

Book Unit: Diamond Willow – “Seeing the Trail”

Developed by: Jen Reiter, 2014 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

Discipline / Subject: Reading – Language Arts

Topic: Reading, Poetry

Grade Level: 5-8; others with modification

Resources / References / Materials Teacher Needs:

Diamond Willow by Helen Frost

Author Site: <http://www.helenfrost.net/item.php?postid=25>

Willow Careful Harvest Sheet: <http://www.ntfpinfo.us/docs/other/UM2005-BirchCedarWillowCarefulHarvestFactsheet.pdf>

Text Set Resources, see attached page

Poetic Form: Found Poems definition: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/poetic-form-found-poem>

Found Poems from Read, Write, Think: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/found-poems-parallel-poems-33.html>

Lesson Summary:

The students will read *Diamond Willow* by Helen Frost. They will use a text set featuring non-fiction texts about successful blind sled dogs to make a recommendation to the characters about what they should do when an injury blinds one of their team dogs. They will analyze the author’s craft to draft original poetry. They will use a second text set to discover information about a legally blind musher who completed the Iditarod and is currently planning for another run.

Standards Addressed: (Local, State, or National)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.10

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Learning Objectives:

1. TLW use details found in text sets to sketch appropriate details.
2. TLW use information gathered from texts sites to support a decision and offer advice.
3. TLW create an original piece of writing based on a specific author's style.
4. TLW create a found poem that gives details from a specific character's point of view.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their participation in class discussions as well on their developed pieces of writing.

Procedural Activities:

Introduction/ Pre-Reading:

1. This book is a beautiful story of a young girl named Diamond Willow. Her name carries with it a lot of significance, as the students will learn by reading. Have the students write a journal entry about the meaning of, or story behind, their name. You may want to have the students complete this for homework so they can ask their parents. Alternatively, you could have the students write about a place that has a lot of significance for their families, as this will also play an important role in the novel.
2. Have the students read the beginning Author's Note. Share with the students either digitally or by printing, the Willow Harvesting sheet. Have the students do a Google Image search for, or provide photos of Diamond Willow branches. Have the students create sketches of a piece of furniture they would create using Diamond Willow wood. Assess by ensuring that the proper shapes are evident in the wood sketches. This will be important as the students read the novel.

Section One:

1. As the students prepare and begin to read, remind them that the novel is written in the shape of diamond poems. Have them flip through the novel and notice that none of the diamonds are quite the same shape. Refer to their studies of Diamond Willow wood from yesterday to determine why that is. Remind them also that the author has included "secret messages" in the poems. It is recommended that they read each poem in its entirety and then go back and read the "secret message." The secret message often gives the reader insight into what is happening in Diamond Willow's thoughts, even sometimes things she has yet to admit to herself.
2. Due to the unique style of the novel, you may want to complete pages 3-18 as a shared reading. This will allow you to model how to approach the reading of this unique author's style. Here are some discussion questions for this section:
 - Page 3: What do we learn about Diamond Willow from just the first poem?
 - Page 4: How does Diamond Willow get her unique name?
 - Pages 4 & 5: How does Diamond Willow describe herself? How does she feel about herself? Do you think she is happy?
 - Page 7: What is some advice that we can take from dogs about how we should teach each other?
 - Page 11 – 14: Can you think of a time that you felt the same way as Diamond Willow? A time you wanted to do something and then got nervous when it was time to do it? Do you think she is really ready to take this big trip on her own? What skills should she have to be able to do this?
 - Page 15 & 16: What precautions should she take as she makes an independent trip?
 - Page 17 & 18: Discuss the use of the animal/family characters and their comments on the events in the novel. Why would the author include these sections? What can we learn from them? Why is it important to have the animals be "family members?"
3. Have the students read through page 41 and then stop.
4. Present the students with the Text Set materials and give them time to explore the resources. The Text Set articles could be read digitally or printed.
5. Have students use the information gathered via the text sets to advise the family about what they should do about Roxy now that she is blind. The parents seem to want to put Roxy down, but Diamond Willow does not want that to happen. The advice could be written as a letter or presented as a debate.

Section Two:

1. Have the students complete the novel.
2. Have the student complete one or both of the following writing assignments.

Choice One: Found Poems

- Have the students reread only the “secret” messages in the poems. Divide the class into partners and assign each pair a set of pages to collect the messages from. Give the partnerships time to rehearse reading their messages aloud. (You may want to encourage some creativity in the presentation. Will they read together? Separately? How can they make it come alive?) When everyone is ready, have the class present all of the messages in “popcorn” reading fashion as one entire work. So, in effect, creating a poem from a poem.
- Discuss the idea the author did not include these hidden messages in the ancestors’ pages. Discuss why she may have made that choice.
- Their challenge is to create a found poem from the ancestors’ view point. Have them mine the ancestors’ pages for meaningful phrases and put one phrase on each index card. (You could assign a required number or range of phrases.) They can then use the cards to experiment with various sequences for the phrases. When they are pleased with their sequence, they can create a final version of their found poem.

Choice Two:

- Students can write their own diamond shaped poems with hidden messages inside. They could either write the poems from the ancestors’ points of view, or write their own persona stories.

Section Three: Relating it to Today’s Iditarod

- Share with the students the materials in the second Text Set. Give them time to explore the resources. This text set features information on Rachael Scdoris, a legally blind musher, who completed the Iditarod and is apparently contemplating another run at it in the next few years.
- The students can respond to the text set in writing by reflecting on whether or not they feel she should be able to compete in the race. They need to support their ideas with evidence from the text set. Alternatively, students could contemplate about whether disabled mushers should be able to compete and under what circumstances.

Materials Students Need:

Anchor Text: Diamond Willow by Helen Frost for individuals or partners

Text Set, see attached page

Index cards

Technology Utilized to Enhance Learning:

Text set articles, videos, and audio recordings – see attached sheet

Other Information:**Modifications for Special Learners/ Enrichment Opportunities:**

- The method of reading the anchor text could vary according to need. Students could read independently, with a partner, or in small groups.

Additional Information

- This novel could also be used in a Book Club format, grouping it with Love that Dog by Sharon Creech, another novel told in narrative poem form that has a focus on dogs. Dogku by Andrew Clements would be a fun way to introduce a “poetry dog novel” book club!

Diamond Willow Text Sets

Mid- Novel Text Set
Theme: Blindness in Sled Dogs

Anchor Text: Diamond Willow by Helen Frost

CBS News: “Blind Sled Dog Thrives with Brother’s Help”

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/blind-sled-dog-thrives-with-brothers-help/>

Gonzo is a sled dog who lives in New Hampshire. He continues to run with his team by relying on his brother for assistance on the trail.

AP Report: “Blind Sled Dog Thrives with Brother’s Help”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2NvOncgqhA>

Video news report version of Gonzo’s story.

Channel 2 News: “This Blind Sled Dog is Racing Her Way to Nome”

<http://iditarodch2.tv/2015/03/laura-the-blind-sled-dog-on-the-iditarod-trail/>

Iditarod musher Kelly Maxiner talks about his blind dog Laura during the 2105 Iditarod Race.

Huff Post: “Belle the Blind Sled Dog Won’t Give Up Racing”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/07/blind-sled-dog-race-belle-idaho-_n_6122884.html

A story from Idaho about a sled dog who lost her sight but continues to run. Includes text and video.

CBC News: “Blind Sled Dog Set to Retire”

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/blind-sled-dog-set-to-retire-1.803134>

Isobel, a blind sled dog from Canada, is set to retire from her team.

Rivers: Diary of a Blind Alaska Racing Sled Dog by Mike Dillingham

Sled Dog: Powerful Miracle by Stephen Person

Features a section on Isobel’s story.

Blindness in Dogs: <http://www.reachoutrescue.org/info/display?PageID=11145>

End of Novel Text Set
Theme: Should Disabled Mushers Be Allowed to Compete?

National Geographic: “Rachael Scdoris”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc6U1iDabI0>

A short segment about then sixteen-year-old Rachael as she was preparing for her dream of running Iditarod.

National Public Radio: “Blind Ambition: Woman Set for Iditarod”

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4522230>

Students could read the accompanying article or listen to the audio file of the broadcast about Rachael’s 2005 attempt.

Scholastic: “Blind Musher Takes on Iditarod”

http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/itarod/young_mushers/index.asp?article=blind.musher

A short article on Rachael’s 2006 run.

ESPN: Woman is First Legally Blind Musher to Finish Iditarod

<http://espn.go.com/sports/news/story?id=2373895>

An article about Rachael’s first finish.

Juneau Empire: “Former Iditarod Champion Helps Blind Musher”

http://juneauempire.com/stories/022408/out_250438507.shtml#.VodLNZMrLos

An article about Joe Runyan who assisted Rachael on her 2008 race.

Discovery Channel: Snowblind

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4522230>

A documentary about Rachael’s 2008 Iditarod.

Rachael’s Iditarod Biography:

<http://iditarod.com/race/2009/mushers/137-Rachael-Scdoris/>

No End in Sight: My Life as a Blind Iditarod Racer by Rachael Scdoris and Rick Steber

Rachel tells her Iditarod story. School Library Journal recommends it for grades eight and above. It would provide a lot of background material for the teacher if the text is too difficult for the students.

The Bulletin: Rachael Scdoris – From Musher, To Cyclist, To Mom

<http://www.bendbulletin.com/home/3769374-151/rachael-scdoris-from-musher-to-cyclist-to>

A recent article (2015) in honor of the tenth anniversary of Racheal’s accomplishment in finishing the Iditarod in which she hints at returning to the race.