

# Belle Prater's Boy



By

Ruth White

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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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](http://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 two or three chapters of *Belle Prater's Boy* and is comprised of these activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### 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.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include family and friendship, bullying, loyalty, personal growth and facing the ghosts that haunt us.

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### List of Skills

#### Vocabulary Development

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

#### 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. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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## Synopsis

When Belle Prater disappears, Belle's boy, Woodrow, comes to live with his grandparents in Coal Station, Virginia. Woodrow's cousin Gypsy lives next door and is as curious as the rest of the town about his mother's disappearance. Woodrow is cross-eyed and wears hand-me-downs, but Gypsy is impressed by his charm and witty stories. As they spend time together, the cousins find they have a lot in common, and they become best friends during their sixth grade year. Gypsy is the town beauty, but she has hidden sorrows and secrets of her own. She wonders how Woodrow can accept his mother's disappearance when she's never gotten over her father's death. That's when Woodrow tells Gypsy the secret about his mother. He's the only one who knows because he's Belle Prater's boy. [The Publisher]

## Author Biography

*Ruth White*

Ruth White was born in 1942 in Whitewood, Virginia. Although her family was very poor, her parents had a great love for reading which they instilled in their young daughter. When she was five her father was killed by another man in a brawl. A few years later her mother moved the family to Michigan. When she grew up Ruth became a teacher, then wrote a number of books for young readers including *Sweet Creek Holler*, *Weeping Willow* and the Newbery Honor Book, *Belle Prater's Boy*. She currently lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.





# Belle Prater's Boy



*By Ruth White*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapters 1-2



### Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *Belle Prater's Boy* is Gypsy, a twelve-year-old girl who lives in Coal Station, Virginia with her mother. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read. What do you think makes for an unforgettable **protagonist**?




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

speculation	evidence	traipse	convergence
conveniences	proclaimed	abomination	mystic

1. As a member of the jury, I hoped the prosecution would present more \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Everyone thought that burning the country's flag was an \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The mayor \_\_\_\_\_ loud and clear that he would not consider resigning.
4. Grandpa's house did not have many of today's modern \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The old lady in the corner house was thought to have \_\_\_\_\_ powers.
6. “It is all \_\_\_\_\_ and not based on facts,” the police officer said.
7. The town was built at the \_\_\_\_\_ of Black River and Slag Creek.
8. There was no place for her to \_\_\_\_\_ unless she went out in her nightgown.

# Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter Two?


2. What crisis did the Prater family experience early one October morning in 1953?


3. Uncle Everett's occupation was that of a \_\_\_\_\_.

4. What factor finally made Woodrow's grandparents take him into their home?


5. What distinguishing features marked the following characters:

Gypsy	
Woodrow	

6. One of the first things Gypsy does was to ask her cousin for details about his mother's disappearance. Why might this have been a difficult topic for Woodrow to address with his cousin?


7. Where did Woodrow think the secret of his mother's disappearance lay? Why do you think he felt so strongly about this?


8. How was Belle quite different in appearance than her sister? How would this have probably affected her growing up?

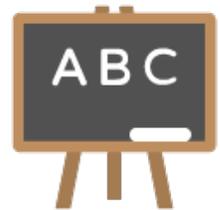

9. What event from the sisters' past had a traumatic effect on Belle's life?


10. How did Gypsy treat her stepfather, Porter? Why do you think she treated him this way?


## Language Activities



**A.** 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 Two: ... *her big, breezy, yellow kitchen...*



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

A mountain in the early morning	
The call of a robin	
Your choice.	

## B. 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. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first two chapters of *Belle Prater's Boy*.

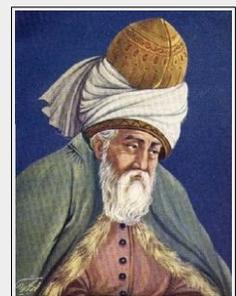
Word	Anagram	Clue
poems		Sulks.
great		Shred.
words		An ancient weapon.
sleep		Removes the outer covering.
hills		A person who works with a swindler to encourage others.
stove		Elects.
north		Thistle.

Now find two additional words from the first two chapters which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

Word	Anagram	Clue

### Good to Know ~ Jalal al-Din Rumi

Rumi (1207-1273) was a mystic poet of ancient Persia. His poems have been translated into many languages from Persian, the original language of most of his poems. The words *Jalal al-Din* mean *Glory of the Faith* in the Arabic language. When the Mongols invaded central Asia between 1215 and 1220 the poet and his family as well as a group of disciples fled westward. Rumi travelled extensively during his life. His tomb in Konya, Turkey continues to draw visitors to this day.



## C. Coal Miner.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following famous quatrain was written by the acclaimed poet, Atrocious Halitosis. It is entitled, **Coal Miner**.

*I worked the coal round Sydney Bay,  
In the blackest hole in the worstest way,  
'Twas a plum-hard way to earn my keep,  
But we're proud and strong, the men of the deep.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - A - B - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first two chapters of our novel.

### The Quatrain Poem

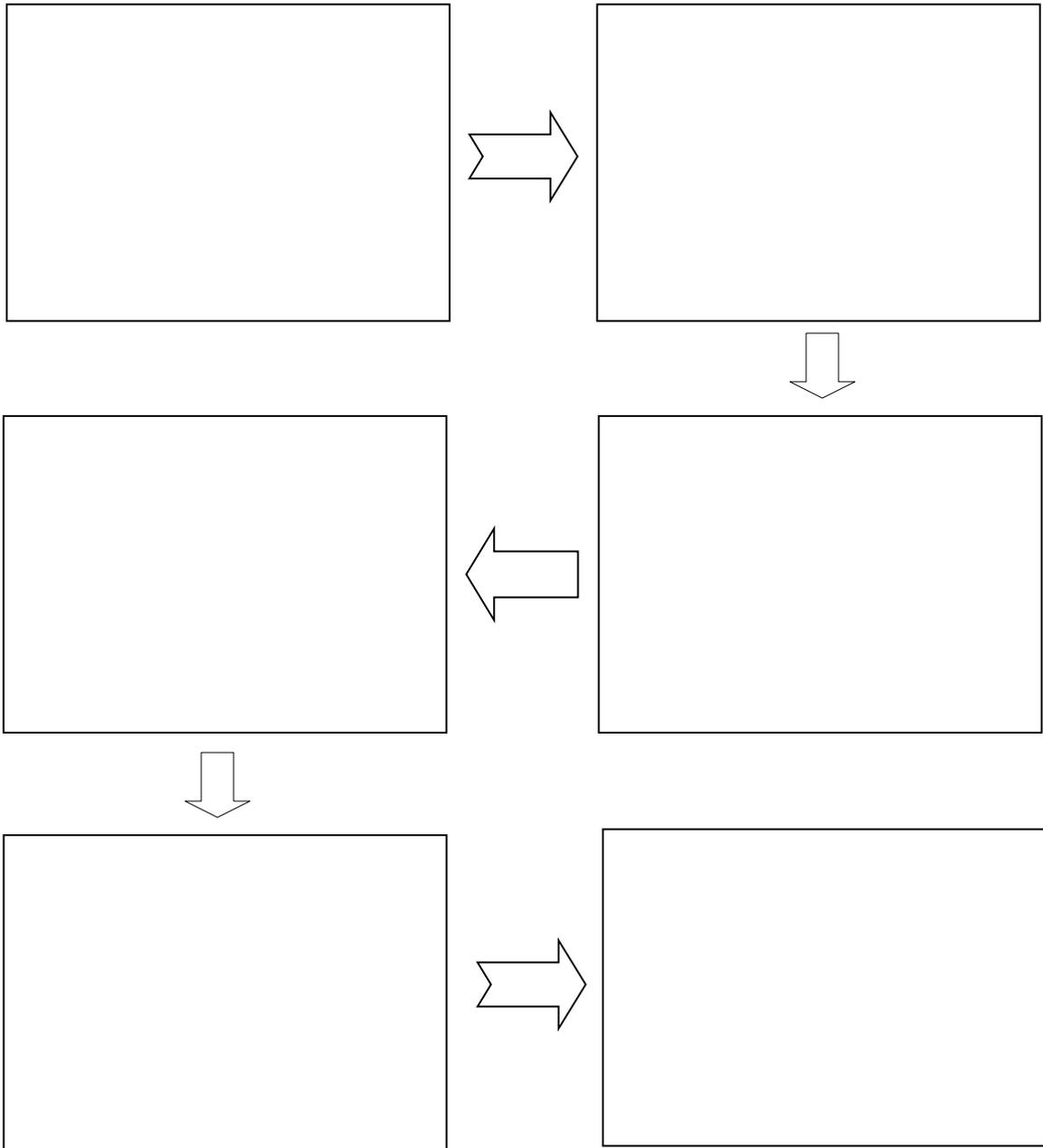
Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: \_\_\_\_\_


Why do you think the poet uses the word **worstest**, instead of a word like *worse*?


## D. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in these chapters. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



## Extension Activity



### Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first two chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6