as scrapbooks of my life, because I put in them all the neat things that I see and read and hear. I sometimes wonder what people who don't write do with all their good stuff.

—Betsy Byars, *The Moon and I*

Betsy Byars did not plan to be a writer. When she was a child, her only view of writers was what she saw in photos on book jackets. Those views did not inspire her. She thought the writers looked “funny, as if they’d been taken to a taxidermist and stuffed.” She decided that this lifeless look probably resulted from their being shut up inside a room all day, alone and bored. She had other career plans. First, she thought she would work in a zoo, taking care of baby animals. Later, she thought she would be a mathematician, like her sister Nancy; but Byars lost interest after taking calculus in college.

What did interest her were books and words. Byars had learned to read at age four, and she had always loved reading. She changed her college major to writing. After graduation, while her husband attended graduate school, Byars wrote articles on an old typewriter. Her first pieces were published in magazines. After her children were

born, she became interested in writing for young people.

Her Work Byars had difficulty finding a publisher for her first book, *Clementine*, but it was finally published in 1962. Since then, Byars has gone on to write more than fifty books. Her books have won many awards, including a Newbery Medal, an American Book Award, and an Edgar—an award for outstanding mysteries. Her work has changed over the years. Although a teacher had urged her to “write about what you know,” Byars did not take the advice at first: she did not think her life was worth reading about. She was born in North Carolina in 1928, “the same year as bubble gum and Mickey Mouse,” she says, and she had a happy, uneventful childhood. What was so interesting about that?

Realistic Fiction Byars soon learned that her life held plenty of interest for other people. In 1968, her novel *Midnight Fox* was published. It was followed by *Trouble River* in 1969 and *The Summer of the Swans* in 1970. All three novels are realistic stories about lifelike people in real settings. All three novels won loyal readers. Luckily, Byars found that ideas were easy to come by after all. She says:

Since my books are mostly realistic fiction, I get my ideas from the things that happen to me, to my kids, to my dogs and cats, to my friends' dogs and cats, and from things I see on TV and read about in the newspaper. . . . [A]lmost every incident brings back a memory.

Byars explains that when people write about things that they know, they write with authority. She has become an authority on many subjects, including flying, which is a hobby she shares with her husband. Both of them are pilots.

Byars has now been writing for forty years. Unlike the writers whose pictures she saw as a child, she has a lively face, filled with humor and interest. In all her years of writing, she says, “sitting in a room all by myself, typing, I’ve never once been bored.”

Introducing the Novel

This heavily wooded, mountainous area forms the setting for this story. Try to picture the scenery as you read. Think about how

dangerous the deep valleys and old abandoned mines might be to curious children.

Did You Know?

Swans are large white waterfowl. They are excellent swimmers and strong fliers. Their size and beauty have inspired many artists and writers. In this country, you are most likely to see one of two species: the so-called mute swan or the whistling swan.

- Mute swans are not really mute, or silent. They can make sounds—from soft hissing to loud trumpeting noises—but they are usually quiet. These are large birds, up to five feet tall, with wings that can spread as wide as eight feet. Mute swans are often photographed because they are so pretty. Adults have large white bodies, arched wings, gracefully curved necks, and orange

and black bills. In the United States, most mute swans live near the Great Lakes or in mid-Atlantic coastal areas.

- Whistling swans are slightly smaller than mute swans. Unlike the larger swans, these birds have longer necks, which are straight, not curved. Whistling swans migrate long distances, traveling each fall from the Far North down to their winter homes near the Great Lakes and the Atlantic shore. These swans have deep, rich voices—which sound a little like the voices of geese—and they are often heard before they are seen. They often travel in large flocks made up of hundreds of birds.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Betsy Byars, a sensitive writer with an ear and heart attuned to the subtleties of growing up, has created a story of extraordinary understanding and warmth.

—Top of the News

Seldom are the pain of adolescence and the tragedy of mental retardation presented as sensitively and as unpretentiously as in the story of Sara and Charlie. . . . [The Summer of the Swans is] a subtly told story, echoing the spoken and unspoken thoughts of young people.

—Horn Book

Introducing the Novel

The Summer of the Swans is a remarkable book; usually in a work of fiction, one aspect, such as theme, plot, or characterization will stand out, but in this novel, all three are outstanding.

—Malcolm Usry, *Betsy Byars*

BACKGROUND

The Summer of the Swans was not Betsy Byars's first book, but it was the first to be showered with praise and awards. One critic called it an "overwhelming success." Since the novel was first published in 1970, two generations of readers have come to agree.

The novel contains many details that are borrowed from the author's own life. The setting is West Virginia, where Byars lived at the time she wrote the book. The main character, Sara Godfrey, is a fourteen-year-old girl who resembles Byars herself as a teenager. Byars explains, "When I was little, I had big feet for my age; I gave those to Sara." She also gave Sara some of her own earlier thoughts and feelings—for example, the belief that "the important thing was to look exactly like everybody else."

The other main character in *The Summer of the Swans* is Sara's ten-year-old mentally handicapped brother, Charlie. Charlie, too, is based on Byars's real-life experiences. As a volunteer in a West Virginia program for students with learning problems, Byars had once worked with two mentally disabled children, a girl and a boy. Although neither child was the actual model for the character Charlie, Byars has said, "I never would have written the book if I had not had the experience of knowing them." She learned not only of their problems in school but also of their problems with other students. Byars did some library research to find out more. She read case histories of children who had suffered brain damage after having high fevers. She then used the information and her own imagination to create a realistic Charlie.

Other characters in the novel include Sara's attractive nineteen-year-old sister, Wanda,

whom Sara sometimes envies, and Aunt Willie, who takes care of the family. As you read *The Summer of the Swans*, you may feel as if you know the Godfreys. Sara and Wanda sometimes argue, just as real sisters do. Sara often has to take care of her younger brother, just as real-life older sisters do. Aunt Willie sometimes nags the children to do the right thing, just as real adults do.

As the novel begins, Sara complains, "This has been the worst summer of my life." She is not exactly sure why. Nothing much has changed since the last summer, and she was happy then. Why does she feel so miserable now? She spends most of her time playing with Charlie or moping around the house. In fact, the most interesting thing that has happened all summer is that a small flock of swans has flown to a nearby lake. The beauty of the visiting birds fascinates both Sara and Charlie.

It takes a family crisis for Sara to discover why she has been unhappy and what in life really matters to her. Over the course of just a few days, she learns a great deal about herself and about who her real friends are. In the process, she takes a giant step toward becoming an adult.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The story takes place in West Virginia during the late 1960s. West Virginia is nicknamed "The Mountain State" because it has so little level land. Instead, West Virginia is filled with hills and mountains, including the Allegheny Mountains and the Blue Ridge Mountains. These mountains run in long parallel ridges with valleys in between. Sometimes, large caves and underground streams form tunnels beneath the mountains.

Coal is also under the mountains. In fact, three-quarters of the state has coal deposits. Some coal is found in rich deposits, and many of these areas attracted coalmines. Mining is so important to West Virginia's economy that the state flag shows a miner. Most coal in the state must be pulled from underground mines.

Before You Read

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 1–6

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What are the most important things in life?

Journal

Most people believe that some things are more important than others. In your journal, write down what you value and explain why.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what things in life matter the most to Sara.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Many novels begin with a direct description of the setting—the time and the place in which the story occurs. In this novel, you will find hints that suggest when the events take place. One hint is the mention of Jackie Kennedy Onassis.

Jacqueline Kennedy was the widow of President John F. Kennedy who was assassinated in 1963. In 1968, she married Aristotle Onassis, a Greek shipping magnate, and added his name to hers. When she lived in the White House, Jacqueline Kennedy was known for her charm, her elegance, and her sense of style. Many American women copied her hairdo and style of dress, and many Americans called her Jackie instead of by her formal name.

Who's Talking?

Every story has a **narrator**—a “voice” that tells what is happening. The narrator determines how much readers will know. If the narrator is a character in the novel, readers know only what that character sees, hears, and feels. Sometimes, however, the narrator is not a character in the story and may or may not know what the characters think or feel. As you read the novel, think about what you learn from the narrator and what you are able to figure out for yourself.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

abruptly [ə brʌpt 'lē] *adv.* suddenly; unexpectedly (p. 3)

clamoring [klam 'ər ɪŋ] *adj.* noisy (p. 16)

emphatically [em fat 'ɪk lē] *adv.* forcefully; showing determination (p. 7)

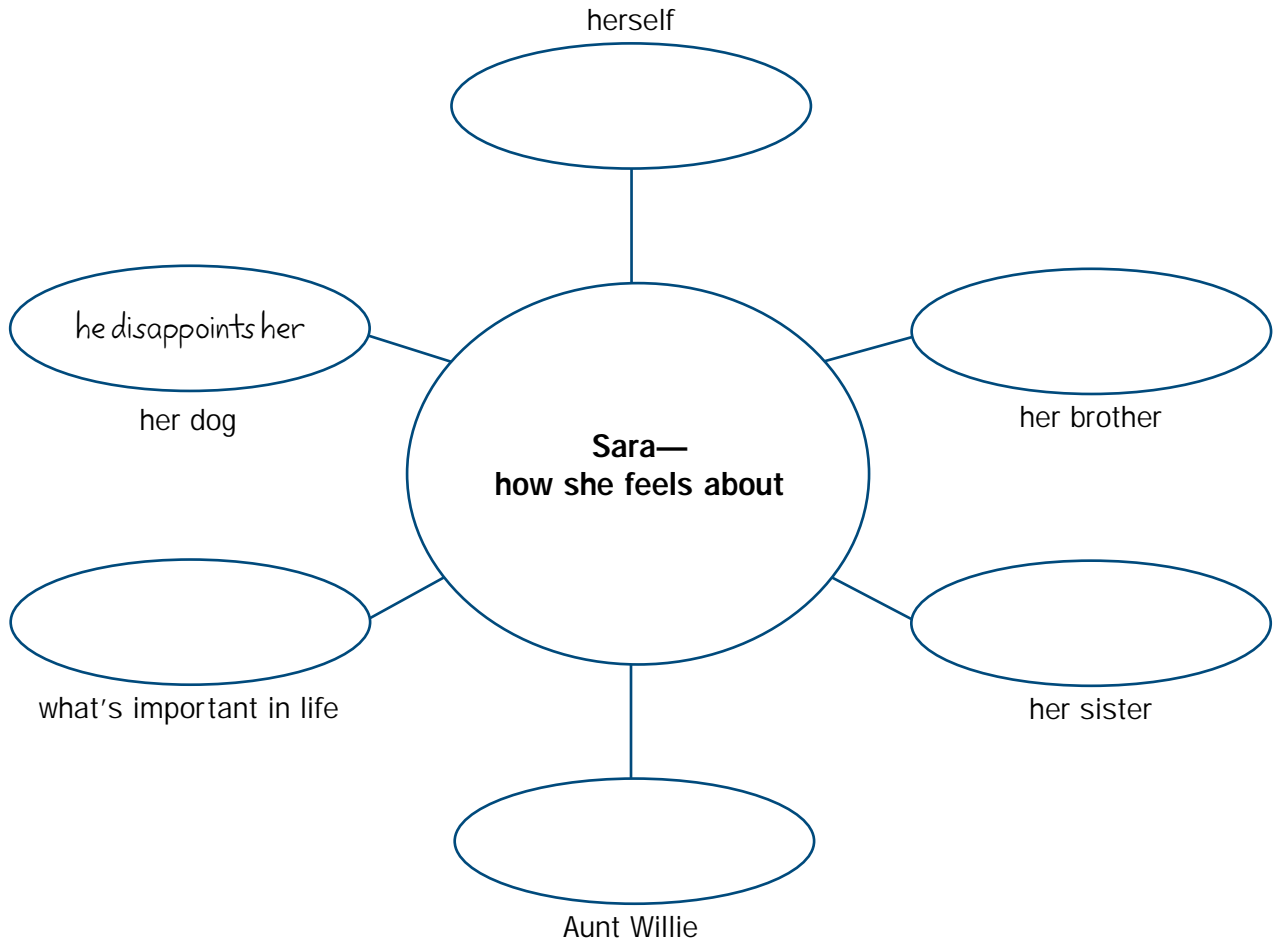
indignation [ɪn 'dɪg nā 'ʃən] *n.* anger that is caused by an unfair situation or statement (p. 9)

kaleidoscope [kə lɪ 'dæ skōp '] *n.* tube-shaped toy that contains loose bits of colored glass or plastic. A viewer looks in one end and sees the colors form different, ever-changing patterns as the tube is turned. (p. 4)

Active Reading

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 1–6

At the beginning of *The Summer of the Swans*, you learn a lot about Sara. As you read the first six chapters, try to understand what kind of person she is. Keep track of what you learn by filling in the character web below.



Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 1–6

Personal Response

What is your impression of Sara at this point in the book? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. In chapter 1, what advice does Wanda give Sara? Why doesn't Sara follow Wanda's advice?

2. What is Charlie doing when he first appears in the novel? How does Sara treat him? What does her treatment of Charlie tell you about their relationship?

3. Why is Aunt Willie taking care of the children? How does Sara feel about her?

4. How does Sara respond when Wanda mentions that she has discussed Charlie with a boy in her psychology class? Why?

5. Why does Sara want to look like Wanda? Why are looks important to Sara?

6. What happened to Charlie when he was three? What was the result?

Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 1–6

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

7. Does Sara seem like a real person to you? Use examples from the novel to explain your answer.

8. How might Sara answer the **Focus Activity** question on page 16? How might Charlie? Now that you have read the first six chapters, would you change your response to the question in any way? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing the Problem

In chapter 1 Sara says, “This has been the worst summer of my life.” Write a paragraph expressing your opinion about why the summer is so awful for Sara. Support your opinion with details from the novel. (You may want to review the **Active Reading** character web on page 17 before you write.)

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

With a group of classmates, discuss Aunt Willie. What is she like? What does the motor scooter ride suggest about her? Would you want her as a parent? Why or why not? Try to come to an agreement; then share your responses with the rest of the class.

Listening and Speaking

In *The Summer of the Swans* certain details give readers a taste of what the 1960s were like. “Fill in the blanks” in your knowledge of the popular culture of the 1960s by interviewing a family member or another adult who was a teenager at that time. Before the interview, write down four or five questions that you would like to ask. During the interview, jot down the person’s responses. Then use your notes to present a brief oral report to your class.

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Before You Read

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 7–11

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you react in a crisis? Are you generally cool and calm?

Journal

In your journal describe how you react—or wish you would react—in crises.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover the crisis that occurs in the Godfrey family and Sara's reaction to it.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The Summer of the Swans is told from the **third-person limited point of view**. The narrator describes the unspoken thoughts and feelings of only two characters. As you read the next five chapters, notice that the narrator sometimes focuses on Sara's thoughts and feelings and at other times on Charlie's.

Different Kinds of Conflict

Every story contains some type of conflict, or struggle. Novels often contain several conflicts. These may be external or internal. An **external conflict** exists when a character struggles with an outside force, such as another character or a force of nature. An **internal conflict** exists when a character is caught up in a psychological struggle. Usually, the character must make a difficult decision of some kind. As you read the next five chapters, be alert to both kinds of conflicts.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

discontent [dis'kən tent'] *n.* lack of satisfaction or contentment (p. 20)

feverish [fē'vər ish] *adj.* restless; showing great emotion (p. 28)

irritating [ir'ə tāt ing] *adj.* annoying (p. 20)

persist [pər sist', -zist'] *v.* to stubbornly insist on something (p. 24)

posse [pos'ē] *n.* search party (p. 36)

rasping [rasp'ing] *adj.* hoarse; gruff (p. 30)

thrash [thrash'ing] *v.* to move about wildly or violently (p. 30)

wedge [wej] *v.* to cram; to force into a narrow space (p. 18)

Active Reading

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 7-11

Characters have reasons for the things they do. They may be motivated by some sort of problem. As you read chapters 7-11, pay attention to what the characters want and what they do.

Character	Wants	Action
Sara	to leave lake	

Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 7–11

Personal Response

If you were Sara, what thoughts might be going through your mind at this point? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why doesn't Sara want to stay at the lake? How does Charlie react to her request to leave? Why?

2. What does Sara say about Wanda's boyfriend, Frank? What do Sara's statements suggest about her feelings toward Wanda?

3. Why can't Charlie get anyone's attention when he points out that a button is missing from his pajamas? What does this tell you about the family?

4. What motivates Charlie to get out of bed? What happens as a result?

5. How does Aunt Willie respond when Sara says that Charlie is not in his bed? How is her response different from Sara's? In your opinion, what accounts for this difference?

Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 7–11

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. What is the effect of switching from Sara’s to Charlie’s point of view? How would the story change if the reader had only Sara’s perspective of events?

7. Should Aunt Willie have called the police, or was she right to let Sara go looking for Charlie? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Description

Chapters 9 and 10 contain many descriptions of what Charlie sees, hears, feels, and thinks. Review these chapters and take notes on the descriptions. Then write a paragraph analyzing how the details help you learn about Charlie. Support your analysis with the specific details that you have noted.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In chapters 7–11, Sara, Charlie, and Aunt Willie experience conflicts. With a group of classmates, review these chapters and jot down the conflicts that each character experiences. Classify each conflict as external or internal. Report your findings to others in your class.

Performing

With a partner, perform a scene from chapters 7–11 that consists mostly of dialogue—for example, the scene in which Sara and Charlie visit the lake or the scene at the end of chapter 11 in which Sara and Mary talk about Charlie. Discuss how the characters feel. Rehearse the scene, trying to capture the characters’ feelings in your voices and facial expressions. Then perform the scene for your class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 12–16

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you feel after losing something that is important to you?

Quickwrite

Recall a particular time when you lost something important, such as a favorite possession or a pet. Write a brief description of how the loss affected you. Try to capture how you felt and what you did.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what Sara loses and what Charlie loses and how they feel afterward.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

A person lost in the woods faces many dangers. The obvious ones include contacts with wild animals and accidents—for example, suffering a fall, getting hurt, and being unable to walk. A less obvious danger also lurks: hypothermia, or the loss of body heat. People who do not wear warm clothing can suffer from hypothermia. As you might imagine, this occurs most frequently in cold weather, but it can also occur in warmer weather if the person is damp or is in a cold or windy place.

Rising Action

The **plot** is the sequence of events in a narrative work. Most authors begin their novels with an **exposition**, or introduction of the characters, the setting, and the conflict. The **rising action** is the part of the plot in which the conflict becomes complicated. This is the part of the plot that keeps the reader asking, What will happen next? How will it all work out? As you read chapters 12–16 of *The Summer of the Swans*, think about the twists and turns in the plot.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

grudgingly [gruj'ing lē] *adj.* in a reluctant manner, as if against one's will (p. 39)

hustled [hus'əld] *v.* moved or worked quickly or energetically (p. 51)

impetuously [im pech'ōō əs lē] *adv.* without preplanning or forethought; reckless (p. 57)

indestructible [in'di struk'tə bəl] *adj.* unable to be destroyed (p. 57)

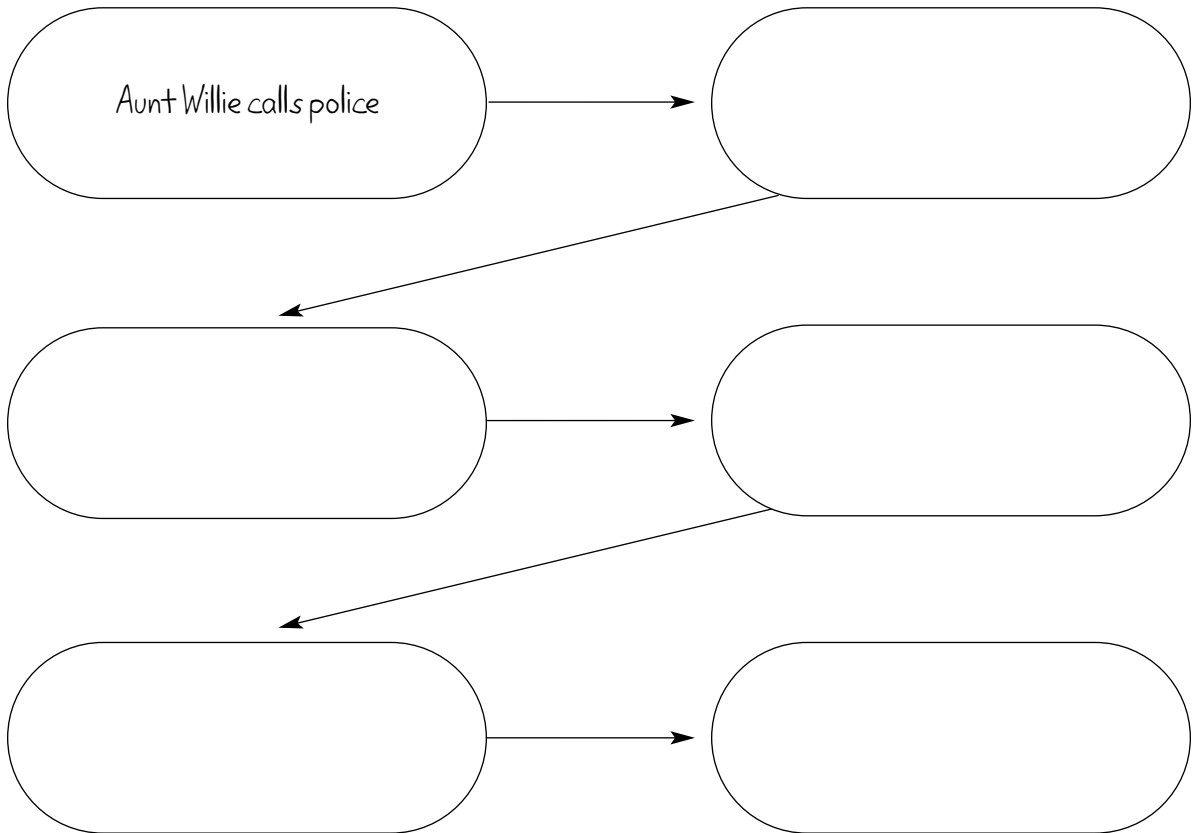
ravines [rə vēnz'] *n.* narrow valleys with steep sides (p. 39)

remoteness [ri mōt'nəs] *n.* an attitude of distance or coldness toward another person (p. 43)

Active Reading

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 12–16

You have already met or heard about the major characters in *The Summer of the Swans*. Use the sequence chain to track what happens to them. Note the important things that the characters say and do in chapters 12–16.



Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 12–16

Personal Response

How do you feel the search for Charlie is going? What, if anything, would you do differently if you were among the searchers?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Aunt Willie feel so guilty about Charlie's disappearance?

2. What does Charlie's self-portrait reveal about him? What other details do you learn about him? How do they add to the suspense?

3. How does Sara feel about Joe Melby at first? How do her feelings change? Why?

4. What kind of person is Joe? What words and actions led you to form your opinion of him?

5. How are Joe and Sara alike? How are they different? Give examples from the novel to support your answers.

Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 12–16

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Has your opinion of Sara changed since the beginning of the novel? Explain.

7. Review your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 24. Are the actions and feelings of the searchers believable? Give your reasons.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Dialogue

Good dialogue sounds natural. In *The Summer of the Swans*, find an example of a dialogue that sounds like actual speech. How does Byars achieve this effect? Is it through her choice of words, her arrangement of words, or both? Write a short explanation of what makes the dialogue seem true to life.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Is Sara being too hard on her father? In your group, debate both sides of this issue, using details from the story. Decide whether Sara or her Aunt Willie has a more accurate view of the father.

Learning for Life

When chapter 16 ends, Sara and Joe are on their way to hunt for Charlie. All of the searchers must be careful because the woods can be a dangerous place. Write a list of safety tips for people going into the woods. Think about the various dangers that they could face and about steps that they could take to avoid them.

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Before You Read

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 17–23

FOCUS ACTIVITY

In your opinion, does the ending of a novel have to be happy to be satisfying? Why or why not?

Questionnaire

Before you finish the novel, answer the following questions:

- What is the best way the story could end?
- What is the worst way the story could end?
- What kind of ending might be both good and bad?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how *The Summer of the Swans* ends.

BACKGROUND

Climax and Resolution

In novels and stories, the **climax** is the point of the greatest emotional intensity, interest, or suspense. It typically comes at the turning point, where readers are eager to find out what will happen next. Most major events in the story lead up to the climax. However, a story does not stop at the climax. It continues to the **resolution**, or final outcome, where readers know or can guess what will happen to the main characters.

Did You Know?

A **symbol** is a person, a place, or a thing that stands for something else, typically something abstract. For example, in *The Summer of the Swans*, Sara's sneakers, Charlie's watch, and the swans all have symbolic meanings. As you read the final chapters of the novel, think about what the sneakers, the watch, and the swans represent to the characters.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

cascade [kas kād'] *n.* fall of materials (p. 66)

clammy [klam'ē] *adj.* cool, damp, and sticky (p. 60)

enveloped [en vel'əpt] *v.* wrapped up or covered completely (p. 59)

flailing [flāl'ing] *v.* beating wildly (p. 60)

frenzy [fren'zē] *n.* wild, violent activity (p. 67)

tremulous [trem'yə ləs] *adj.* timid, trembling (p. 61)

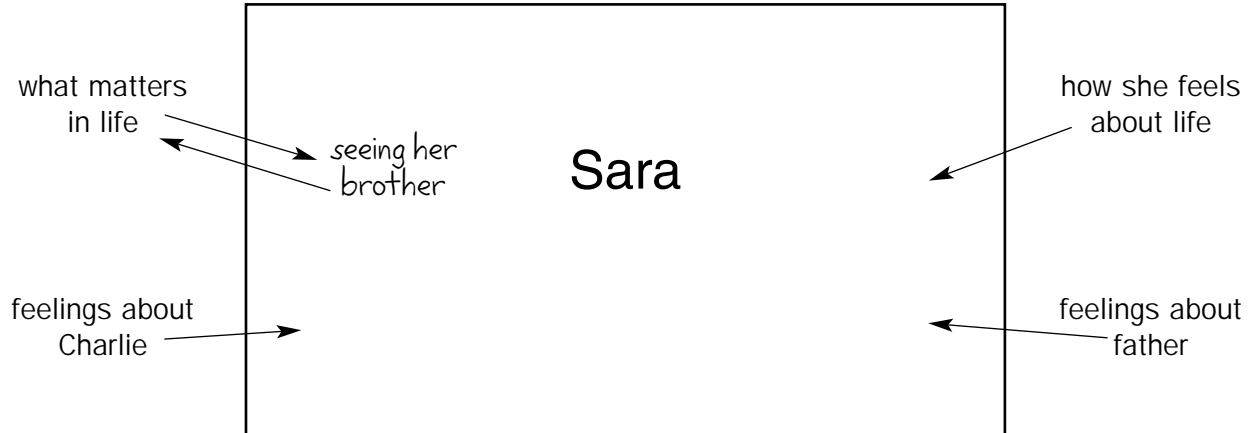
waver [wā'vər] *n.* hesitation (p. 65)

wryly [rī'lē] *adv.* with grim humor (p. 63)

Active Reading

The Summer of the Swan Chapters 17–23

Even though *The Summer of the Swans* revolves around Charlie, Sara is actually the best-developed character in the novel. Not only does she exhibit many different traits, she changes during the course of the story. Before you finish the novel, review the notes that you made about Sara for the character web on page 17. Then, as you read the final chapters, make notes about how she has changed.



Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 17–23

Personal Response

Were you pleased with the novel's ending? Why or why not? (You may wish to review your responses to the **Focus Activity** on page 28.)

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Charlie's watch break? Why is he so upset when it no longer works?

2. What does Joe do to help in the search for Charlie? In your opinion, how does his help make Sara feel? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Upon finding Charlie, Sara knew that "if she lived to be a hundred no one would ever look at her quite that way again." Explain what she meant by this thought. What does she realize about her relationship with Charlie at that point?

4. Describe Sara's telephone conversation with her father. What does she realize about her father after she talks with him?

Responding

The Summer of the Swans Chapters 17–23

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Betsy Byars has said that “the characters are the key to the story.” Do you think that her statement applies to *The Summer of the Swans*? Give reasons for your answer.

7. Sara changes as a result of her experiences. What kinds of situations have changed you in important ways? Can happy or positive events change people as much as negative ones can? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Exploring Theme

One book reviewer described the theme, or message, of the novel as follows: “The extreme inward pain of adolescence lessens as a person reaches outward.” Do you agree that this is the theme of the novel? Write a paragraph in which you agree or disagree with the statement. Use examples and quotations from the story to support your opinion.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

As Sara and Charlie make their way home, Sara calls Charlie’s attention to the swans flying overhead. With a group of classmates, review the novel to find all the references to the swans. Then discuss the meaning of the birds. In what ways is Sara similar to the swans? In what ways is Charlie similar to them? Share your conclusions with the class.

Internet Connection

Some large electronic booksellers encourage readers to review the books they sell. Find an online bookstore that sells *The Summer of the Swans*, and write an online review of the book. Explain whether you would recommend the novel to other readers and give your reasons. Share your review with your class.

Robert Froman

Sky Day Dream

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you could be any creature on earth, what creature would you choose to be? Why?

Background

Many poets enjoy experimenting with the look of a poem as well as the “sound.” In **concrete poetry**, the words form a picture that helps express the theme of the poem. Robert Froman, the author of “Sky Day Dream,” created a collection of concrete poems called *Seeing Things*.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the speaker in the poem wish to do? What sight causes this wish?

2. Describe the picture in the poem. How does the shape of the poem help express the meaning?

3. Why might some lines be larger and darker than others? What do the differences in size and hue suggest?

4. How does the title help prepare you for the meaning of the poem? What title would you give the poem? Why?

5. **Making Connections** Which character or characters in *The Summer of the Swans* might share the same feelings as the speaker in the poem? Explain your answer.

Creative Writing

Write a concrete poem. Begin by making a list of objects or animals that you could easily picture in an arrangement of words. Then select an idea from your list and jot down words that describe how you feel about the subject or what it suggests to you. Use these words as you form your poem. If you have access to a computer, try word-processing your “picture poem.”

D. H.
Lawrence

Search for Love

Before You Read

Focus Question

What qualities make a person lovable?

Background

D. H. Lawrence, the author of “Search for Love,” was born in England in 1885. He began his career as an elementary school teacher, but poor health forced him to give up his job. Soon after he began to devote himself to writing. Lawrence is best known for his novels, but he also wrote a number of distinguished short stories and poems. When he died in 1930, he was one of England’s most famous writers and remains one of the most respected authors of the twentieth century.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to the speaker, why should a person avoid searching for love?

2. In your opinion who are the “loveless” in the poem? People who do not love others? People who are not loved by others? Both? Give reasons for your answer.

3. According to the speaker, how do people find love? What does this suggest about how people should act or behave?

4. Do you agree with the speaker? Why or why not?

5. **Making Connections** Which characters in *The Summer of the Swans* seem to be searching for love? Does the statement in the poem apply to them? Explain.

Interdisciplinary Activity

Create a picture to illustrate the poem. You might draw a picture, or you might use clippings from magazine art to create a collage.

Kimberly Kirberger

Love Yourself First

Before You Read

Focus Question

In your opinion, do most teenagers have a positive or a negative view of themselves? Why do you think this is so?

Background

This essay offers advice about how to be your own best friend. Kimberly Kirberger, the author, is a co-author of the popular book *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the author mean when she writes, "I am my own worst enemy"?

2. According to the author, what is the most worthwhile goal a person can set for himself or herself? Do you agree? Give your reasons.

3. What connection does the author make between being a good friend to someone else and accepting yourself? Do you think the advice in this essay could help a person be a better friend? In what ways?

4. From what you read, do you think the writer has experienced any of the problems she describes in the essay? How might her personal experience make the essay seem more believable?

5. **Making Connections** In your opinion, would the advice in the essay benefit Sara? Explain.

Learning for Life

Think about your own goals. In your journal, finish this sentence: The most worthwhile goal you can ever set for yourself is. . . . Explain why the goal is so important.

Toni Cade
Bambara

Raymond's Run

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are your special talents and skills? Do they come naturally, or do you have to work at them?

Background

African American author Toni Cade Bambara wrote short stories, novels, and screenplays. "Raymond's Run" is from her first collection of stories, *Gorilla, My Love*, which earned the American Book Award. Bambara was born in 1939 in New York City. She died in 1995.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why does Squeaky spend so much time with Raymond? What kinds of things do they do together?

2. How does Squeaky feel about running and about practicing? Judging from his actions, how does Raymond feel about Squeaky's running?

3. Who usually wins the May Day races? What suggestion does Mr. Pearson make to Squeaky, and how does she react? Why?

4. What does Raymond do during the race? What do his actions suggest to Squeaky? How do they change her ideas about herself? About Gretchen?

5. **Making Connections** In what ways are Sara and Squeaky alike?

Internet Connection

Use the Internet to find out about the Special Olympics. Discover what parts both Raymond and Squeaky might play if they decided to participate. Then write a letter to either character describing what his or her role would be.

Migration: Frequently Asked Questions

Before You Read

Focus Question

Imagine seeing a flock of birds flying overhead. How might they look? How might they make you feel?

Background

Most people just accept that many birds, including swans, come and go with the seasons. In this article, the why and how of bird migration is explained.

Responding to the Reading

1. When, where, and why do birds migrate? What might happen if they did not migrate?

2. Contrast older methods with newer methods of studying migration. What can scientists now learn that they could not learn in the days before modern technology?

3. What are some of the ways in which birds survive long flights over unfamiliar territory?

4. What tools might a person use to accomplish the same navigational feats that birds accomplish? Give reasons for your answers.

5. **Making Connections** Based on details in the novel and in the fact sheet, are the swans in the novel likely to stay in the lake near Sara's home or return to the lake near the university?

Science Connection

With a group of classmates, make a migration map of summer-resident birds. Each person in your group should select a different bird that is not a year-round resident. Research when and where each bird migrates. Then show the various routes on a single map, using colored flags or pins to identify different types of birds.