



Mississippi History on Loan

ALMOS' A MAN

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History established the Mississippi History on Loan film program to enhance classroom instruction on Mississippi history, literature, art, personalities, and places. The program has over 200 titles available year-round for grades 4-12. The films are offered in VHS and DVD format.

Mississippi History on Loan presents *Almos' a Man*, based on Richard Wright's short story. The award-winning film depicts the story of a black teen-aged farm worker in the Deep South in the 1930s. David, the boy, persuades his mother to give him part of his earnings for a used hand gun. He accidentally kills a mule with it. David becomes embittered and runs away when his confession evokes unexpected responses from his father and the owner of the mule.

Produced by Dan McCann, 1977. 39 minutes, color.

This activity packet includes the following:

- Curricular Connections for Common Core and Mississippi Department of Education Frameworks
- Richard Wright Biography
- Timeline of Events
- True or False?
- Multiple Choice
- Short Answers
- Who Said It?
- Interviewing Others
- Storyboarding the Action
- Reflecting on the Text
- Essay Question
- Teacher Evaluation

For more information please contact:

MDAH Museum Division P.O. Box 571 Jackson, MS 39205
Phone: 601-576-6800 Fax: 601-576-6815 outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov



Mississippi History on Loan ALMOS' A MAN

Curricular Connections

MDAH works to ensure our lessons and activities complement Common Core Curriculum and Mississippi Department of Education frameworks, competencies, and objectives. Each lesson and activity has been matched to the grade levels, subjects, competencies, and objectives.

Curricular Connections		
Common Core Language Arts	Grade 6	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL6; RL7; W2; W3; W4; W5; W9; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5
	Grade 7	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL6; RL7; W2; W3; W4; W5; W9; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5
	Grade 8	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL6; RL7; W2; W3; W4; W5; W9; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5
	Grades 9-10	RL3; RL7; W2; W3; W4; W5; W9; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5
	Grades 11-12	RL7; W2; W3; W4; W5; W9; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5



Mississippi History on Loan **ALMOS' A MAN**

Richard Wright Biography

Who was Richard Wright?

In 1908, Richard Wright was born on a plantation in Roxie, Mississippi. Wright's family were descendants of the first African slaves brought to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. Wright's father, Nathan, was a sharecropper and his mother, Ella, was a teacher. After his father abandoned the family, Ella was left to care for her two sons alone. When Ella became ill, the boys were temporarily placed in an orphanage. After moving to Jackson, Ella had a stroke and Wright left school to help support his family. He found a series of jobs, but had a hard time maintaining a job because of discrimination and low wages. Since Wright refused to act inferior to his white peers, he was harassed. Wright's experiences of growing up in the Jim Crow South influenced his writings.

Like many African American southerners, Wright eventually moved to Chicago where he faced the same discrimination problems as in the South. In Chicago Wright became involved with fighting for social causes. He soon joined the Communist Party and wrote numerous publications for the organization. Later Wright moved to New York. In 1938, his collection of four short stories entitled *Uncle Tom's Children* was published. The book was well-received. Around 1940, Wright gained international fame with his book *Native Son*. Today Richard Wright is considered one of the most significant and influential African American writers of the 20th century. Through his writings, Wright tried to affect social change in America and many viewed him as a voice for African Americans. Wright went on to write *The Man Who was Almost a Man* (*Almos' a Man*), *Black Boy*, and *The Outsider*. Although Wright achieved literary fame and wealth, he still faced racism. Disillusioned with race relations in the United States, Wright moved to France in 1946. He died in Paris on November 28, 1960.



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ALMOS' A MAN

Timeline of Events

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Place the events below in the order that they occurred.

- _____ Dave asks Ma for money to buy a gun.
- _____ Pa talks to Dave about work during dinner.
- _____ Dave forces himself to shoot the gun with his eyes open.
- _____ Dave talks to Jenny about getting a gun.
- _____ Dave shoots Jenny with the gun.
- _____ Dave plows the fields.
- _____ Dave talks to Mr. Joe about getting a gun.
- _____ Dave buys a gun from Mr. Joe.
- _____ Mr. Hawkins shoots a bird.
- _____ Dave's coworkers complain that he is performing duties improperly.



Mississippi History on Loan ALMOS' A MAN

Timeline of Events **Answer Key**

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Place the events below in the order that they occurred.

- ___7___ Dave asks Ma for money to buy a gun.
- ___6___ Pa talks to Dave about work during dinner.
- ___10___ Dave forces himself to shoot the gun with his eyes open.
- ___4___ Dave talks to Jenny about getting a gun.
- ___9___ Dave shoots Jenny with the gun.
- ___2___ Dave plows the fields.
- ___5___ Dave talks to Mr. Joe about getting a gun.
- ___8___ Dave buys a gun from Mr. Joe.
- ___1___ Mr. Hawkins shoots a bird.
- ___3___ Dave's coworkers complain that he is performing duties improperly.



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ALMOS' A MAN

True or False?

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Determine if the following statements are true or false and explain your answer.

1. After shooting Jenny, Dave returns the gun to Mr. Joe's store.

2. Pa and Dave argue about whether Dave is ready for a gun.

3. Dave tells everyone that Jenny fell on a plow.

4. Dave gives the gun to his parents after he bought it from Mr. Joe.

5. Dave covers Jenny's bullet wound with dirt.

6. Before Jenny's death, Pa was aware that Dave purchased a gun.

7. Mr. Hawkins pays Dave's wages directly to Dave's mother.

8. Mr. Joe sells Dave a left-handed Wheeler pistol.

9. Dave borrows a mail order catalog from Mr. Joe.

10. Mr. Robinson approaches Dave about throwing rocks instead of working.



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ALMOS' A MAN

True or False? Answer Key

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Determine if the following statements are true or false and explain your answer.

1. After shooting Jenny, Dave returns the gun to Mr. Joe's store.

False. After shooting Jenny, Dave buries the gun near the creek.

2. Pa and Dave argue about whether Dave is ready for a gun.

False. Dave argues with his mother about him being ready for a gun.

3. Dave tells everyone that Jenny fell on a plow.

True. Dave tries to convince everyone that Jenny's injury occurred when she became rowdy and fell on a plow.

4. Dave gives the gun to his parents after he bought it from Mr. Joe.

False. Even though Dave promised to bring the gun to Ma after buying it, he hid it under his pillow.

5. Dave covers Jenny's bullet wound with dirt.

True. In an effort to stop the bleeding, Dave covered Jenny's wound with dirt.

6. Before Jenny's death, Pa was aware that Dave purchased a gun.

False. Only Ma knew about the gun before Jenny's death. Pa learned about the gun after Jenny's death.

7. Mr. Hawkins pays Dave's wages directly to Dave's mother.

True. Mr. Hawkins gives Dave's pay to his mother because he is still considered a child.

8. Mr. Joe sells Dave a left-handed Wheeler pistol.

True. Mr. Joe sells Dave a left-handed Wheeler pistol.

9. Dave borrows a mail order catalog from Mr. Joe.

True. Dave borrows a mail order catalog from Mr. Joe.

10. Mr. Robinson approaches Dave about throwing rocks instead of working.

True. Mr. Robinson approaches Dave about throwing rocks instead of working.



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ALMOS' A MAN

Multiple Choice

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Choose the answer that best correctly completes the sentence.

1. Dave gets money for the gun from
 - A. Mr. Hawkins
 - B. Ma
 - C. Pa
2. Dave buys the gun from
 - A. Mr. Joe
 - B. Mr. Robinson
 - C. Mr. Hawkins
3. Ma tells Dave to buy the gun for
 - A. her
 - B. Pa
 - C. himself (Dave)
4. Mr. Joe lends Dave
 - A. a hammer
 - B. a gun
 - C. a mail order catalog
5. Dave buys the gun for
 - A. \$2
 - B. \$5
 - C. \$6
6. At the end of the film, Dave
 - A. hitch hikes
 - B. jumps onto a train
 - C. visits Mr. Hawkins
7. When Ma asks Dave for the gun in the middle of the night, Dave tells her the gun is hidden
 - A. outside
 - B. in the kitchen
 - C. in his drawer
8. Mr. Hawkins tells Dave he wants
 - A. \$50 for the dead mule
 - B. \$20 for the dead mule
 - C. \$100 for the dead mule
9. Near the end of the film Dave declares that he is now a man because he
 - A. fired the gun without being afraid
 - B. he gets rid of the gun
 - C. stood up to those he felt disrespected him
10. Jenny is shot because
 - A. she walks in front of the gun
 - B. Dave did not look where he was shooting
 - C. Dave shot her intentionally



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ALMOS' A MAN

Multiple Choice Answer Key

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Choose the answer that best correctly completes the sentence.

- Dave gets money for the gun from
 - Mr. Hawkins
 - Ma**
 - Pa
- Dave buys the gun from
 - Mr. Joe**
 - Mr. Robinson
 - Mr. Hawkins
- Ma tells Dave to buy the gun for
 - her
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 - a hammer
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 - \$2**
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- At the end of the film, Dave
 - hitch hikes
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- Near the end of the film Dave declares that he is now a man because he
 - fired the gun without being afraid**
 - he gets rid of the gun
 - stood up to those he felt disrespected him
- Jenny is shot because
 - she walks in front of the gun
 - Dave did not look where he was shooting**
 - Dave shot her intentionally



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ALMOS' A MAN

Short Answers

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Using a separate sheet of paper, answer each of the following questions in 4-6 sentences.

1. What reason does Dave give Mr. Joe for wanting a gun?
2. Why does Dave really want a gun?
3. Do you think a person of Dave's age should own a gun? Why or why not?
4. How does Richard Wright approach the struggle for manhood in this story? What do you believe are the keys to achieving adulthood?
5. In the story, Dave compares himself to Jenny. Why does Dave make this comparison?
6. Should Dave be treated as an adult in the story? Why or why not?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Dave?
8. What do you think could have prevented Dave's problem? How could the story have ended differently?
9. Read the following excerpt from Wright's short story. Why do you think Dave decided to leave town at the end of the story?

To his left the road curved, running to the tracks of the Illinois Central. He jerked his head, listening. From far off came a faint hooooof-hooooof; hooooof-hooooof ; hooooof-hooooofThat's number eight. He took a swift look at Jim Hawkins's white house; he thought of Pa, of Ma, of his little brother, and the boys. He thought of the dead mule and heard hooof-hooof; hooooof-hooooof; hooooof-hooooof....He stood rigid. Two dollahs a mont. Les see now...Tha means itll take bout two years. Shucks! (p. 251)*
10. By the end of the story has Dave become a man? What has he learned (or not learned) from his experiences?

*Richard Wright, "Almos' a Man" in *Mississippi Writers: An Anthology* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 240-252.



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Interviewing Others

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Working in groups of two or three, pick one group member to act an interviewer from a newspaper or magazine who is “on the scene” in the aftermath of Jenny’s death. The other group member(s) will pretend to be one of the characters from the story. Work together to come up with questions the interviewer can ask and responses from the character(s). Have each group share their interview questions and answers with the class.

Example:

Interviewer: Mr. Joe, why did you sell a gun to Dave without consulting his parents?

Mr. Joe: I believed that he has already gotten his parents’ permission.

Interviewer: Did you feel that Dave was too young to have a gun?

Mr. Joe: I thought that maybe it was too soon for him to have one.

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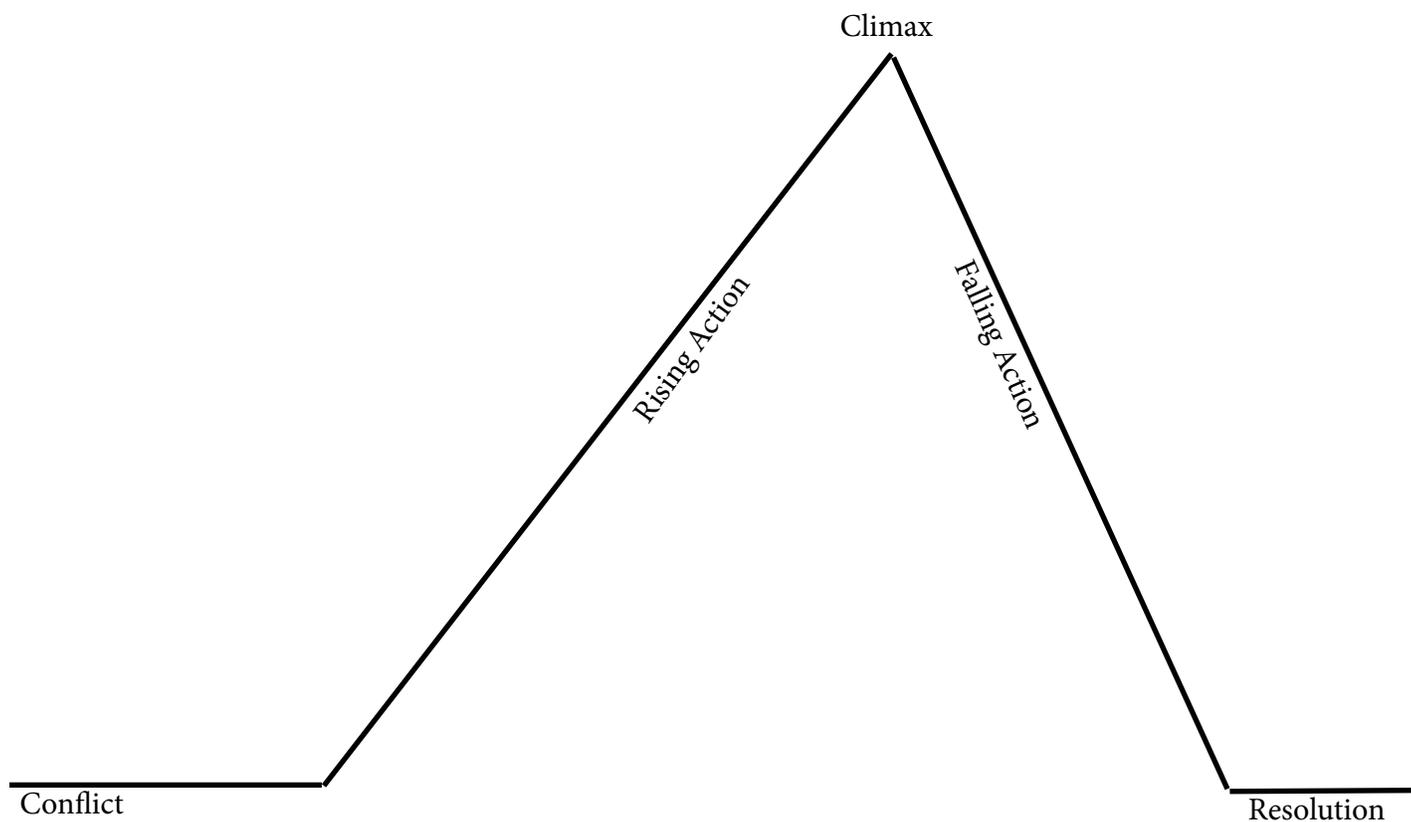
Storyboarding the Action

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Using scenes from the film create a storyboard of the events that occurred using one of the following methods:

- Draw the events
- Write a short description of the action

Use the below chart if desired to help organize your storyboard.



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ALMOS' A MAN

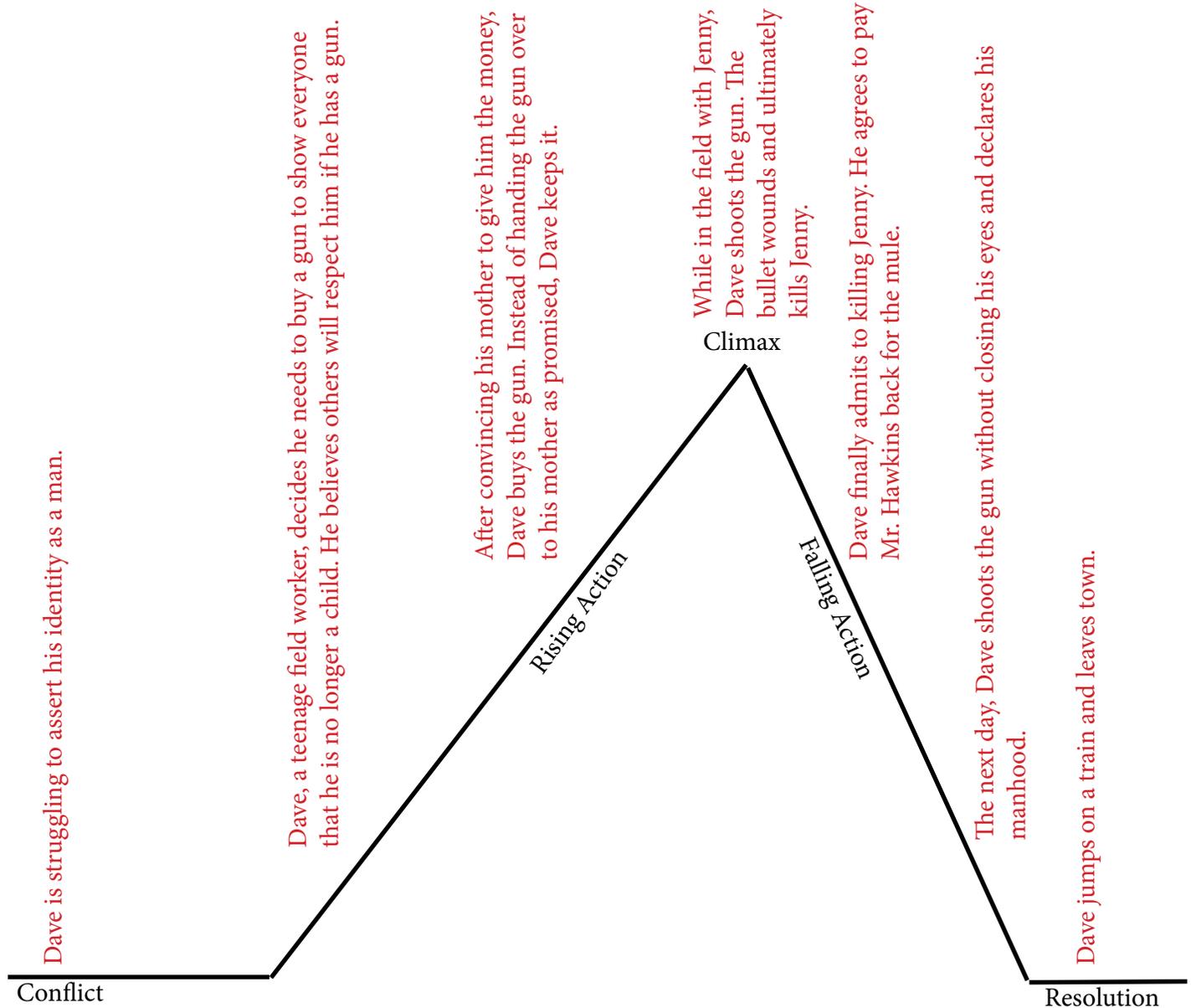
Storyboarding the Action **Answer Key**

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Using scenes from the film create a storyboard of the events that occurred using one of the following methods:

- Draw the events
- Write a short description of the action

Use the below chart if desired to help organize your storyboard.





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ALMOS' A MAN

Reflecting on the Text

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: Read the following excerpts from the short story *Almos' a Man*. Pick one of the passages to reflect on and write a journal entry in response to the text. Discuss your thoughts about the passage you choose. In your entry you may also discuss Richard Wright's use of language, how his life influenced the text, or how the social climate during Wright's life impacted the text.

Excerpt One: That night Dave did not sleep. He was glad that he had gotten out of killing the mule so easily, but he was hurt. Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they laughed. He tossed on his bed, feeling his hard pillow. N Pa says he's gonna beat me....He remembered other beatings, and his back quivered. Naw, naw, Ah sho don wan im t beat me tha way no mo.....Dam em all! Nobody ever gave him anything. All he did was work. They treat me lika mule....N then they beat me....He gritted his teeth. N Ma had t tell on me. (p. 250)

Excerpt Two: When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight and proud in the moonlight, looking at Jim Hawkins's big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had jus one mo bullet Ahd taka shot at tha house. Ahd like t scare d man Hawkins jussa little....Jussa enough t let im know Dave Sanders is a man. (p. 251)

Excerpt Three: He hesitated just a moment; then he grabbed, pulled atop of a car, and lay flat. He felt his pocket; the gun was still there. Ahead the long rails were glinting in moonlight, stretching away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man.... (p. 252)

Richard Wright, "Almos' a Man" in *Mississippi Writers: An Anthology* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 240-252.



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ALMOS' A MAN

Essay Question

NAME _____ DATE _____

Directions: In *Almos' a Man*, Dave is struggling to show that he is no longer a child. In your life, how can you relate to Dave? How have you tried to demonstrate to your parents, friends, relatives, teachers, or peers that you are growing up? Write a short essay describing a time in your life when you wanted to demonstrate that you were growing up, such as learning to drive, getting a job, picking your own clothes, having your own telephone, etc. Show comparisons and contrasts between your situation and Dave's. Did you understand the different points of view of the people involved? What lasting impressions were made?



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Teacher Evaluation

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?

2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?

3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?

4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?

5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:

___single-day unit

___multi-day unit

___multi-week unit

___other

6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

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Teacher Evaluation

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

Directions and Notes	4	3	2	1
Curricular Connections	4	3	2	1
Student Worksheets	4	3	2	1
Who was Richard Wright?	4	3	2	1
Timeline of Events	4	3	2	1
True or False?	4	3	2	1
Multiple Choice	4	3	2	1
Short Answers	4	3	2	1
Who Said It?	4	3	2	1
Interviewing Others	4	3	2	1
Storyboarding the Action	4	3	2	1
Reflecting on the Text	4	3	2	1
Essay Question	4	3	2	1
Overall Lesson	4	3	2	1

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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P.O. Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205
Phone: 601-576-6800 Fax: 601-576-6815
outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov