

A Series of Unfortunate Events - The Bad Beginning -



By

Lemony Snicket

A Novel Study
by Nat & Joel Reed

A Series of Unfortunate Events

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on between one and two chapters of **A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning** and is comprised of five of the following different activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language Activities
- Extension Activities

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, as well as in reasoning and critical thinking. Students will also be expected to provide clear answers to questions and well-constructed explanations. It is critical as well that students be able to relate events and the feelings of characters to their own lives and experiences and describe their own interpretation of a particular passage.

A strength of the unit is that students can work on the activities at their own pace. Every activity need not be completed by all students. A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) so that students may organize their work and keep it all in one place. A **Student Checklist** is also included (p.6) so that a record of completed work may be recorded.

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include belonging, dealing with adversity, courage, perseverance, the destructive power of greed, the theater and acting.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homonyms
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *singular/plural*
8. Identify *anagrams*
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Create an Information Card
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a comic strip
6. Design a wanted poster

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Synopsis

Dear Reader,

I'm sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant. It tells an unhappy tale about three very unlucky children. Even though they are charming and clever, the Baudelaire siblings lead lives filled with misery and woe. From the very first page of this book when the children are at the beach and receive terrible news, continuing on through the entire story, disaster lurks at their heels. One might say they are magnets for misfortune.

In this short book alone, the thee youngsters encounter a greedy and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast.

It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting down this book and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing.

With all due respect,

Lemony Snicket. (The Publisher)

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found online at such sites as the following: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Series_of_Unfortunate_Events

Author Biography

Lemony Snicket

Born Daniel Handler on February 28, 1970, in San Francisco, California, Lemony Snicket became well-known for his series of novels for children, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, featuring the Baudelaire siblings, Violet, Klaus and Sunny. Books in the series include *The Bad Beginning* (1999), *The Vile Village* (2001), *The Slippery Slope* (2003), *The Grim Grotto* (2004), *The Penultimate Peril* (2005) and *The End* (2006). A film, *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*, directed by Brad Silberling, appeared in 2004.



Courtesy of the following website: www.biography.com

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapter:

Lemony Snicket has certainly chosen an intriguing title for his novel. Most people, however, would rather not have a series of unfortunate events happen to them personally. What would be three events you would NOT wish to have happen to you?

1	
2	
3	



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

despair	misfortune	distracted	trivial
retrieve	device	executor	misspoken

1. My cousin asked me to be the _____ of his estate.
2. I hate to bother the principal about so _____ a matter.
3. When his pet budgie died, Max fell into a state of complete _____.
4. Milos Raonic was about to serve the ball when he was suddenly _____ by a noisy fan.
5. Uncle Charlie invented a _____ that will open a can of beans in three seconds.
6. Once Councilor Augustine realized she had _____, she quickly apologized.
7. He was about to _____ the golf ball when a huge dog appeared before him.
8. I'm afraid I had the _____ of running afoul of the law when I was young.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** for most of Chapter One?

2. For each of the three main characters listed in the following chart, find one thing from the story which would describe this person (either his/her appearance or personality).

Violet	
Klaus	
Sunny	

3. Even though the Baudelaire children were intelligent and resourceful, there was something rather unusual about them. What was it?

4. What terrible news did Mr. Poe deliver to them in this chapter?

5. The children remembered that Mr. Poe always seemed to have a _____ and often excused himself from the table to have a fit of _____ in the next room.

6. Think of three appropriate **adjectives** which would describe Mr. Poe:

Mr. Poe	1.	2.	3.
---------	----	----	----

7. What was to become of the great fortune that the children's parents had amassed?

Good to Know – Skipping Stones

Violet loves to skip stones on the water – which requires a good throwing arm and a flat rock. Did you know that there is a North American Stone Skipping Association, which was founded by Coleman-McGhee in 1989? The world record according to the Guinness Book of Records is **51 skips** set by Russell Byars on July 19, 2007.

Language Activity



A. Will the real Mr. Poe please stand up!

Mr. Poe comes across as being a rather odd, mysterious person. It is probably no accident that the author chose the name, Mr. Poe, for this particular character. A more well-known Mr. Poe is the famed writer, **Edgar Allan Poe**, who gained world-wide attention for his eerie tales of mystery and the macabre!

Using resources in your school library or on the Internet do some research into this remarkable author and record three fascinating facts about his life and/or accomplishments.

I	
II	
III	

B. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One "... and had pleasant facial features..."

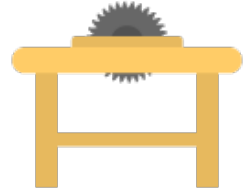


Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

The sound of waves on the beach	
A scary Jack o-lantern	
Your own example	

C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters.

Word	Anagram	Clue
there		A number.
words		A weapon.
slender		Bankers are often _____.
where		A person who cuts wood or stone.
table		The sound a goat might make.
stone		What you might take in class.
details*		Becomes wider, larger or more open.

* A tough one!

D. Place the following words from this chapter in **alphabetical order**.

rife	1.
retrieve	2.
stone	3.
rather	4.
room	5.
previous	6.
reached	7.
slender	8.
pleasant	9.
really	10.

Extension Activities



A. Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in this section of **A Series of Unfortunate Events**. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6

B. Poe Was a Poet ~ Perhaps You Too?

As well as writing many spooky stories, Edgar Allan Poe was probably most famous for one of his most disturbing poems – *The Raven*.

There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem for which Poe was so adept at creating. One of the forms of poetry that is the most fun to tackle in the **Diamante** poem.

The Diamante Poem

The diamante poem has a distinct form and a distinct shape. Directions for creating one is as follows:

Line 1 - Noun or subject – one word.

Line 2 - Two adjectives that describe Line 1.

Line 3 - Three *'ing* words that describe line 1 (i.e. *playing*).

Line 4 - Four nouns – the first two are connected with Line 1, the last two are connected with Line 7.

Line 5 - Three *'ing* words that describe Line 7.

Line 6 - Two adjectives that describe Line 7.

Line 7 - One noun synonym for the subject.

Following the above instructions, try your hand at writing a diamante poem using an idea, event or character from Chapter One of the novel as your inspiration.

Title: _____
