**Curses, Inc Discussion Guide**

(designed and kindly provided by Maria Bellamy, Breathitt County High School, Jackson, KY 41339)

**Vivian Vande Velde unit**

Objective: enticing reluctant readers in 9th grade classes to read five short stories selected from Vivian Vande Velde's collection *Curses, Inc.* and to respond to each story in writing.

1. "Curses, Inc."
2. "Skin Deep"
3. "To Converse with the Dumb Beasts"
4. "Boy Witch"
5. "Cypress Swamp Granny"

Time:  5 to 10 class periods, depending on activities

Materials:

1. response packet for each student (consumable)
2. classroom set of stories (reusable)
3. multiple-choice test (can be added to your AR or similar software, or adapted for written test
4. word processors for final writing assignment (optional)

Preparation:

1. Purchase enough paperbacks of *Curses, Inc.* for your classroom.  You may obtain permission to make photocopies by contacting publisher Harcourt's permissions department at http://permissions.harcourt.com/.
2. Make a response packet for each student.  Instructions and explanations follow.
3. Manually add the multiple choice test to your school's Accelerated Reader (TM) program, Scholastic Reading Counts (TM) program, or similar software.  If you prefer, use it as a paper test BUT you will have to scramble the answers first.  Test and instructions follow.

Activities:

1. Read a story, perhaps using one of the methods listed.
2. Complete the written responses for that story.
3. Share and discuss.
4. When all five stories are read, complete the unit reflection.
5. Take the test.
6. Complete the writing assignment.

**Making the Student Response Packet**

Go to the website http://teacherfiles.com/resources_organizers.htm and print out the following FREE graphic organizers:

1. Photo Scrapbook
2. Cause and Effect (two copies)
3. Basic Story Map
4. Character Grid
5. Character Connections
6. Story Map
7. Character Web (two copies)
8. Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

The same pages are available at http://www.teacherprintables.net/free-printable-organizers.html .

Organize the masters in the following order.  Write the required information on each page before running it off.

Page 1:  Photo Scrapbook

- Write one of the five story titles below each picture frame.  Label the sixth frame "how much I liked this unit" and draw a circle or face with no eyes and mouth.  (Students will complete this smiley-face with the appropriate expression later.)

Page 2:  Cause and Effect

- Fill in the author and title "Curses, Inc."

Page 3:  Basic Story Map

- Fill in the author and title "Curses, Inc."

Page 4:  Character Grid

- Fill in the author and title "Skin Deep."
- Fill in the characters as Ardda and Prince Garn.

Page 5:  Character Connections

- Fill in the author and title "To Converse with the Dumb Beasts."

Page 6:  Story Map

- Fill in the author and title as "Boy With."

Page 7:  Cause and Effect

- Fill in the author and title as "Boy Witch."

Page 8 and 9:  Character Web

- Fill in the author and title on both these pages as "Cypress Swamp Granny."
- Fill in the character on one page as Granny and on the other page as Marietta.

Page 10:  Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

- Fill in the author and, for the title, write "All 5 Stories."

You may wish to number the pages 1-10

After getting all 10 masters made, make two-sided copies, stapled twice along the long edge, to create a Student Response Packet of five pages for each student.

**Activities**

1. Read a story.
2. Draw a picture on page 1 of the Response Packet in the appropriate picture frame.
3. Complete the appropriate graphic organizer(s).
4. Compare and share responses.
5. Repeat.

Pictures in the frames on page 1 can be as simple or complex as they want to make them, from a pencil sketch to a full-colored masterpiece.  The only rule is that each picture must be recognizably something from that story.  These make a wonderful individualized cover for each packet and help students to recall each story.

| story | suggested reading method | Student Response Packet |
|---|---|---|
| "Curses, Inc." | take turns reading paragraphs. Even better, project my PowerPoint with a fake website that looks something like the one in the story. Read the first part of the story orally to students and let them read the website pages to themselves or orally as a class. | picture on page 1<br><br>page 2 Cause & Effect<br><br>page 3 Basic Story Map |
| "Skin Deep" | teacher reads orally at the start, then students finish silently on their own<br><br>You can show a plot diagram on the board and help students see that what you read at the start of the story is exposition. I recommend reading to the point where Ardda goes to find | picture on page 1<br><br>page 4 Character Grid for both of the main characters |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | the injured man. Point out to students that there is now a complication or conflict in the story. They will need to read on to see how the rising action develops, the climax, and the resolution to the story. | |
| "To Converse with the Dumb Beasts" | Choose roles and read my adaptation aloud as a play. | picture on page 1<br><br>page 5 Character Connections<br><br>I allow students to compare themselves with any animal, even if it doesn't appear in the story. They may also choose one of the human characters. |
| "Boy Witch" | Take turns reading orally, one sentence at a time. Rather than call students by name, I go down the rows or around the circle, depending on our seating. It goes very quickly in this manner. | picture on page 1<br><br>page 6 Story Map<br><br>page 7 Cause and Effect |
| "Cypress Swamp Granny" | Teacher reads the first part orally as a DRTA (Directed Reading-Thinking Activity). This allows you to stop and clarify or discuss certain points before continuing. For instance, what is the setting of this story? What clues help you to figure that out?<br><br>(Answer—August in New Orleans is stated in paragraph 1, but you must use the information in paragraph 2 about Manassas, Bull Run, and war with Yankees to infer the time period as soon after the Civil War.)<br><br>You can have students divide into small groups and read to each other to finish the story, or you may choose another method. For example, students may be assigned to read only the dialogue of a character orally while the teacher continues to read the narration. This will allow you to continue DRTA questioning. | picture on page 1<br><br>page 8 and 9, Character Web for Marietta and for Granny<br><br>I preface this with a discussion of authors' methods of characterization, particularly the indirect methods:<br><br>• 1 character's appearance<br><br>• 2 character's actions<br><br>• 3 character's words<br><br>• 4 character's inner thoughts and feelings<br><br>• 5 other character's reactions to and |

| | | opinion of that character |
|---|---|---|
| | | Students may note that authors do not necessarily use all these methods. They may also realize that characters are not usually described all at once, but bits of characterization are worked in throughout a story.

If students have difficulty with this, you can assign them (even before reading) to a particular method. For instance, give students sticky-notes and an assigned role, such as, *Your job is to place a sticky-note anywhere you see a physical description of Granny. When we get finished, use all the places you found in the story to help your group write a description of Granny's appearance on your Character Web.* Assign reading roles to each student and they will have something to contribute as they work with others to complete the written Character Webs. |
| | You might work in comments on characterization as you read. If students are accustomed to scanning a story looking for one spot where an answer leaps out, they may be discouraged or daunted by searching an entire story looking for information they can put on the Character Web described at right. | |
| Unit Reflection | Have students fill in the final picture on the front page of their Response Packet, completing the smiley-face with an appropriate expression for how much they liked the unit.

Have students complete the back of the Response Packet, giving Thumbs Up and Thumbs Down to aspects of the unit. | |

## Writing Assignment

You may want to have students write a letter at the conclusion of the unit. This can be addressed to you as the teacher and might give responses to the following questions:

1. What was your opinion of the unit overall?
2. Which was your favorite story? Why? Which story did you like the least? Why
3. Which reading method did you like best? Why? Which reading method did you like least? Why?
4. Did the graphic organizers help you understand each story? How? What part(s) of the packet did you like best?
5. Would you recommend that I do this unit again with another class? How should I change it to make it better? Would you like to do another unit like this one? What kinds of stories would you like me to assign you to read?

**Multiple Choice Test**

I give permission for the teacher to use this test as a written or computer-based test. You may add these questions to your school's individual test bank in Reading Counts, Accelerated Reader, or similar software that allows students to test individually over a book they have read. (Both Reading Counts and Accelerated Reader allow teachers to manually type in tests that can then be administered to students in the same manner as tests bought from these companies. Both programs scramble answers each time the test is given, so answers are not designated A, B, C, etc.)

To add this test to your program, you may print the test and refer to it as you manually type it in, or you may copy and paste it in one item at a time. In all cases, my first answer is the correct one and MUST be put in the proper place in order for grading to be correct. Consult your program's instructions or tech support if you do not know how to manually add a test.

If you do not have Read180, Accelerated Reader, or other testing software, you may use this as a paper-and-pencil test. However, you MUST scramble the answers and make an answer key for yourself.

NOTE: I manually set the book level and word count on this test in order to make it generate 5 AR points. I did NOT follow standard procedure to establish book level and word count, so if that matters to you, you must do it yourself.

Quiz Number: Choose a quiz number that is not currently assigned in your database.

Title: Selected Stories by Vivian Vande Velde (teacher-created test)

Author: Vivian Vande Velde

Language: English

Book Level: 5.0

Fiction

Word Count: 30000

Number of Questions: 10

Question 1:  Why was Denise Bainbridge angry with Bill Essler?

1. He backed out of going to the graduation dance with her.
2. He threw rocks at her dog Muffins.
3. He made her pay for all their dates.
4. He bragged too much about how rich he was.

Question 2:  Why didn't any of Bill's curses make Denise miserable?

1. She had taken out a curse against him first.
2. Curses aren't real.
3. The curse website messed up.
4. Bill didn't spend enough money on his curses.

Question 3:  Which of the following was NOT part of Ardda's ugliness?

1. tufts of hair on her ears
2. a huge nose
3. a purple birthmark covering her left cheek
4. mud-colored limp hair

Question 4:  Which of the following did Ardda NOT do at the end of the story?

1. ride away on Prince Garn's horse
2. change the prince's appearance
3. move to a different town
4. make her hair blonde and curly

Question 5:  Kedric wanted to hear the animals talk because

1. he was lonely and wondered what his pets would say to him.
2. he was a game warden and wanted to find where wild animals lived.
3. he was a hunter and wanted to track game.
4. he was a veterinarian and wanted to help sick animals.

Question 6:  Everything the cat said was about

1. food.
2. kittens.
3. getting petted.
4. hairballs.

Question 7:  The girl who came to Clarence for help had lost her hair because

1. her brother cut it off as a joke.
2. she was worried about her upcoming wedding.
3. a witch placed a spell on it to make it fall out.
4. she had been sick lately and it came out.

Question 8: Which of the following was NOT something caused by Clarence's spells?

1. Emma got perfect, beautiful hair.
2. Emma grew a beard.
3. Emma lost her eyebrows and eyelashes.
4. Emma got a rabbit stuck to her head.

Question 9: What price did Ceecee's Granny take from Marietta for every spell?

1. a year of her life
2. a lock of her hair
3. a share of her money
4. a month at her house

Question 10: Marietta's main concern was

1. having a man.
2. helping people recover from the war.
3. increasing her family's fortune.
4. continuing her education.

Many thanks to Maria Bellamy for writing and sending to me this Unit Activities Guide. Maria's class website is www.breathitt.k12.ky.us/schools/BHS/Bellamy/default.htm

and she has an article regarding teaching science fiction at http://about-sf.livejournal.com/1326.html