

*All Those Secrets
of the World*
by Jane Yolen

A Teacher's Guide for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction	3
Quick Card	5
Questions about Structure: Setting	6
Questions about Structure: Characters	7
Questions about Structure: Conflict and Plot	8
Questions about Structure: Theme	10
Questions about Style	11
Questions about Context	13
Suggestions for Writing Assignments	14
Story Charts	15

INTRODUCTION



CenterForLit’s teacher guide series is intended to assist teachers and parents in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. It is important to note that they are **not** intended to be workbooks for the student, but rather models and guides for discussion leaders. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, CenterForLit’s flagship literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around **three unique ideas** which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — **Context, Structure, and Style**. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares them for meaningful discussion of the story’s themes.

Context encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author’s world.

Structure includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes *exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and conclusion*), Setting, Characters, and Theme.

Style refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc.) enables a reader not only to understand the author’s themes more readily, but also to appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, *children’s literature* is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children’s books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher—allowing him to present Context, Structure, and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children’s story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the *Socratic Method*. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well-placed questions to teach students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the

student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar-level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric-level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essays and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces **deep thinkers** at any age.

The questions used in this guide have been taken directly from the Socratic list, and will therefore be familiar to the seminar alumnus.

More information about *Teaching the Classics* may be found at www.centerforlit.com/teaching-the-classics.

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Andrews", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Adam Andrews, Director
The Center for Literary Education
3350 Beck Road
Rice, WA 99167
(509) 738-6837
adam@centerforlit.com

QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>All Those Secrets of the World.</i> Jane Yolen. (1991) ISBN: 978-0316968911
Plot	Janie's father leaves for war and returns two years later.
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1940's America• World War II• Norfolk, Virginia, site of an American naval base• Janie's childhood
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Janie, a young child in a WWII era family.• Michael, Janie's elder cousin.• Daddy, Janie's father, a U.S. soldier.• Mama, Janie's mother.• Grandma & Grandpa, with whom Janie and her mama and brother live while Daddy is away.
Conflict	Man vs. Society – The War Man vs. Self – Janie's perception of absence
Theme	Perception vs. Reality Distance makes everything look small, or even non-existent. Reality is more than can be seen.
Literary Devices	Symbolism: Janie's realization on the beach about perspective suggests the story's universal theme.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



The following questions are drawn from the “Conflict” and “Plot” sections of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 84-86 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.

What does the protagonist want? (5)

Janie wants her father. Watching him leave for the war, she fears that his receding figure means obliteration. She lacks perspective and understanding regarding the nature of physical absence. She worries that out of sight means out of mind and that absence equals death. He is gone so long that she nearly forgets him.

Why can’t she have it? (6)

Janie’s father is called to war. He must leave to do his patriotic duty. This leaving creates a fundamental conflict that partakes of the problem of the one and the many, and a tension between duties to society and individuals. (Man vs. Society)

Janie’s youth accounts for her confusion regarding father’s existence. Janie has undoubtedly been told of her father’s whereabouts and activities, but she must reconcile this knowledge with the information gathered by her senses and experiences. She neither sees, hears, nor senses him at all. He has vanished, for all intents and purposes, and may never return. Can she trust his promise to return?

The perspective Janie needs comes two-fold: first in the symbolic lesson her cousin gives her on the beach regarding issues of physical perception and reality. As Janie watches Michael run down the beach, she fears that he will disappear just like Daddy, but his quick return assures her that distance is not the same as non-existence. Can she believe Michael’s explanation of his seeming disappearance? Can she trust that he exists without the aid of her physical senses? Janie will have to wait for two years before Daddy’s return. Her knowing, really an act of faith, represents the degree of maturity Janie achieves as a result of the conflict she endures. (Man vs. Self)

What other problems are there in the story? (7)

Adults reading the story will notice Janie’s mother in the background, grieving and fearful as her husband deploys. This grief seems to rob her of agency for a time in Janie’s life. She looks to grandparents for support. (Man vs. Society)

How is the main problem solved? (9)

The main problem is helped by Michael’s beachside demonstration, but it is fully resolved when father returns.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE: LITERARY DEVICES



The following questions are drawn from the “Literary Devices” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 88-90 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.

Does the author use the characters and events in her story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way? (17)

The author uses the beach episode with Michael to introduce Janie to the nature of reality and existence. This incident helps her to come to terms with a reality that transcends visibility. Experience supports her lesson in time.

In Jane Yolen’s *All Those Secrets of the World*, young Janie’s perception of reality is challenged when her father is called away to fight in World War II. Watching his ship shrink to microscopic size as it sails off into the horizon, Janie believes him to have magically disappeared. Later, when her cousin, Michael, runs off down the beach during their afternoon play, she panics, believing he, too, will vanish. Michael reassures her of his static physical mass, giving her a brief explanation of the concept of visual perspective.

Somewhat mollified, Janie returns home to await her father’s homecoming. When at last her father returns, weary and injured, he marvels at how much she has grown in his absence. Janie, however, wiser for her recent experiences, explains to him that she only looked smaller to him because of the great distance that had separated them. This is one of the secrets of the world.

Distance and perspective, then, become resounding themes in this story, which touch upon important issues such as the substance of faith and reality. No mere child’s questions, Yolen’s illustration of space and perception probe universal, philosophical problems such as the nature of reality, the source of knowledge, and the reliability of physical senses. Although Janie’s sight suggests her father’s permanent disappearance, the facts presented to her by her beachside lesson suggest he is very much alive. A discussion of these philosophical ideas offers a gem of an opportunity to educators wishing to confront the ideas of philosophical materialism.

NOTES:

ESSAY QUESTIONS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS



Hints for effective writing assignments can be found on pages 73-74 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus and Chapter 6 of Reading Roadmaps.

1. How does the episode on the beach symbolize the story's larger themes?
2. What abstract idea does the ticker-tape parade at the story's beginning signify? How does the presence of this idea contribute to the story's theme?
3. Younger students may benefit from writing about how they might feel if their own parent was called away for a time.

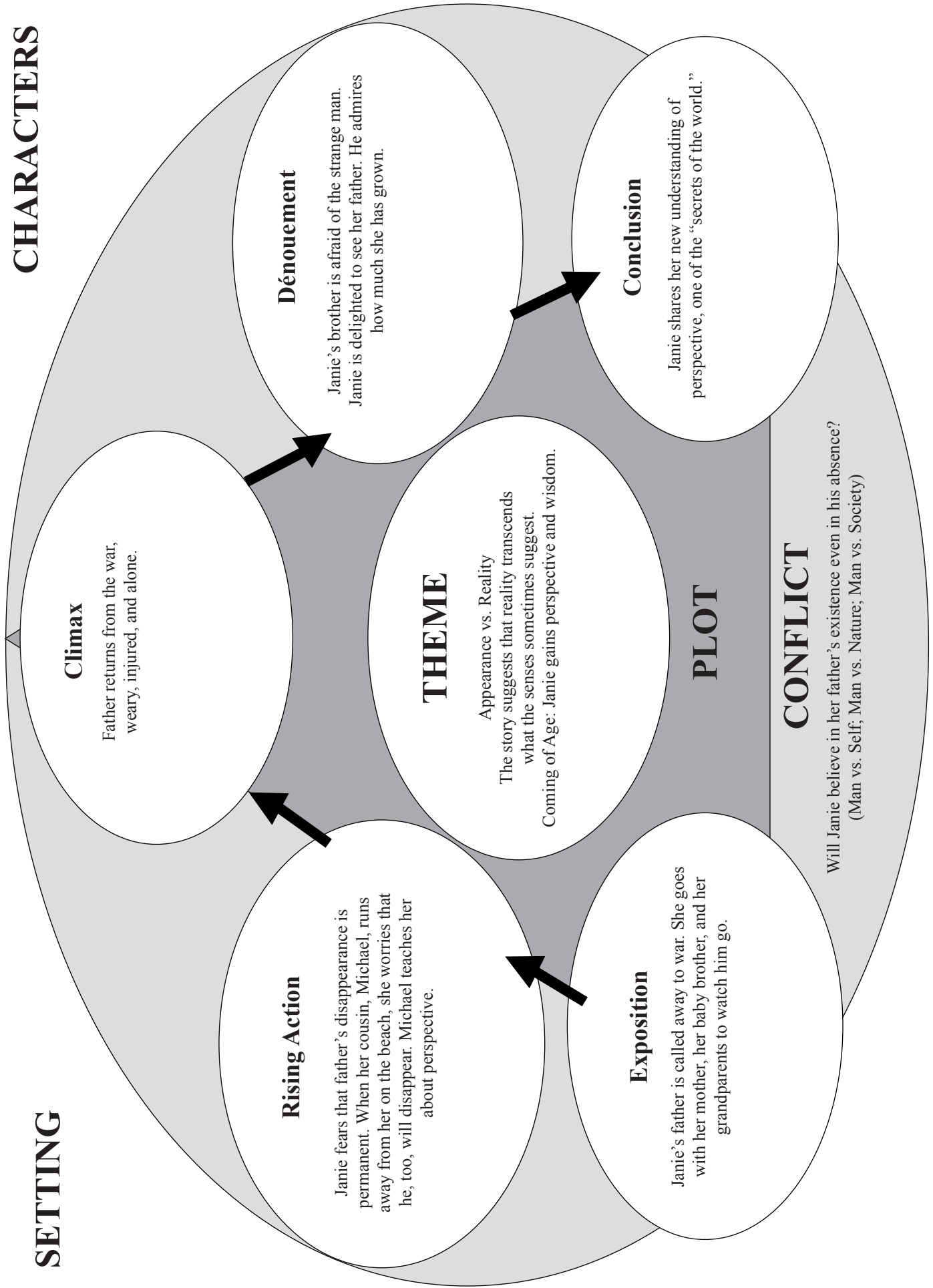
STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central conflict. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected—even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Story Chart: *All Those Secrets of the World*



Story Chart: *All Those Secrets of the World*

SETTING

CHARACTERS

