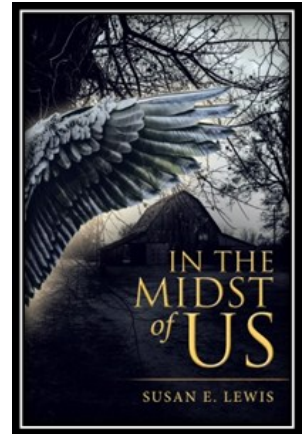


IN THE MIDST OF US

A Packet of Activities for Homeschool and Christian High School English Classes



Student standards for Reading: Literature – Key Ideas and Details

Objective: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Answers found in Appendix 4

1. How does Marc represent a typical teen as he deals with life issues? Is there anything about Marc's actions/responses that are not typical of teens today? If so, explain.
2. Why does Marc hide behind Denver?
3. Describe Denver's character traits.
4. What is it about Denver that draws some people to him?
5. How does Denver represent the ungodly world that we live in?
6. Marc seems to confront Denver only when angry. Is this good? Is this normal? How should Marc handle his anger?
7. How is Marc's final confrontation with Denver different than the other times?
8. Discuss Marc's transformation (character arc) through the story.

9. Would Maylee's circumstances have turned out differently if she had shared with Johnny and Ruth (at the beginning) what she went through with her father? Do you agree with her decision? Why or why not?
10. Why is it hard for Maylee to discuss or describe her spiritual conversion to Denver? To Marc?
11. Why do you think Maylee is attracted to Denver?
12. How is Johnny Jackson important to the story?
13. How do we see God's hand of protection?
14. Discuss Psalm 91:4

FOR DEEPER DISCUSSION

Dealing with Difficult Topics

1. Both Marc and Maylee experience betrayal by their earthly fathers. Some students may relate and possibly find it hard to see God as a good Father. The plot, discussions between characters (particularly with Johnny), and the conclusion of *In the Midst of Us* can provide a safe place to start students discussing how they can trust God, even when life has not been good.
2. Trusting God is difficult for Marc. Maylee's comments on page 130 are difficult for Marc to accept. He has to go through a lot more before he does trust God. Why is it easy for some and hard for others to trust God?
3. Abortion was not even a consideration for Maylee. But it is a prevalent topic of conversation in the world today. Discuss God's view, the world's view, and students' views. Psalm 139 is a great set of verses to use with the discussion of abortion

THEMES FOUND IN

In the Midst of Us

Objective: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

1. It doesn't matter what happened in your past or what is happening right now. No scheme of man, past or present, can thwart God's greater plan.
2. Some things are worth fighting for.
3. It is important to know how to handle peer pressure and temptations from the world.
4. God is always in our midst

THEME DISCUSSIONS

Suggested Activities

Goals: For teens to become proficient at (a) defending their choice to say NO and (b) relying on God to walk through the hard times with them

THEME #1 – IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HAPPENED IN YOUR PAST OR WHAT IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW. NO SCHEME OF MAN, PAST OR PRESENT, CAN THWART GOD'S GREATER PLAN.

1. Question: How do we see this in the book?
2. Question: What Bible characters also faced past injustices from others, and yet God's plan proved reliable and virtuous? [Share and discuss the lives of Joseph, King David, Jesus, and Paul]
3. Discuss: How does the following verse apply to this theme? *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

THEME #2 -- SOME THINGS ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

A. An Activity: Standing up for what is right

1. Have students get into small groups and make a list of causes that are worth fighting for. One member shares the group list with the class. You can have the students take notes and prepare a cumulative list to turn in along with the following assignment.

B. Object Lesson: What-if Scenario

1. What if—the students lived in a community where, once they reached a certain age, they were required to stand up for one cause—only one. (Picture the movie *Divergent*, except not a career, but a cause)
2. Each individual student must choose three on the list (created in prior activity) that he/she feels is most important. Then, the student must narrow the choice to one cause to defend and fight for.
3. Each student will write a speech of persuasion that will be presented to the class to convince the other students of the worthiness of the cause they have chosen. The speech must include a definition of the issue, why it is so important, and 3-5 steps or activities that will help change the need or situation.
4. As the speeches are given, students will complete a survey (see Appendix 1).
5. Students can be encouraged to act on their convictions. Any real movement or progress made by a student to stand up for his/her cause should receive recognition and perhaps extra credit or reward.

THEME #3 -- IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE AND TEMPTATIONS FROM THE WORLD

STANDING UP AGAINST: Peer Pressure and Temptations

A. Introduction to **PEER PRESSURE**:

1. Write down a number of scenarios or examples of negative and positive peer pressure on note cards and place them in paper bags. (See Appendix 2 for some suggestions)
2. Divide the class up into groups of 3 or 5, each group receiving a bag.
3. The students must quickly separate the negative and positive peer pressure cards.
4. The first team to do so wins
5. Discuss as a class since some of the issues could go either way.

B. Discussion of **SELF-IMAGE**:

1. Write the following statement on the board: Having a healthy self-image helps a person stand against peer pressure.
2. Students copy statement on a piece of paper or in their notebooks and write Agree or Disagree.
3. They must write one sentence explaining their reasoning.
4. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.

C. Group Activity:

1. Have students get into pairs and create a list of characteristics of a person with a healthy self-image.
2. As the groups share their lists, create a chart on the board.
3. If the word *personality* is mentioned, circle the word. If not, introduce *personality* to the chart.

D. Discussion of **PERSONALITY**:

1. Discuss different personality types. Narrow the types down to two—introverts and extroverts. Use the following definitions:

An Introvert is defined as a shy or reserved person who enjoys solitude or being with one or two friends. **An extrovert** is defined as a highly active, talkative person who enjoys being with people and enjoys larger social events.

2. In their notebooks, have the students **create a symbol** that represents themselves and their personality type.
3. Hand out small slips of paper. Have each student write which personality type he/she is (anonymously). Collect, tally, and present the results.
4. Display Psalm 139:13-18 (see Appendix 2). Have students discuss how these verses add to the discussion of personality types. Connect having a healthy self-image with this discussion of personality—agreeing with who God created you to be.

E. Discussion of **STRENGTH**:

1. Present the following statement: It takes a certain kind of strength to stand against peer pressure. (This will lead to a discovery of where our strength comes from.)
2. Students copy above statement on a piece of paper or in their notebooks and write Agree or Disagree.
3. They must write one sentence explaining their reasoning.
4. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.
5. Research: Using individual or class Thesauruses, have students find and write seven synonyms for *strength*. Create a list on the board.
6. Discussion: Present Isaiah 40:28-31 and 2 Chronicles 20:17 to the students (See pg. 2 of Appendix 2) Discuss how these verses relate to standing up against peer pressure. **(These promises of God to help us in our fights and difficulties are for everyone, no matter what personality.)** Keep the verses displayed in the classroom to remind students that peer pressure may be a battle, but God will help them fight it.
7. Present the list from Ephesians 6:10-18 of spiritual armor —

(belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit, and prayer)

F. Practice **STANDING AGAINST PEER PRESSURE:**

1. What-if Scenario—What if students are merchants in a village of soldiers who are about to go to war. Which pieces of spiritual armor (from Eph. 6) do they want to convince the soldiers to buy? You can even have fun with this and have each student create the pieces of armor and present their sales pitches to the class or to another class.

(Note: This activity is directed more toward standing up for what is right instead of standing against temptation. But this direction might appeal to some teens to help them counter peer pressure. Instead of trying to say no, which is often difficult, they can try to sell the peer on a better idea.)

G. Another Activity to Practice **STANDING AGAINST PEER PRESSURE—**

1. Defend your Choice: (an activity to build thinking skills and the skill to stand against something the student doesn't want to do)
2. See **Appendix 3** for details of this activity

H. Real Application of **STANDING AGAINST PEER PRESSURE:**

1. Go back to the list of negative peer pressure topics created in Activity A-. Introduction to Peer Pressure (pg. 5)
2. Take a class vote on the three or four that are the hardest and the most common that they face. (You can either keep this as a class discussion or make it a writing assignment.)
3. Optional: Place students in small groups and have them create ways of saying no or getting out of what they don't want to do when being pressured. You can have groups share their ideas.
4. You as the teacher can close the discussion with the spiritual aspects of the armor in Ephesians (truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Word of God, prayer) to help in their battles.
6. Also see **Relevant Bible Verses** at the end of this thematic study unit on page 9.

THEME #4 -- GOD IS ALWAYS IN OUR MIDST

1. For fun: Play Where's Waldo? Find a video on YouTube and let class play the game.
2. For Discussion: Many of us struggle, at times, knowing or feeling God's presence with us when life is difficult. Display the following quote and use in your class discussion: "God's action in our world is not always to perform the miraculous, but more often than not, to walk through our suffering with us." —Daniel Hans (The Apostle Paul is a good example from the Bible of this reality.)
3. Discussion: Where and how is this theme revealed in the book *In the Midst of Us*? (through guardian angels—the creature, through people—Johnny Jackson, through the Bible—Psalm 91:4)
4. Show a video to start a class discussion on God's presence even when we can't see Him. How can we know He's there? How do other strong Christian role models know?
 - Find videos of Christians like Lauren Daigle, Kari Jobe, and Chris Tomlin who give their testimony about God in our midst and making the choice to trust God during times of difficulty.

Relevant Bible Verses

Jeremiah 29:13 “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”

1 John 4:12 “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

Matthew 28:20 “. . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Deuteronomy 31:6 “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

Zephaniah 3:17 “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”

2 Kings 6:15-17 (The story of Elisha praying that the eyes of his servant be opened to see the presence of God’s angels in their midst)

John 16:7, 13-15 (Jesus talking about the Holy Spirit giving the disciples access to Jesus after He is gone.)

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

Symbols, Motifs, and Imagery

Objective: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

DEFINITIONS—

“In a literary work, **symbols** are images, ideas, sounds, or words that represent something else, and help to understand an idea or a thing. **Motifs**, on the other hand, are images, ideas, sounds, or words that help to explain the central idea of a literary work—the theme. A **symbol** may appear once or twice in a literary work, whereas a **motif** is a recurring element.”

Source: LiteraryDevices Editors. “Motifs” LiteraryDevices.net. 2019. // literarydevices.net/motifs/ (accessed November 6, 2019)

SYMBOLS –

- A. Some examples from the book are below. Have students look for other examples to discuss.
1. Page 15 “the kitchen linoleum buckling, the thin metal table warping and kneeling” (a symbol of the abuse that had been going on in the house)
 2. The shearing barn—Pages 56, 57 (From a distance the barn looks decent, but on closer inspection, it is dilapidated.); 108 (the place of Denver’s deceit when he takes away all pretense of caring for Maylee); 176 (the place Maylee pleads for May’s life, shearing away her past inhibitions of faith); 183-184 (a place where Maylee is vulnerable and must give in to what is happening around her); 202 (where Maylee is finally found—the shearing away of anxiety and loss)
 3. Johnny as the wise father figure

MOTIF —

The major motif in the story is one of **HIDDEN OR VEILED TRUTHS**

A. Discuss how and where this motif is presented in the novel. (See questions below.)

B. Questions for Motif Discussion (answers found in Appendix 4):

1. Chapter 2 presents only hints of Maylee's past. Have students give examples of phrases from Chapter 2 that provide those hints. How does this method enhance the motif?
2. Chapter 4 starts out as an elusive dream. What phrases indicate a dreamlike quality? How does the dream lend to the motif?
3. The creature plays a major role in the motif. Discuss its presence.
4. The place Marc goes to in Chapter 58 is veiled, never identified out right. How does this advance the motif?

C. **Deeper Discussion:** How are hidden or veiled truths important to the four themes of the story? Answer: This motif shows the nature of the spiritual battle that we are in and how our enemy lies and deceives and tries to keep the truth hidden from us.

D. **Activity:** Have students break into pairs or groups. They must come up with and write down an example of a hidden or veiled truth—(1) in a TV show, (2) in a movie, and (3) in real life. Students should be prepared to discuss for each of the three situations: the truth that is hidden, how it is hidden, and the consequences for the people involved..

IMAGERY—Strong word pictures developed by the use of specific word choices

Numerous examples of specific word choices that carry strong imagery are scattered throughout the story. Students are to discuss which words in the examples help develop the mental images and how.

1. Page 61 “Rock cliffs on the left side soon gave way to an opening where a brown sandy beach strewn with river rocks pushed against a curve in the river.”
2. Page 90 “I could almost taste her salty tears coursing down muddy cheeks.”
3. Page 108 “The August sun was **ruthless**” and “**ruined** hay bales”
4. Page 111 “A shadow hung heavy in the yard.”
5. Page 112 “The ride to the drive-in lot was like a trip to a cemetery—silent and somber”
6. Page 191 “Anger, my old companion, crouched beside me once again.”

ACTIVITY: A writing assignment—Have students create their own sentences with good imagery describing any or all of the following: (1) a river, (2) a sad little girl, (3) a hot day, (4) a place of gloominess, (5) a car ride, (6) a feeling like anger or elation. The students should write the individual sentences on separate cards to be turned in. The teacher chooses five of the best from each category and reads them aloud to the class without identifying the writer. The class votes for the best sentences with excellent imagery.

Date _____

[illegible]

Appendix 2

STANDING UP AGAINST: Peer Pressure and Temptations (Theme 3, Activity A)

List of Issues Teens Face

Examples of peer pressure—negative, positive, and either

1. To drink
2. To have sex before marriage
3. To go against your parent's rules
4. To try drugs
5. To skip school
6. To try out for a sports team or other school activity
7. To go to a party
8. To speak up in a group
9. To try a very hot jalapeno
10. To wear a certain outfit
11. To jump off a cliff
12. To shoplift
13. To tell a lie
14. To visit a church or youth group
15. To sit with the new student at lunch
16. Other choices -----

Appendix 2 (Continued)

BIBLE VERSES

Psalm 139:13-18 “For You created my inmost being, You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

Isaiah 40:28-31 ”Do you know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youth grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

2 Chronicles 20:17 “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.”

Appendix 3 – An Object Lesson

DEFENDING YOUR CHOICES –

Standing against something you DO NOT want to do. (An Activity from page 7):

Directions: Prior to class, the teacher creates cards (enough for each student) with **one** of the following categories written on it. Make three of each category or enough for every student to get a slip of paper.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Vacation | 6. Car |
| 2. Pet | 7. Paint color and style for bedroom |
| 3. Movie | 8. Activity for birthday |
| 4. Restaurant | 9. Theme for homecoming or prom |
| 5. After school or summer job | 10. After-prom activity |

- A. Put slips of paper in a bag. Have each student draw out one slip. They are not to share which category they draw.
- B. Either in their notebook or on a sheet of paper, students are to write down the category and an example of something that fits in that category that they would **NOT** want to do or buy.
- C. The student is to create a well-written paragraph of at least five sentences (introductory, three supporting sentences, and a closing sentence) defending his/her choice to say NO to the decision. The paragraph should be 100-150 words in length. A sample is below.
- D. The teacher chooses one student to present his/her argument first. The other students who have the same category must stand up next to present their cases. The goal is to present his/her own argument in a stronger way than the previous student does. After reading all the paragraphs, each student may choose to add to their argument (ad lib).
- E. After each category presents, lead a discussion as to how the arguments held up. What were strong points? What were weak points?

Sample Paragraph

If I was given a choice as to how to redecorate my room, I would not choose pastel colors nor use fluffy accents. To me, pastels are not bold colors. I want my choices to reflect a confident, strong personality. I believe deep, rich, and bold colors show fortitude, determination, and strength of character. Whereas pale pastels express meekness, mildness, even inactivity. And when considering accents for my room, fluffy seems too impractical. I prefer natural accent pieces, like baskets—a very practical item. As a senior, it's time to get serious about life and my future. I want to start thinking more like a confident adult. I know decisions down the road will be more important than bedroom colors, but I start today by standing against using pastels and fluff as a decorative style.

Appendix 4

Answers to Discussion Questions

1. Marc reacts in ways that are both healthy and unhealthy. Unhealthy—he doesn't want to talk about his feelings, avoids issues, or gets angry. Healthy—He finds other activities to occupy himself like fishing and getting a job. Whether these are typical of teens is an opinion question.
2. Hiding behind Denver was an easy out when Marc first moved to Cedar Knob. Denver befriended Marc and was somewhat of a protector. Marc was not drawn to Denver because of Denver's popularity, as some teens would be.
3. Denver's character traits—bold, strong, outgoing, confident
4. Other students are drawn to Denver because of his confidence. He also pays attention to people, even though it may not be sincere. This is something young adults don't always recognize. People like Denver can easily draw teens into a situation they shouldn't be a part of (if they are not strong in their own personality and purpose).
5. Denver represents the ungodly world with his deception, insincerity, boldness in pursuing what he wants, and his arrogance.
6. Marc confronting Denver when he is angry is not good, but it is normal. He should back away and take his time to think calmly before confronting an issue. Students may have other ideas.
7. In Marc's final confrontation with Denver, he no longer reacts in uncontrolled anger. He is standing for what is right, protecting someone he cares about. He finds something (someone) worth fighting for.
8. Marc's character arc—He goes from avoiding or reacting wrongly to conflicts and uncomfortable issues to finding the strength to stand against something that is wrong and stand up and fight for someone he loves.
9. Opinion question
10. The experience Maylee has in church is new to her, and both Denver and Marc react negatively. Denver with anger and Marc with avoidance.

11. Maylee is attracted to Denver because he pays attention to her, and he is outgoing and popular (strong but toxic reasons that any young teen girl needs to be cautious of). Even with Maylee's negative experiences in her past with bold and strong men (as we find out later) these types of people are what she is used to, and she has not yet learned to fight against them.
12. Johnny Jackson is the voice of spiritual truth.
13. God's hand of protection is seen in both the spiritual world with the creature and in the natural world with Johnny, Ruth, and eventually Marc as he runs after Carly and then stands up for Maylee.
14. The first part of the verse is a symbolism of God's protection that is brought to life in *In the Midst of Us*. The second part of the verse—"God's faithful promises are your armor and protection" is a truth we can stand on.

ANSWERS TO THE THEME #1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Page 3)

THEME #1 – It doesn't matter what happened in your past or what is happening right now. No scheme of man, past or present, can thwart God's greater plan.

How do we see this in the book?

1. Though her own father allowed abuse, God led Maylee to the loving Jackson family.
2. Though Denver violated Maylee, God gave Maylee a beautiful daughter. (Ps 139)
3. Marc grew strong in spite of the bad situations of his past. He became one who stood up for what is right. He found a godly cause (and person) to fight for.

ANSWERS TO THE MOTIF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Hints from Chapter 2—

Page 5 “I wondered if she knew why I was there.”

Page 7 “Papa had been taken away. And I was glad about that.”

Page 8 “I didn’t know where Papa was. Did I even want to see him again?”

2. Dreamlike qualities in Chapter 4—

Page 14 “. . . nightmarish images from the past flying from one corner of my room to the other.”

Page 15 “The scene emerged in our old kitchen”

“Scenes blurred in and out.”

“, . . . his voice a distant muffle.”

Page 18 “Darkness and light ebbed in and out with each stomp.”

3. The creature’s role in the motif—He can only be seen by Marc. The creature is not visibly present all the time but does show up at the right moments when protection is needed. He is obviously supernatural, appearing suddenly even through walls (as in Chapter 58).

4. The hidden aspect of the building (which houses prostitution) at the edge of town is not identified. Symbolically this reflects the efforts of our enemy to hide his maneuvers to tempt and corrupt us with things of this world.