

# **A Teaching Unit For The Watsons Go to Birmingham ~ 1963**

**Christopher Paul Curtis**



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*Teaching Unit*  
*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*  
By Christopher Paul Curtis

Teaching Unit By Tammy D. Lewis and Shannon B. Temple  
ELA Core Plans

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# *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*

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# *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*

## *Chapter 1*

### **Comprehension**

1. Who is telling this story?
2. What do the Watsons name their car?
3. What happens to Byron while they are scraping ice off of the car window?

### **Meet the Watsons**

In this first chapter, we are introduced to the members of the Watson family. Let's take a closer look at some of them. Complete the following chart for each of the following characters.

	Kenneth	Byron	Momma	Dad	Joetta
Two facts that you have learned about this person					
Two descriptive words that seem right for this person					
One or two quotes from the story so far that help show this character's personality					

Go back and read the beginning of chapter one. The opening of this novel uses a great deal of imagery to describe how cold it was. Using this author's style as an example, write your own description of a *hot* day. Use a separate sheet of paper. Begin with *It was one of those super-duper hot Saturdays.*

# *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*

## *Chapter 2*

### **Comprehension**

1. Larry Dunn was the king of kindergarten, but Byron was considered a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What is Kenneth Watson really good at doing?
3. What is wrong with Kenneth's eye?
4. Who is Poindexter?

**Point of view is the relationship of the narrator (storyteller) to the story.**

- In a story with first person point of view, the story is told by one of the characters, referred to as "I".
- In a story with a limited third-person point of view, an unseen narrator is telling the story, and this narrator reveals the thoughts of only one character and refers to that character as "he" or "she".
- In a story with an omniscient point of view, an unseen narrator is telling the story, and the narrator reveals the thoughts of several characters.

**Let's examine the point of view in this novel. Complete the following questions.**

**Who is telling the story? Is the point of view...**

- **First person? (A character is telling the story.)**
- **Third-person limited? (An unseen narrator, not a character, is telling the story and this narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of only one character.)**
- **Third person omniscient? (An unseen narrator- not a character- is telling the story and this narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of several characters.)**

### **Discussion Questions**

*The boys would see if he was tough or weak, if he was cool or a square, and the girls would look to see if he was cute or ugly. Then they decided how to treat him.*

Respond to this passage. Do you think this is how people are treated in real life? Explain how this is true.

Go back and read the reaction of the bus driver at the end of this chapter. What do you think of this reaction? Do you think it was the right way to handle things? Explain why or why not.

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 3*

### Comprehension

1. Kenneth says there were two things wrong with Rufus. What are those two things?
2. What happens to make Rufus and Cody stop talking to Kenneth?
3. Who helps to mend the relationship between Kenny and Rufus?

### Flashback

A flashback is a literary device in which an earlier episode, conversation, or event is inserted into the chronological sequence of a story. It is a technique that bridges time, place, and action to reveal information about a character. Flashbacks are also used to fill in information about the background of a conflict or to advance the story.

Purposes of flashbacks	Some cues that begin a flashback for a character	Some words that signal a flashback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ to fill in information about the background of a conflict</li><li>❖ to fill in information about the background of a character</li></ul>	sound odor taste related setting related event daydreams, thinking, dreams	Once Long ago Yesterday A while back

A lot of this chapter is dedicated to a flashback about LG Jones and Kenneth. Go back and read the flashback again. It begins on page thirty-seven.

Using the chart above for help, which clues begin this flashback?

- a. a sound
- b. a related event
- c. a related setting
- d. a dream or daydream

What is the purpose of this flashback?

- a. to give us more information about Kenneth's history with friends
- b. to give us more information about Kenneth's personality

What do we learn about Kenneth from this flashback?

- a. He is learning what makes someone a good friend and what makes someone a bad friend.
- b. He is very smart, and he always knows how to have a good time.
- c. He wants to be in charge at all times.

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 4*

### Comprehension

1. What did Byron tell Kenneth and Joey about why their mother makes them wear so many clothes on cold days?
2. Who stole Kenneth's gloves?
3. What does Momma do to the second pair of gloves after one of her children has lost the first pair?
4. What is a Maytag Wash?

A **simile** is a figure of speech that compares two things using the words *like* or *as*. We can use similes to make descriptions more vivid or to make descriptions stand out.

### Vivid Original Similes

Any writer can use a common simile that everyone has heard before. A good writer, however, creates similes that are original and fresh to surprise the reader and make him/her think! Underline the similes found in chapter four in the following three sentences. Then, rate the following similes from one to three – one being your favorite and three being your least favorite.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Joey usually looked like a little zombie while I peeled the coats and jackets off of her.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Finally it made that funny sound like water going down the drain and slid out of the boot.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *With Byron walking around me like that we must have looked like we were in the Wild West and I was a wagon train and Byron was the Indians circling, waiting to attack.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *I bet we looked like the solar system, with me being the sun and Byron being the orbiting earth.*

**Now, let's try creating similes! Complete the following sentences from this chapter making up your own similes. Keep them original.**

Joey usually looked like \_\_\_\_\_ while I peeled the coats and jackets off of her.

Finally it made that funny sound like

---

With Byron walking around me like that we must have looked like

---

### Infer

What can we infer about Larry Dunn after reading this chapter?

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 5*

1. What happened in Momma's past that causes her to be so firm against playing with fire?
2. What made Momma go and check on Byron when he was in the bathroom?
3. Where did Kenneth and Joey encourage Byron to go when Momma let go of him to go get the matches?

**Strong verbs** are words that describe the action in a sentence. Some verbs are said to be stronger than others, and these are the ones that tend to make your writing more effective. Here's how it works: take a verb like *fall* and another verb with a similar meaning like *plunge*. Now, compare these two sentences: 1) I watched the rock fall into the water. 2) I watched the rock plunge into the water. In the first sentence, you learn that the rock fell, but in the second sentence you also learn how the rock fell. The word *plunge* means "to enter quickly and forcibly into something". So, with the word *plunge*, the reader gets all the meaning of the verb *fall*, plus the additional meaning that explains how the rock fell as well. That is what makes it stronger! Strong verbs SHOW, not just TELL!

**In chapter five, the author uses many different strong verbs. Circle each strong verb, and then complete the chart.**

- A. *I sneaked to the bathroom door and peeked through the keyhole.*
- B. *Momma snatched Byron's neck and, stopping just to pick up the matches that Byron had dropped, she dragged him all the way down the stairs!*
- C. *Joey grabbed ahold of my arm and said, "What's going on? What'd he do?"*
- D. *...Momma let go of his throat and stormed into the kitchen.*
- E. *He didn't even make it out of the living room before Momma tackled him.*
- F. *Four more times Momma lit a match and four more times Joey paoohed them out.*

<b>Strong Verb(s) Used</b>	<b>Explain why these are effective verb choices.</b>
A. sneaked, peeked	These verbs show that Kenneth didn't want to get caught. They allow the reader to picture him being very secretive.
B. snatched, dragged	
C. grabbed	
D. stormed	

E. tackled	
F. potoohing	

### Onomatopoeia – words that sound like what they mean

In the box, write as many onomatopoeia words as you can think of.

Read the following sentences from chapter five. Underline the onomatopoeia used in each.

*The toilet stopped glugging and Byron said, “Not bad, but let’s have a little more screaming on the way down...”*

*...Nazi number seven hit the water with a hiss, Byron threw his hands up in the air and said, “Momma, I-, ...*

*It was so close now that I thought I could hear the sweat on Byron’s finger getting turned into steam and going Psss!*

### Figurative Language

*He looked like one of those ballerinas that dance just on the tips of their toes.*

What type of figurative language is used in this passage?

- a. Idiom
- b. Metaphor
- c. Personification
- d. Simile

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

*Test Chapters 1-5*

1. This novel is set in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Mobile, Alabama
  - b. Flint, Michigan
  - c. Branson, Missouri
  - d. Atlanta, Georgia
2. Which of the following best describes Daniel Watson?
  - a. quiet and reserved
  - b. prideful and arrogant
  - c. quirky and insightful
  - d. playful and humorous
3. What do the Watsons call their car?
  - a. The Green Hornet
  - b. The Watson's Wagon
  - c. The Brown Bomber
  - d. The Big Hooptie
4. Which of the following best describes how Byron treats Kenneth most of the time?
  - a. Byron is overprotective of Kenneth.
  - b. Byron is always making excuses for Kenneth's behavior.
  - c. Byron is always playful with Kenneth.
  - d. Byron is mean to Kenneth and bullies him.
5. Who is Buphead?
  - a. Byron's friend
  - b. Kenneth's friend
  - c. the family dog
  - d. the mailman

*Byron's mouth was frozen on the mirror! He was as stuck as a fly on flypaper!*

6. The simile in this passage compares Byron to a fly. Why is this simile effective?
  - a. It allows the reader to picture a fly being stuck on fly paper and provides a humorous similarity to Byron's situation.
  - b. It allows the reader to feel like a fly being stuck on flypaper and to know just how Byron feels.
  - c. It enhances the setting of the story by describing that a fly is near Byron.
  - d. It convinces the reader to feel sympathetic for Byron because most readers know what it feels like to be stuck like a fly on flypaper.

*The fly was still stuck and buzzing, “Oh, Mom-ma! Hel’ me! Geh me offa ‘ere!”*

7. In this passage, the simile has now become which type of figurative language?
  - a. an idiom
  - b. a metaphor
  - c. personification
  - d. hyperbole
8. What point of view is used to tell this story?
  - a. first person from Byron’s point of view
  - b. first person from Kenneth’s point of view
  - c. third person limited
  - d. third person omniscient
9. What does Kenneth sometimes do to try and cover up his lazy eye?
  - a. He looks at people sideways.
  - b. He wears a patch.
  - c. He blinks a lot.
  - d. He makes his other eye look weak.
10. Rufus has a brother named \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. LJ
  - b. Cody
  - c. Sam
  - d. Luke
11. What can the reader infer about Rufus and his brother?
  - a. They don’t get along well with each other.
  - b. They are really good baseball players.
  - c. Their family does not have a lot of money.
  - d. They can’t stand Kenneth.
12. The way that Kenny reacts when he hurts Rufus’ feelings shows that Kenny is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. remorseful and kind hearted
  - b. courageous and independent
  - c. understanding and generous
  - d. unforgiving and spiteful

*Joey usually looked like a little zombie while I peeled the coats and jackets off of her.*

13. What type of figurative language is used in this passage?
  - a. idiom
  - b. hyperbole
  - c. metaphor
  - d. simile

14. What tall tale does Byron tell Kenneth and Joey about the garbage trucks?
  - a. that they recycle the garbage into food
  - b. that they pick up dead frozen people
  - c. that they run over little kids who don't do their homework
  - d. that they have spies in them who look for bullies
15. Larry Dunn can best be described as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. a comedian
  - b. an athlete
  - c. a bully
  - d. a musician
16. What is a Super Maytag?
  - a. a washing machine that Byron puts Kenneth inside
  - b. a cruel way to put snow all over someone's face
  - c. a cruel way to play tag
  - d. a giant crossword puzzle
17. What does Byron do to Kenneth when he doesn't think that Kenneth hit Larry Dunn hard enough?
  - a. Byron punches Larry in the face.
  - b. Byron starts calling Kenneth a "sissy" in front of everyone.
  - c. Byron allows Larry to go home.
  - d. Byron punches Kenneth in the stomach.
18. How did Mrs. Watson plan to teach Byron a lesson for playing Nazi parachute in the bathroom?
  - a. She planned to ground him for a month.
  - b. She planned to burn his fingers.
  - c. She planned to run over his foot with the car.
  - d. She planned to put him in a tub of ice.
19. Who was most afraid for Byron when his mom was so mad at him?
  - a. Joey
  - b. Kenneth
  - c. Buphead
  - d. Mr. Watson

*She thought she missed, though 'cause she stood there huffing and puffing and patooohing at the match even after it went out.*

20. What literary device is used in this passage?
  - a. simile
  - b. metaphor
  - c. onomatopoeia
  - d. alliteration

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

*Test Chapters 1-5*

*Answer Key*

<i>Number</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1	b
2	d
3	c
4	d
5	a
6	a
7	b
8	b
9	a
10	b
11	c
12	a
13	d
14	b
15	c
16	b
17	d
18	b
19	a
20	c

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 6*

### **Comprehension**

1. How does Mama tell Kenneth and Byron to pay for the groceries?
2. What did Byron do to persuade Kenny into keeping the secret about the food?
3. What did Byron do after he killed the dove?

**Kenneth struggles with understanding his older brother. Let's analyze the character of Byron. Complete the following chart using chapter six to help you.**

Byron's actions in chapter 6	What do you think these actions say about Byron?
After finding out the groceries are not provided by welfare, Byron was smiling and even put his arm around Kenneth on the way home. He even carried the groceries for Kenneth.	This tells us just how upset Byron gets about welfare. He is embarrassed about this and is proud not to be on welfare. It also shows that his nice actions toward his brother Kenneth match his mood.
Byron gives Kenneth some of the Swedish Cremes to eat and then when Kenneth realizes that Byron took the cookies without his parents knowing, Byron says " <i>Don't even think about it, Poindexter, you ate two of 'em yourself so quit wastin' my cookies and just shut up and enjoy what's left.</i> "	
Byron hit and killed a bird with one of the Swedish Cremes and then gently brushed pink frosting off of the dove's chest.	
Byron gets sick and when Kenneth tries to comfort him by putting his hand on Byron's back, Byron pops him in the arm and then throws a rotten apple at Kenneth.	
Byron made a grave for the bird with two popsicle sticks tied together in a cross.	

**Direct characterization** – an author comes right out and tells us about a character.

**Indirect characterization** – an author reveals the personality of a character through his/her actions, dialogue, and dialogue of others.

**What type of characterization does the author mostly use with Byron?**

## The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 7

### Comprehension

1. How does Byron's mother feel about his "conk"?
2. How does Byron's father decide to punish him for getting a "conk"?

When reading, there are times when you have to figure out what things mean. Sometimes you have to figure out idioms with which you are unfamiliar, and sometimes you have to figure out what words and references are based on the time period of the story. In this chapter, there are some things that you may have to figure out based on the time period. There are also a couple of idioms in this chapter. Let's take a look at both.

### Idioms – figures of speech that do not mean what they say.

Find the idiom on the first page of chapter seven. Write it on the line below, and explain what it means. Example: She let the cat out of the bag when she mentioned the surprise party to the wrong person.

---

Find one other idiom in this chapter and explain it.

### Now, complete the following chart to figure out some of the words used in this chapter.

Passage	Based on context clues, what do you think the underlined words mean?
<i>Byron had gotten a <u>conk!</u> A <u>process!</u> A <u>do!</u> A <u>butter!</u> ...His hair was reddish brown, straight, stiff, and slick-looking. (Page 87)</i>	
<i>"Shoot, you think I care what them <u>squares</u> say?" (page 91)</i>	

### Predict

At the end of this chapter, we read that Dad brought home the TT AB-700 in the Brown Bomber. Without reading ahead, make a prediction about what this is.

---

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 8*

### **Comprehension**

1. What is the Ultra-Glide?
2. Why does Dad insist on hiding his toothbrush?
3. What seems to be Kenneth's favorite song?
4. Why are the Watsons going to Alabama?
5. The kids have always heard stories about Grandma Sands. How can she be described?

### **“Yakety Yak”**

Listen to the song “Yakety Yak” as you read the lyrics that your teacher provides.

1. Find the rhyme scheme used in the song.
2. What words describe the tone of this song?
3. What does “Yakety Yak” mean or refer to in this song?
4. What does the content of this song say about music during this time?

### **Disc jockey**

In the 1960s, disk jockeys, also known as DJs, played a great role in the wit, humor and fun of the radio broadcasts. Most radio announcers spoke in clear, correct English, but some disc jockeys broke all the rules of on-air behavior and invented outrageous personalities for themselves. It was not uncommon for a disc jockey to create a rather long rhyme all about himself and just how good he was at playing records. In this chapter, Mr. Watson cannot help himself as he imitates a disc jockey. (page 114)

### **Create your own disc jockey rhyme.**

Pretend that you are *the man with the plan who will make the records spin and people dance again...* Create a rhyme at least ten lines long. Use Mr. Watson's disc jockey rhyme as an example.

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 9*

### **Comprehension**

- 1. Where did Byron sleep the night before they left for Birmingham?**
- 2. Why are Byron's parents sending Byron to live with Grandma Sands?**
- 3. What did Mrs. Davidson give to Joey?**

### **Historical Context**

What was going on down South according to the pictures that Kenneth mentions in chapter nine?

### **Time Period**

We know that this book takes place in 1963. It's part of the title! Let's take a look at the details that the author weaves into this story that relate to that time period. For example, a "conk" contributes to the time period because this was a hair style that was popular during this time. In the chart below, list other references to the time when the novel takes place.

Songs mentioned that were popular during this era	Words that were used then and not now	Other things that are specific to this time period

### **Discussion**

Why do you think Joey puts Mrs. Davidson's gift in her sock drawer?

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 10*

**Imagery is language that creates a sensory impression within the reader's mind. It allows the reader to see, hear, feel, smell, or even taste what is happening in the story – all in the mind of course. Imagery makes the reader feel like he/she is there, in the story, experiencing the same things that the character is experiencing.**

This chapter is full of imagery – imagery that allows you to feel like you are there with the characters. Let's examine how the author creates it.

### **Three ways to create imagery**

- Create imagery through the little things.**

Authors pay attention to detail when they write. Sometimes it's the little things that create a picture. Reread the passage that describes the toilet seat in the outhouse from page 139. Make a list of the "little things" - the details that help you to picture this outhouse.

- Create imagery with strong verbs!**

Authors use action verbs when they want to create imagery. These words help you to imagine something happening. With a specific, strong verb, you can pinpoint exactly what is going on. Read the following passage from page 144. Find the action verbs that help you picture the action.

Find the passage at the bottom of page 144 that begins...*All four doors of the Brown Bomber opened...*

Read until it says *Dad laughed*. Make a list of the strong verbs used in this passage.

### **Create imagery with figurative language and adjectives.**

Authors use literary devices such as similes, metaphors, and personification to help them create imagery. Figurative language allows you to picture something in your mind and then relate it to something else. Underline the simile in the following passage that helps you "feel" what the characters feel in this scene.

*Dad stuck his hand out of the window just as the song came on and said, "Feel that coolness. It feels like you're running your fingers through silk."*

Find another passage in this chapter that contains visual imagery. Complete the chart.

Page #	Passage	How imagery is created...little things, strong verbs, figurative language, adjectives

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

### *Test Chapters 6-10*

1. When Byron thinks that he is going to have to sign a welfare list for groceries, he is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. afraid
  - b. proud
  - c. embarrassed
  - d. intimidated
2. Byron knocked a bird out of the sky with a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. cookie
  - b. rock
  - c. peanut
  - d. shoe
3. What can the reader infer about Byron after we learn that he made a little grave for the bird that he killed?
  - a. We learn that he knows a lot about birds.
  - b. We learn that he does have a softer side.
  - c. We learn that he is afraid of getting into trouble.
  - d. We learn that he is a round character.
4. True or false: Kenneth completely understands Byron and always knows why Byron does the things he does.
  - a. true
  - b. false

*...as he saw us he turned around and tried to walk right back out. Both me and mama smelled a rat.*

5. What type of figurative language is used in this passage?
  - a. idiom
  - b. metaphor
  - c. personification
  - d. simile
6. What is Momma's initial reaction to Byron's haircut?
  - a. She is proud of him for being responsible enough to get his own haircut.
  - b. She is shocked but happy with the result.
  - c. She is angry and very upset about his new haircut.
  - d. She is reminded of the time when she cut her own hair when she was a child.
7. What did Dad do to Byron when he saw Byron's hair?
  - a. He gave Byron \$20 for being responsible.
  - b. He took Byron to the neighbor's house to show him off.
  - c. He put Byron on restriction.
  - d. He shaved Byron's head.

*"Our very own drive-around record player!"*

8. This new surprise for the Brown Bomber contributes to the setting of the novel by \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a. introducing to the reader technology that was popular during the time that this story takes place
    - b. making the characters seem very happy and excited
    - c. encouraging the reader to research record players
    - d. creating suspense for the reader
  9. What is Kenneth's favorite song?
    - a. "Under the Boardwalk"
    - b. "Yakety Yak"
    - c. "You Ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog"
    - d. "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"
  10. Where is Byron going for the summer?
    - a. a boy's home
    - b. Grandma Sand's house
    - c. summer camp
    - d. on vacation with Buphead
  11. What did Mrs. Davidson give Joey?
    - a. a book about Alabama
    - b. a new record
    - c. a little figurine of an angel
    - d. a bag of peppermints
  12. What was in Mrs. Watson's notebook?
    - a. how many miles the Watsons would drive each day
    - b. when the Watsons would stay in motels
    - c. what the Watsons would eat for lunch during the trip
    - d. all of the above
  13. Which of the following best describe Byron's emotions when he finds out he has to go stay at Grandma Sand's house for the summer?
    - a. determined
    - b. panicked
    - c. angry
    - d. relieved
- "Cuz, boy, this he-uh is the deep South you-all is gonna be drivin' thoo."*
14. What literary device is used in this passage?
    - a. dialogue
    - b. dialect
    - c. standard English
    - d. both a and b

15. What is Byron's plan to pay his parents back for making him go to spend the summer away from home?

- a. He is going to eat everything out of the cooler without them knowing.
- b. He isn't going to say a single word during the road trip.
- c. He is going to sing as loud as he can to every song.
- d. He is going to jump out of the car when they get halfway there.

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

*Chapters 6-10 Test*

*Answer Key*

<i>Number</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1	c
2	a
3	b
4	b
5	a
6	c
7	d
8	a
9	b
10	b
11	c
12	d
13	c
14	d
15	b

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 11*

## Dialect

Dialect includes a character's vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. It is unique to where a character lives.

*Go to page 151 and find the part where Momma starts speaking southern style. The passage begins "O.K. , Clem" This passage contains dialect. Rewrite the passage as Standard English.*

Write a conversation between Mrs. Watson and one other character. Use the dialect that Mrs. Watson uses when she is teasing. Fill in the blank with the character of your choice.

Mrs. Watson:

\_\_\_\_\_ :

Mrs. Watson:

\_\_\_\_\_ :

Mrs. Watson:

\_\_\_\_\_ :

Mrs. Watson:

\_\_\_\_\_ :

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 12*

### **Comprehension**

1. What drags Mr. Robert's dog into a lake?
2. Why didn't Byron and Kenneth sleep well at Grandma Sands' house?
3. True or false? Byron is miserable at Grandma Sands' house.

### **Writing Opportunity**

In this chapter, Mr. Roberts tells a story about his dog, Toddy. Write a narrative about a dog or some other animal. This can be a true story or you can make one up. Your story should have five paragraphs and include an introduction, body, and conclusion. Make sure you include some exciting details so that the reader is entertained by your story. You can brainstorm or create a graphic organizer in the box below before writing your narrative.

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 13*

Comprehension

1. Who does Byron say that the Wool Pooh is?
2. What happens to Kenneth at Collier's Landing?
3. Who rescues Kenneth?
4. Who did Byron see while he was with the Wool Pooh?

Reread the part of this chapter that describes the struggle that Kenneth has with the Wool Pooh. In the box, draw a picture that you have in your mind of the struggle.

Reread the first paragraph of chapter thirteen. What word does Grandma Sands use in her warning that sounds like *Wool Pooh*?

What might the Wool Pooh symbolize?

We know that the Wool Pooh is not real. It is a creation of Byron's imagination, and Kenneth thinks that it is real. However, it does serve as a symbol. In the box below, make a list of words that personify the Wool Pooh.

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 14*

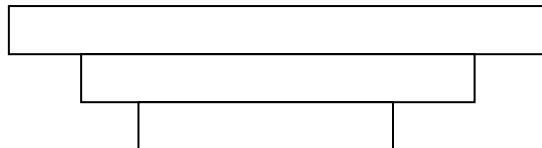
### **Discussion**

Why do you think Kenny sees the Wool Pooh in the church after it had been bombed?

In this chapter, a tragedy occurs. Write a newspaper article retelling the story about the bombing of the church in Birmingham. You can quote characters from the novel in your report.

**Read the following information on writing a news report before you start.**

- A news report is based on facts. Do not include your opinions.
- The first paragraph contains the most important information: Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How?
- It is arranged in an “inverted pyramid” style:



This means that facts are arranged from most important to least important. It allows you to see a lot of information quickly in the first couple of paragraphs. The least important facts are near the end.

**Answer these questions in the lead of your news report:**

1. Who is it about?
2. What happened?
3. When did it happen?
4. Where did it happen?
5. Why did it happen?
6. How did it happen?

Remember, not everyone knows what the reader knows. Write only what would appear in a newspaper.

**Don't forget to create a headline. Your headline should grab the readers' attention, so put some thought into it! Write three headlines on the lines below. Then, choose your favorite and write your news article on a separate sheet of paper.**

**Headlines:**

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## The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 14

Because this story is told in the first person point of view, and Kenny is telling the story, the reader gets a “fuzzy” picture of what happened at the church because things for Kenneth were a blur. Let’s piece together the facts by answering some questions.

1. What did Kenneth hear when he started going to sleep under the tree in his yard (page 182)?
  2. Where were Byron and Mr. Watson when the sound occurred?
  3. When Kenneth was inside the church, and he tried to pull out the little shiny black shoe, what did he imagine that he saw?
  4. Why do you think that Kenneth imagined that he saw this?
  5. When Kenneth returned home and saw Joey, what did he think about her?
  6. Why did Joey think that Kenneth had on different clothes?
  7. Why was Joey not inside the church when the incident occurred?

## The Watsons Go to Birmingham

### Final Test

1. What is the point of view of this novel?
  - a. first person
  - b. second person
  - c. third person omniscient
  - d. third person limited
2. What is the genre of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*?
  - a. science fiction
  - b. drama
  - c. historical fiction
  - d. nonfiction
3. The protagonist is the main character of a story. Who is the protagonist in this novel?
  - a. Byron
  - b. Kenneth
  - c. Buphead
  - d. Grandma Sands
4. The setting of the novel is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. during the past, in Flint, Michigan and Birmingham, Alabama
  - b. present day times, in various parts of the South
  - c. in the future, throughout Alabama
  - d. during the distant past in Mississippi
5. All of the following words describe Kenneth except \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. caring
  - b. soft-hearted
  - c. gullible
  - d. overactive
6. Which of the following describes the overall tone of this novel?
  - a. serious and profound
  - b. humorous and encouraging/moving
  - c. offbeat and factual
  - d. stern and modest
7. Which of the following words best describe Grandma Sands?
  - a. soft spoken and gentle
  - b. shy and awkward
  - c. stubborn yet outgoing
  - d. stern yet loving
8. Which of the following best describes the relationship between Kenneth and Byron?
  - a. loving yet turbulent at times
  - b. easy going and friendly
  - c. unsupportive in all ways
  - d. one-sided in that Byron does not love Kenneth
9. Which of the following describes an external conflict from the novel?
  - a. Kenneth going to the World-Famous Watson Pet Hospital
  - b. Byron's embarrassment of getting his lips frozen to a car mirror
  - c. Byron convincing Kenneth that he played a part in Joey surviving the bombing
  - d. None of these
10. All of the following are things Byron did EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. save Kenneth at Collier's Landing
  - b. give a bird a funeral
  - c. tear down a tree house
  - d. check on Kenneth when he was hiding behind the couch

11. Which of the following is part of the resolution of the novel?
- The Watsons travel to Grandma Sands' house.
  - Byron helps Kenneth get over the trauma he has been through.
  - Grandma Sands convinces Byron to move in with her.
  - The Watson's pet dog dies.
12. When thinking about the writer's style, Christopher Paul Curtis used all of the following except \_\_\_\_\_.
- imagery
  - dialect
  - foreshadowing
  - monologues
13. All of the following are issues addressed in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* except \_\_\_\_\_.
- family
  - racial inequality
  - dealing with grief
  - religion
14. Kenny is the \_\_\_\_\_ child.
- oldest
  - middle
  - youngest
  - adopted
15. Thinking over the course of the novel, Kenny views Byron with both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- anger, jealousy
  - sadness, pity
  - determination, grief
  - fear, admiration
16. Why did the Watsons leave Alabama on the night of the bombing?
- Daniel Watson had to return to work.
  - Joey was too upset about the bombing to stay.
  - They did not want Joey to hear about the bombing.
  - Kenny needed to be home to deal with his feelings of guilt.
17. How does Byron change when the Watsons arrive in Alabama?
- He uses his manners.
  - He is more polite.
  - He seems more content.
  - All of the above
18. True or False? Flint, Michigan has a much colder climate than Birmingham, Alabama.
- true
  - false
19. When Joetta appears at Kenneth's bedroom door, he thinks that she is \_\_\_\_\_.
- helpless
  - a ghost
  - physically hurt
  - the wool pooh
20. Which of the following is **not** a theme statement for this novel?
- Life is not fair, but we must continue to live our lives.
  - Family support can help through hard times.
  - It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.
  - Though life has its challenges, with loved ones and friends, we can endure.

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

*Final Test*

*Answer Key*

<i>Number</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1	a
2	c
3	b
4	a
5	d
6	b
7	d
8	a
9	d
10	c
11	b
12	d
13	d
14	b
15	d
16	c
17	d
18	a
19	b
20	c

## ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham***

**ABCs** Directions: Think of words that are important in the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. Then, place the word in the appropriate box. Make sure you are able to explain how each word relates to the novel.

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T
U	V	WX	YZ

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Theme:** the story's central message; a life lesson

### **Some things to remember about theme are:**

- Theme is what the author wants you to remember most.
- Occasionally the theme is stated directly in the novel/passage.
- Most often, the theme is unstated and is revealed to the reader gradually throughout the novel/passage.
- Theme is written as a statement, not just a word.
- Different readers can have completely different theme statements. This is fine as long as each reader can support his/her idea with evidence from the novel/passage.

### **Plan for understanding theme in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham***

**Step 1:** List words from the novel that express the big ideas or topics from the novel.

**Step 2:** Think about what the characters in the novel do and say that relate to the topics you listed above.

**Step 3:** Come up with a statement of the author's point or message based on one or more of your big ideas.

**Step 4:** Find passages and/or quotes from the novel that support your theme statement.

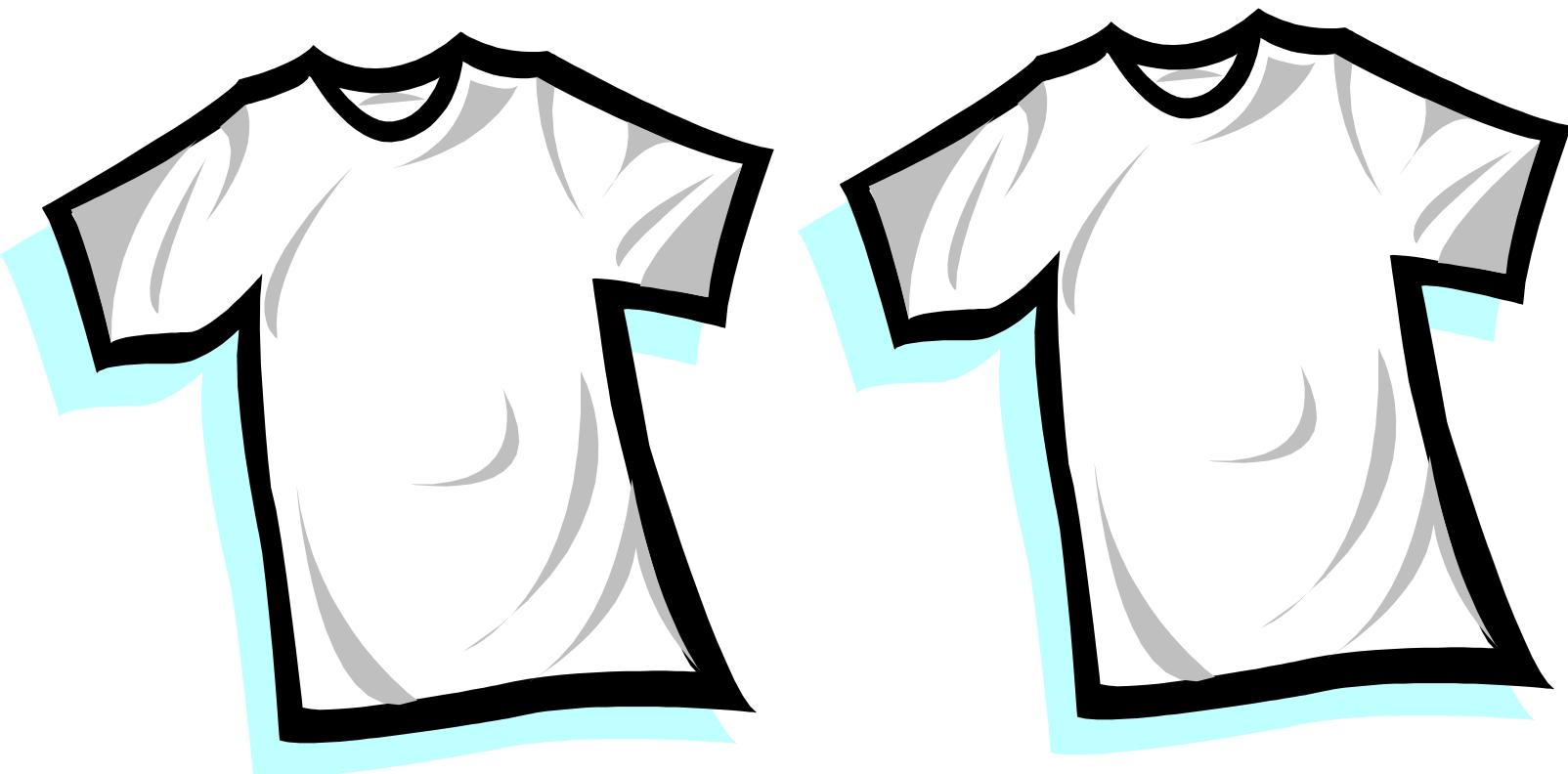
# *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*

## Mottos

A motto is a word or saying that describes a principle or moral that someone lives by. Some examples are:

- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
- Never judge someone until you have walked a mile in his/her shoes!

Create a T-shirt for two characters from the novel. In the center of each shirt, write a motto that this character would live by.



Character:

Character:

## ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham***

### **Writing Opportunity**

**Cinquain:** a poem containing five lines

Write a cinquain poem using a character or object found in the novel as the basis of your poem. The cinquain format and topic suggestions are listed.

#### **Cinquain Poem Format**

Line 1: a noun

Line 2: two adjectives to describe the noun in line one

Line 3: three –ing verbs

Line 4: a phrase describing the noun in line one

Line 5: a synonym for the noun in line one

**Possible Topics:** choose one of these or make come up with your own topic.

Kenneth

Byron

Watsons

conk

Ultra-Glide

1969

Brown Bomber

# *Answer Key*

# The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963

## Chapter 1

### Comprehension

1. Who is telling this story? **Kenneth**
2. What do the Watsons name their car? **The Brown Bomber**
3. What happens to Byron while they are scraping ice off of the car window? **he gets his mouth frozen to the mirror**

### Meet the Watsons

	Kenneth	Byron	Momma	Dad	Joetta
Two facts that you have learned about this person	The narrator The younger brother	Just turned 13 The narrator's older brother	Not born in Flint Did not want to move from Alabama Her name is Wilona Has a gap between her teeth	His name is Daniel He likes to cut up	Narrator's little sister Goes by Joey
Two descriptive words that seem right for this person	exaggerating Well behaved	Conceited Mean /rude	Outspoken caring	Humorous, playful	Youngest child Caring/sympathetic
One or two quotes from the story so far that help show this character's personality	It was about a zillion degrees below zero.(page 1)	I peeked around the back of the car to see what By was up to. The only thing he'd scraped off was the outside mirror and he was bending down to look at himself in it. (page 7-8)	Momma didn't see anything funny. "Daniel Watson! What are we gonna do?" (page 14)	"But the name stuck, didn't it? Hambone Henderson. Me and your granddaddy called him that because the boy had a head shaped just like a hambone, had more knots and bumps on his head than a dinosaur..." (page 4)	Joey told By, "Don't worry, we'll come right back." She stood on her tiptoes and gave By a kiss, then she and Momma ran inside. (page 15)

# *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*

## *Chapter 3*

### Comprehension

1. Larry Dunn was the king of kindergarten, but Byron was considered a god.
2. What is Kenneth Watson really good at doing? reading
3. What is wrong with Kenneth's eye? He has a lazy eye.
4. Who is Poindexter? Kenneth

### Point of View

**Who is telling the story? Is the point of view...**

- First person? (A character is telling the story.) yes Kenneth is telling the story
- Third-person limited? (An unseen narrator, not a character, is telling the story and this narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of only one character.) no
- Third person omniscient? (An unseen narrator- not a character- is telling the story and this narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of several characters. no

### Discussion Questions

Respond to this passage. Do you think this is how people are treated in real life? Explain how this is true.

**Accept Reasonable Responses**

Go back and read the reaction of the bus driver at the end of this chapter. What do you think of this reaction? Do you think it was the right way to handle things? Explain why or why not.

**Accept Reasonable Responses**

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 3*

### Comprehension

1. Kenneth says there were two things wrong with Rufus. What are those two things? **The way he talks and his clothes**
2. What happens to make Rufus and Cody stop talking to Kenneth? **Kenneth laughs at something mean that someone says on the bus.**
3. Who helps to mend the relationship between Kenny and Rufus? **Kenny's mom**

### Flashback

Using the chart above for help, which clues began this flashback?

- a. a sound
- b. **a related event**
- c. a related setting
- d. a dream or daydream

What is the purpose of this flashback?

- a. **to give us more information about Kenneth's history with friends**
- b. to give us more information about Kenneth's personality

What do we learn about Kenneth from this flashback?

- a. **He is learning what makes someone a good friend and what makes someone a bad friend.**
- b. He is very smart, and he always knows how to have a good time.
- c. He wants to be in charge at all times.

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 4*

### Comprehension

1. What did Byron tell Kenneth and Joey about why their mother makes them wear so many clothes on cold days? **that kids freeze to death and the trash truck is really picking up those frozen children**
2. Who stole Kenneth's gloves? **Larry Dunn**
3. What does Momma do to the second pair of gloves after one of her children has lost their first pair? **She pins the pair to the coat.**
4. What is a Maytag Wash? **Larry puts snow in every part of his victim's face.**

**Now, let's try creating similes! Complete the following sentences from this chapter making up your own similes. Keep them original. Accept reasonable answers.**

**Infer** What can we infer about Larry Dunn after reading this chapter? **His family doesn't have much money.**

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 5*

1. What happened in Momma's past that causes her to be so firm against playing with fire?  
**Her house caught on fire when she was little.**
2. What made Momma go and check on Byron when he was in the bathroom? **She kept hearing the toilet being flushed over and over.**
3. Where did Kenneth and Joey encourage Byron to go when Momma let go of him to go get the matches? **To Buphead's house**

<b>Strong Verb(s) Used</b>	<b>Explain why these are effective verb choices.</b>
A.  Sneaked, peeked	These verbs show that Kenneth didn't want to get caught. They allow the reader to picture him being very secretive.
B.  Snatched, dragged	These verbs help to show Momma's anger. She didn't just put her hand around his neck, she snatched it which shows an angry action. The verb dragged also shows that she was angry.
C.  Grabbed	The verb grabbed in this sentence shows the fear that Joey had at this time. She didn't just touch Kenneth and ask what was wrong. In her panic, she "grabbed" his arm.
D.  Stormed	If someone storms off, it usually means that person is angry. This verb creates imagery because you can see Momma stomping off. It also shows her anger.
E.  Tackled	We usually see this verb used when describing a football game or someone who is being caught in a police chase. It helps us to see just how mad and serious Momma is!
F.  Potoohing	This is onomatopoeia. It allows the reader to hear the sound that Joey was making as she tried to extinguish her mother's fire and rage. Onomatopoeia adds to the imagery and in this case, also adds a little humor.

**Onomatopoeia – words that sound like what they mean**

In the box, write as many onomatopoeia words as you can think of. Some examples listed

bang boom pop crash sizzle hiss roar buzz ring crackle snap

Read the following sentences from chapter five. Underline the onomatopoeia used in each.

glugging

hiss

Psss!

## Figurative Language

What type of figurative language is used in this passage?

- a. Idiom
- b. Metaphor
- c. Personification
- d. Simile

### *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 6*

#### Comprehension

1. How does Mama tell Kenneth and Byron to pay for the groceries? **sign for them**
2. What did Byron do to persuade Kenny into keeping the secret about the food? **shared his Sweedish Cremes**
3. What did Byron do after he killed the dove? **had a funeral for it**

*I don't know, I really wished I was as smart as some people thought I was, 'cause some of the time it was real hard to understand what was going on with Byron.*

**Kenneth struggles with understanding his older brother. Let's analyze the character of Byron. Complete the following chart using chapter six to help you.**

Byron's actions in chapter 6	What do you think these actions say about Byron?
After finding out the groceries are not provided by welfare, Byron was smiling and even put his arm around Kenneth on the way home. He even carried the groceries for Kenneth.	This tells us just how upset Byron gets about welfare. He is embarrassed about this and is proud not to be on welfare. It also shows that his nice actions toward his brother Kenneth match his mood.
Byron gives Kenneth some of the Swedish Cremes to eat and then when Kenneth realizes that Byron took the cookies without his parents knowing, Byron says "Don't even think about it , Poindexter, you ate two of	This shows just how manipulative Byron is. The only reason he gives Kenneth cookies is so he would be guilty too and could not snitch on him.

'em yourself so quit wastin' my cookies and just shut up and enjoy what's left."	
Byron hit and killed a bird with one of the Swedish Cremes and then gently brushed pink frosting off of the dove's chest.	This shows a contrast in By's non-caring attitude. He is cruel to a bird and then gently brushes off frosting. The gentleness is a contrast to the mean side of Byron that he outwardly shows. This may show an inward kindhearted side to Byron that he tries to cover up.
Byron gets sick and when Kenneth tries to comfort him by putting his hand on Byron's back, Byron pops him in the arm and then throws a rotten apple at Kenneth.	Again, this shows the mean behavior that Byron gives to his little brother. It makes the reader feel sympathetic for Kenneth. It seems that Byron lashes out when he feels bad.
Byron made a grave for the bird with two popsicle sticks tied together in a cross.	This also shows that Byron has a remorseful and kind-hearted side to him. It shows the reader and Kenneth that inwardly there is some good to "Daddy Cool".

**Direct characterization** – an author comes right out and tells us about a character.

**Indirect characterization** – an author reveals the personality of a character through his/her actions, dialogue, and dialogue of others.

**What type of characterization does the author mostly use with Byron? Indirect**

### *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 7*

#### Comprehension

1. How does Byron's mother feel about his "conk"? She does not like it.
2. How does Byron's father decide to punish him for getting a "conk"? shave it

Find one other idiom in this chapter and explain it.

*Momma was real hot... page 88* This idiom means that she was very mad.

**Now, complete the following chart to figure out some of the words used in this chapter.**

Passage	Based on context clues, what do you think the underlined words mean?
Byron had gotten a <u>conk!</u> A <u>process!</u> A <u>do!</u> A butter! ...His hair was reddish brown, straight, stiff, and slick-looking. (Page 87)	a certain hair style that was popular during this time period
"Shoot, you think I care what them <u>squares</u> say?" (page 91)	This is a negative term but probably means people who do everything right. Kind of like "goody -two -shoes"

#### Predict

At the end of this chapter, we read that Dad brought home the TT AB-700 in the Brown Bomber. Without reading ahead, make a prediction about what this is. **Accept reasonable predictions.**

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 8*

### **Comprehension**

1. What is the Ultra-Glide? **A record player that's in the car**
2. Why does Dad insist on hiding his toothbrush? **He knows it is a great tool for cleaning, and he wants to make sure no one uses his toothbrush to clean something.**
3. What seems to be Kenneth's favorite song? **"Yakety Yak"**
4. Why are the Watsons going to Alabama? **because Grandma Sands is going to keep Byron for the summer**
5. The kids have always heard stories about Grandma Sands. How can she be described? **She is strict!**

### **“Yakety Yak”**

Listen to the song “Yakety Yak” as you read the lyrics that your teacher provides.

1. Find the rhyme scheme used in the song. **AABBC DDEEC FFFC GGHH**
2. What words describe the tone of this song? **lighthearted, upbeat**
3. What does “Yakety Yak” mean or refer to in this song? **talking back**
4. What does the content of this song say about music during this time? **It was clean, upbeat, playful**

## *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 9*

### **Comprehension**

1. **Where did Byron sleep the night before they left for Birmingham?** **in his parents' room**
2. **Why are Byron's parents sending Byron to live with Grandma Sands?** **to help open his eyes**
3. **What did Mrs. Davidson give to Joey?** **an angel**

### **Historical Context**

What was going on down South according to the pictures that Kenneth mentions in chapter nine?

**inequality and racial violence**

## Time Period

Songs mentioned that were popular during this era	Words that were used then and not now	Other things that are specific to this time period
“Under the Boardwalk” “Yakety Yak”	Square Conk Jive Negro hip	Ultra-glide Disc jockey

## Discussion

Why do you think Joey puts Mrs. Davidson's gift in her sock drawer?

Accept reasonable answers

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 10*

**Find another passage in this chapter that contains visual imagery. Complete the following chart. Sample answer below**

Page #	Passage	How imagery is created...small things, strong verbs, figurative language, adjectives
142	<i>I couldn't keep my head from sinking, deeper and deeper into the Brown Bomber's seat. I woke up and got real nervous real fast. I felt something wet in my pants starting to run down my leg. I opened my eyes and said, "Whew!" It was just Joey drooling all over me.</i>	strong verbs, small things

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 11*

Dialect

Dialect includes a character's vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. It is unique to where a character lives.

Translate the passage into Standard English.

O.K., Clem, I hope when we get to Birmingham you can explain to these babies' granny why you turned them into little zombies from sitting in this car for so long.

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 12*

Comprehension

1. What drags Mr. Robert's dog into a lake? **a coon**
2. Why didn't Byron and Kenneth sleep well at Grandma Sands' house? **It was hot.**
3. True or false? Byron is miserable at Grandma Sands' house. **false**

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 13*

Comprehension

1. Who does Byron say that the Wool Pooh is? **Winnie's evil twin brother.**
2. What happens to Kenneth at Collier's Landing? **He almost drowns because the Wool Pooh tries to get him**
3. Who rescues Kenneth? **Byron**
4. Who did Byron see while he was with the Wool Pooh? **Joetta who looks like a little angel**

Reread the part of this chapter that describes the struggle that Kenneth has with the Wool Pooh. In the box, draw a picture that you have in your mind of the struggle.

Drawings may include a picture of Kenneth with something holding his ankle or pulling him by his leg. It may include an angel or a little girl. The water will be dark.

The Wool Pooh is described as being *big and gray with hard square-looking fingers. Where he should have had eyes there was nothing but a darker colder-looking color.* (page 176)

Reread the first paragraph of chapter thirteen. What word does Grandma Sands use in her warning that sounds like *Wool Pooh?* **whirlpool**

What might the Wool Pooh symbolize? **death**

We know that the Wool Pooh is not real. It is a creation of Byron's imagination and Kenneth thinks that it is real. However, it does serve as a symbol. In the box below, make a list of words that personify the Wool Pooh.

*That's when he came swimming real slow out of the deep...  
...he was big and gray with hard square-looking fingers.  
He grabbed my leg and started pulling me down...  
...But the Wool Pooh wasn't through with me. I felt his hard, hard hand go around my ankle and I went down for the fourth time!*

### *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 14*

#### Discussion

Why do you think Kenny sees the *Wool Pooh* in the church after it had been bombed? Accept reasonable answers Possible answers may refer to his fear, internal struggle with what he was seeing, reminder of death experience in the water

Remember, not everyone knows what the reader knows. Write only what would appear in a newspaper.

### *The Watsons Go to Birmingham Chapter 15*

Because this story is told in the first person point of view, and Kenny is telling the story, the reader gets a "fuzzy" picture of what happened at the church because things for Kenneth were a blur. Let's piece together the facts by answering some questions.

1. What did Kenneth hear when he was sitting under the tree? An explosion – the bombing of the church
2. Where were Byron and Mr. Watson when the sound occurred? in the house
3. When Byron was inside the church, and he tried to pull out the little shiny black shoe, what did he imagine that he saw? the Wool Pooh
4. Why do you think Byron imagined that he saw this? He was afraid. He thought Joey was dead, so he imagined the Wool Pooh which he has associated with death from his own experience of almost drowning.
5. When Kenneth returned home and saw Joey, what did he think about her? He thought she was dead and he was seeing her ghost. He thinks that the Wool Pooh is taking her to see all of her family before she goes. "Oh. You'll probably get to see them next. He takes you around to see your family before you go." (page 187)
6. Why did Joey think that Kenneth had on different clothes? She thought he was at church. She saw someone else, but thought it was Kenny. That is why she left the church before the bombing occurred.
7. Why was Joey not inside the church when the incident occurred? She had followed who she thought was Kenneth home.

**The Watsons Go to Birmingham sample answers below**

A  Alabama	B  Brown Bomber  Birmingham  Bomb	C  Conk  Collier's Landing	D  Disc Jockey
E  Entertainment	F  Flint  Frozen kids	G  Grandma Sands	H  Humor  Hillbilly accent
I  I-75	J  Joey	K  Kenneth	L  Love  Larry Dunn
M  Matches	N  Nazi Parachutes	O  Out-house	P  Pet hospital  Poindexter
Q  Quietness(after bomb)	R  Record player  Rufus	S  Swedish Cremes	T  TT AB-700
U  Ultra-glide	V  Violence	WX  Weird Watsons  Wool Pooh	YZ  Yakety Yak

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