

WILL'S RACE FOR HOME

educator's guide



This guide includes multiple Before-Reading activities, During-Reading activities and discussion questions, and After-Reading reformulations, research ideas, and prompts for writing. Teachers should choose those which best fit their readers.

Before Reading

Preview Questions & Activities

Establishing a Purpose for Reading: Looking at the title and the front cover, ask readers what they think the novel will be about. Have readers discuss multiple meanings for the word “will,” which is the main character’s name.

Activating Prior Knowledge:

1. First readers jot what they know or think they know from other texts, i.e. documentaries, movies, books, articles, or history classes,
 - The year 1889
 - The American South after the Civil War
 - The Emancipation Proclamation
 - Land Grants
 - The Reconstruction era
2. Next, readers discuss as a class or in small groups, and each decides what they feel they WANT or NEED to Know about any of the topics.
3. As they read or conduct any research, readers can add What They LEARNED.

What I KNOW	What I WANT/NEED to Know	What I LEARNED

Pre-Reading Research

The class divides into small groups of 3-4 students.

Each group researches a topic from the late 1880’s in the United States, using 2-3 sources, and makes a presentation or contributes 1-2 typed pages for a class Guide to the Late 1880s. Teacher can use this project to teach citations and/or notetaking. Teachers can also discuss text features which will make this informational resource material effective and user-friendly for readers, such as titles, subheadings, glossaries, charts, maps, pictures, captions, graphs, and timelines.

These are suggestions; topics can be added, deleted, and modified to fit the grade level of readers:

- music and culture
- government, politics, and news
- fashion
- means of travel
- race relations
- life in the Southern states (the former Confederacy)
- science and technology
- The Emancipation Proclamation
- Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War
- Oklahoma – the land and the people
- The Homestead Act of 1862 and other federal bills which reduced tribals lands

During Reading

During Reading Response

After readers read 3 assigned chapters or when a reader reads something that makes them think or question in the reading, they are to jot in a Reading Journal what they are thinking. For each response they are to write for about 3-4 minutes. This is not formal writing. This is not a summary. For more information, teachers can include more strategies and activities from “The Importance of Reader Response” at <https://www.literacywithlesley.com/blog/the-importance-of-reader-response-part-1>

Here are some sample sentence starters to begin reader responses:

- I noticed...
- I was surprised when...
- I wonder why...
- I predict/What I think will happen (next) is...
- I learned...
- I am guessing that...
- I question I have is...
- I am beginning to think that...
- What I found interesting is...
- A connection I can make...(to my life, to another text, to the current world news)
- This reminds me of (another book, a movie, something that happened to you)...
- The artwork made me think...

For each class time or homework reading, the teacher can require a certain number of responses (see attached reproducible form, “*Will’s Race for Home Response Form*”), but readers should spend less than 20% of the time of the reading (about 5 minutes) in responding.

During Reading Activities

Charting the Journey: Find some maps of Texas to Oklahoma (especially if one from 1888-1889 can be located and printed) and, as a class, chart Will’s journey.

Chronicling the Dangers: Teacher may ask readers to chronicle the dangers that Will and the other homesteaders faced on their journeys. Readers can add to a classroom poster or keep their own lists. At some point in the reading, they can categorize the types of dangers faced.

Chronicling Successes/Victories: Teachers can ask readers to also document any successes that Will and the other homesteaders achieved on their journeys.

Alternative Activity: The Dangers and Successes lists can be recorded on a timeline.

During-Reading Discussion Questions

These are meant to be questions to generate discussion among readers. There are no right or wrong answers, only answers supported, or not, by the text; hopefully, the questions will in many cases elicit multiple perspectives. Many of these questions and quotes can also be employed as ideas for short writings.

Chapters 1-3

- Discuss the first line of the novel: “My father is a far-thinking man.”(1) While reading through the novel how does your interpretation of that line change?
- How do Will’s relationships with each of his parents differ?
- What is Will’s father and grandfather’s relationship? What is the relationship between Will’s father and grandfather?
- Why is a Land Rush so important, especially to Will’s family and others in their circumstances?
- How did Pa (Will’s grandfather) prepare Will’s father for this challenge?
- Why did Will’s father want to leave?
- Why did Will want to go with his father?
- Explain Grandpa’s words: “[Will’s] the only one born [in his family] with a chance of inheriting land.” (15)
- *Making Connections*: When did you want to make a change in your life? Or describe a time when you were willing to take a risk to get or achieve something.

Chapter 4-6

- Why is Father, only a cotton-farmer, considered by others to be “a man to be reckoned with”?
- What are some things that will affect the journey from Texas to Oklahoma?
- What does Grandpa give Father to take on the trip and why is it meaningful?
- *Making Connections*: If you were moving to a new place, what is the one memento that would mean the most to take with you?

Chapters 7-9

- When Will asks his father “What’ll make you happy?” Father answers, “A table in my own home, on my own land.”(32-33?) What experiences in Father's past would make this the only situation that will make him happy?
- Explain the ending quote of Chapter 8: “Father and I are in new territory.”(40)
- *Making Connections*: How has your relationship with a family member or friend changed?
- Why did Father not want Will to have friends or siblings? Is it better to have something/someone and lose it/them or not to have at all?

Chapters 10-12

- What different types of people did Will encounter on his journey, especially in Boomtown?
- In pairs, sketch your own illustration of Caesar from the description on page 54.
- Explain the quote, “There are two Caesars: one easygoing, helpful; one mysterious, threatening. He can be either friend or enemy.” (62)
- *Making Connections*: Do you know someone who can be both a friend or an enemy? To different people, in different circumstances, like Caesar, or to the same people in different circumstances?

Chapters 13-15

- Why is the river treacherous?
- *Making Connections*: When have you had to “cross a (metaphorical) river?”
- Why is California, not Oklahoma, Caesar’s goal? Why is he now “conflicted”?
- Discuss the quote, “A war won doesn’t necessarily change people’s minds, hearts. Hate doesn’t disappear.” (73)
- How does the author keep the tension up, even in “down” times? Consider Will’s thoughts at the end of Chapter 15.

Chapters 16-18

- Explain Father’s comment, “Competition means suspicion, bad tempers.” (82)
- *Making Connections*: When have you seen this statement to be true? Does it have to be true?
- Do you find this to be accurate—in the novel and in your life: “I’ve learned silence sometimes speaks more than words. Silence hides secrets, holds back fears, but it also binds with loyalty and love.” (95)

Chapters 19-21

- Why did Caesar leave? Why does Will leave with him?

Chapters 22-24

- What does father mean when he tells Will, “History repeats...My pa was right. This was our journey to make.”? (116)
- What was Father and Grandpa’s secret? Why does it still haunt them and cause them regret? And why does Father tell Will, “Avoid enemies if you can”? (119)
- How does “Caesar [carry] an even heavier burden.” (120)

Chapters 25-27

- What are the many dangers of crossing the river? What river features are the most important from those who plan to cross to note and analyze before attempting the crossing? What is the one danger Father, Will, and Caesar did not anticipate? (Research some of its characteristics and perils)

Chapters 28-30

- Discuss the ways “Journeys are unpredictable.” (142)—Will’s and ones you may have experienced or read about.
- Since they are running late for the land rush, what is their solution? What has prepared Will for this personal challenge?
- What does Will need to do to secure the land for his family? How does he prepare for the trip and the claim?

Chapters 31-33

- What is Will’s “One last task... to make this adventure a success”? (152)
- What was Will’s strategy to find a piece of land and why? Based on what features did he choose his stake?
- Sketching: In pairs or triads, on a piece of graph paper draw Will’s plot of land including the features that drew him to choose it.

Chapter 34-36

- When and how does Will change?
- Confronted by the three men trying to take his land, why does Will make the choice he does? How does he feel about his choice?
- *Making Connections*: Do you feel this statement is true? “Growing up isn’t easy. Certainty is nowhere. People, including me, are complicated.” (169)
- Discuss Will’s assertion, “The boy in me is done.” (169)

Chapter 37-38

- Why is Will ambivalent about his actions?
- Why does Casear want/have to leave Father and Will?
- How is Father “twice free”?
- How is Will now “a far-thinking man,” and what are his plans and dreams?

After Reading

Post-Reading Discussions or Writing Prompts:

Reflect on the title. Why was the story titled *Will’s Race for Home*?

What is the purpose of the parenthetical phrases throughout the novel? Give examples.

What are Will’s dominant character traits that allow him to survive and succeed? What are some examples where he exhibits or reveals each trait? Think of things he says or does or some things other people say about him.

Post-Reading Discussions or Writing Prompts (cont'd)

There are many instances when characters had to assess whether someone was friend or foe. When in the novel was this important.

Making Connections: When did you correctly or incorrectly assess a friend or foe? Why was it important?

What was the main conflict in the story?

Taking place about 25 years after the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, how did the war still affect the people participating in the Land Rush. Give specific examples from the text.

ARGUMENT WRITING

In what ways were these four types of conflict part of Will's story?

- man vs man
- man vs nature
- man vs worldview
- man vs himself

Argue which conflict to be resolved was the most important to the plot.

ILLUSTRATION CAPTIONING

Reader-pairs each choose a different illustration, creates a title and writes a caption that includes the relevant words from the text that the picture illustrates and a short explanation of the illustration.

CHAPTER TITLES

The chapters are not titled. Each student chooses 1-2 chapter(s) to skim or reread and title. They list the titles on a chart and see how their titles "tell" or review the story.

Adaptation: Divide the novel every three chapters, and readers title one 3-chapter section.

A HERO'S JOURNEY

How is *Will's Race for Home* a Hero's Journey? A Hero's Journey depicts a hero who goes on an adventure, is victorious in a decisive crisis, and comes home (or in this case, finds home) changed or transformed. There are traditionally 12 steps, but not every Journey will include all the steps.

I. DEPARTURE

- Ordinary World
- Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the Call (Not every protagonist will refuse the call; some may be ready to go.)
- Meeting the Mentor
- Crossing the Threshold

II. INITIATION

- Tests, Allies, and Enemies
- Approach to the Inmost Cave – ready to face his greatest fear and challenge
- Confrontation or Ordeal (a transformative event)
- The reward

III. RETURN

- Return “Home” (or in this case, establishing a home and returning to family)
- Resurrection (usually an ultimate showdown with a villain but in this case, Will fighting for his future)
- Return with the “Elixir” (what new skills, items, knowledge, or understanding of the world the hero now has)

AFTER READING TEXT REFORMULATIONS

Effective after-reading response employs a text reformulation strategy in which readers reconstruct text read into another type of text. This synthesis, a critical thinking skill that involves putting together assorted parts to make a new whole, helps readers in all disciplines not only relate information learned, but rethink the meaning of this learning and connect new learning to other learnings and their developing views of their world.

I AM POETRY

In “I Am” poetry, readers write from the perspective of something they have read in a text or textbook. In this case they write from the perspective of a character in the novel. The “I Am” poem follows a format that requires readers to read and analyze how the character would view its world and its place in the world, returning to the text multiple times to apply what they have learned. This writing also causes readers to synthesize new material with information they already know or new information they may research to create their poem. The poem can be written independently or collaboratively by pairs or triads. For more explanation and examples, see <https://www.amle.org/after-reading-response-i-am-poetry-for-synthesizing-text/>

“I Am” Poetry Standard Format

I am _____ [character’s name and identity]

I wonder _____

I hear _____

I see _____

I want _____

I am _____ [not the name; more information about the character]

I pretend _____

I feel _____

I touch _____

I worry _____

I cry _____

I am _____ [not the name; more information about the character]

I understand _____

I say _____

I dream _____

I try _____

I hope _____

I am _____ [character’s name, including additional information about the character as a conclusion]

Readers can form pairs or triads who write an I AM poem as —

- Will
- Father
- Caesar
- Belle
- Midnight
- Will’s mother
- John, the sandy-haired man
- Grandpa

POETRY IN TWO VOICES: Compare/Contrast and Making Connections

In Poetry in Two Voices, poets write from two perspectives, comparing and contrasting. Items or content that are similar are written directly across from each other and are read simultaneously; the contrasting details are written on separate lines and read one at a time, in whatever order the writer determines more effective. Or, the material can be written in the manner of a Venn diagram with the lines pertinent to both entities written in the middle. For more information and examples, see <https://www.amle.org/after-reading-response-poetry-in-two-voices-to-compare-and-contrast/>

For a teaching example, have two students read (perform) Paul Fleischman's Joyful Noise: Poetry in Two Voices "Honeybees."

Readers can compare any two characters, themselves and Will, or Will and a character from another class reading. Some examples:

"Will and Me"

"George and Caesar"

"Will and Father"

POST-READING RESEARCH

1. From different sources, pairs or triads research the 1889 Oklahoma Run and note what facts and information they found
 - were in the novel
 - were not included in the novel

Consider how the author used the actual facts to create a fictional story.
Make a classroom chart.

2. Research Civil War belt buckles.

The class can brainstorm symbols for their class or, individually, for themselves, and design a belt buckle. The teacher can present a lesson on symbolism.

OTHER READINGS about the Land Rush

Beautiful Land: A Story of the Oklahoma Land Rush by Nancy Antle.

OTHER READINGS about the Reconstruction Era

Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule by Harriette Gillem Robinet

The Glory Field by Walter Dean Myers

The Road to Freedom: A Story of the Reconstruction by Jabari Asim

Sugar by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Black Was the Ink by Michelle Coles

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Jewell Parker Rhodes is an award-winning and bestselling author and educator for both youth and adults. She is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Black Brother, Black Brother* and *Ghost Boys* which has won over 50 honors and awards.

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ALSO BY JEWELL PARKER RHODES



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