

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground



By

Rita Williams-Garcia

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground

*By Rita Williams-Garcia*



## Table of Contents

Suggestions and Expectations	3
List of Skills	4
Synopsis / Author Biography	5
Student Checklist	6
Reproducible Student Booklet	7
Answer Key	76

**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).

Copyright © 2018 Nat Reed  
Revisions Completed in 2025  
All rights reserved by author.  
Permission to copy for single classroom use only.  
Electronic distribution limited to single classroom use only.  
Not for public display.

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground

By Rita Williams-Garcia



## 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 *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground* and is comprised of these different 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 grief, anger, loss, family dynamics, courage, personal growth and the blues (music).

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground

By Rita Williams-Garcia

## 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
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 about 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

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground

By Rita Williams-Garcia



## Synopsis

From beloved Newbery Honor winner and three-time Coretta Scott King Award winner Rita Williams-Garcia comes a powerful and heartfelt novel about loss, family, and love...

Clayton feels most alive when he's with his grandfather, Cool Papa Byrd, and the band of Bluesmen—he can't wait to join them, just as soon as he has a blues song of his own. But then the unthinkable happens. Cool Papa Byrd dies, and Clayton's mother forbids Clayton from playing the blues. And Clayton knows that's no way to live.

Armed with his grandfather's brown porkpie hat and his harmonica, he runs away from home in search of the Bluesmen, hoping he can join them on the road. But on the journey that takes him through the New York City subways and to Washington Square Park, Clayton learns some things that surprise him. [Courtesy of the publisher]

"This slim novel strikes a strong chord."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

## Author Biography Rita Williams-Garcia

In addition to *Gone Crazy in Alabama*, Rita Williams-Garcia is the author of several distinguished novels for "young adults. She is the winner of a number of awards for her writing including a *Coretta Scott King Honor Book*, *Newbery Honor Book* and the *Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction*. Rita was born in Queens, New York in 1957. She now lives in Jamaica, New York and teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts.



[Biography courtesy of the publisher]



# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground



*By Rita Williams-Garcia*

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

# Clayton Byrd Goes Underground

By Rita Williams-Garcia

## Section 1. When, Cool Papa, When – Lost at Sea



### Before you read this section:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground* is Clayton, a young boy who lives with his mother and grandfather in Queens, New York. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. Who would you say is your *most favorite* character ever? What made you select this character?




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

pleading	secure	harmony	precise
seasoning	embark	encounter	jammed

1. A professional surveyor has to be sure his/her measurements are \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The explorers were about to \_\_\_\_\_ on a safari into the country's interior.
3. The trio simply sat and \_\_\_\_\_ for about an hour before beginning to record.
4. “You're going to need more \_\_\_\_\_ before playing with us,” the bandleader stated.
5. The Beach Boys are famous for the \_\_\_\_\_ featured in their songs.
6. Pat found herself \_\_\_\_\_ with the principal when he suddenly picked up the phone.
7. I feel very \_\_\_\_\_ living next door to the police station.
8. I have lived here all my life and have yet to \_\_\_\_\_ a zombie after dark.

# Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One.


2. Investigate: The author mentions in the first chapter that Cool Papa hit a few ghost notes. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, find out the meaning of **ghost note**. Be prepared to share your investigation with others in your class.


3. What musical instrument did each of the following play:

Cool Papa Byrd	
Jack Rabbit Jones	
Big Mike	
Hector Santos	
Clayton Byrd	

4. What do you think Cool Papa meant when he said, *Happy people need the blues to cry, and sad people need the blues to laugh?* (You may wish to discuss this statement with a classmate before responding.)


5. What was Clayton waiting for permission from his grandfather to do? What was his grandfather waiting for before granting him permission?


6. How were Cool Papa and the other members of the group paid for performing?


7. According to Cool Papa, a bluesman ain't a bluesman without that deep-down \_\_\_\_\_.

8. Describe the relationship that Clayton's mother had with Cool Papa.


9. What were the interests of Clayton's father, Mr. Miller?


10. Why do you suppose Cool Papa had such a high opinion of himself?


11. Why had Cool Papa been *light on the fathering side* when Ms. Byrd was a child? How had this affected Ms. Byrd now that she was an adult?


## Language Activities



### A. 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 three chapters of *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
open		A slangy denial.
times		Hit.
blues		Greases.
smile		Fruits.
notes		The start of something.
stayed		Dependable.
reason		A married woman in Mexico.

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

Word	Anagram	Clue

**Check out the Author's Website:**

<https://rita-williamsgarcia.squarespace.com/about-me>

## B. A Quatrain Poem Celebrates The Blues.

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 quatrain is the first four lines of the blues song, **Key to the Highway**, written by Eric Clapton and Little Walter.

I got the key to the highway,  
and I'm billed out and bound to go  
I'm gonna leave here runnin',  
cause walkin' is most too slow



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - B - C - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBB, 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 three chapters of our novel (like **singing the blues**).

### The Quatrain Poem

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

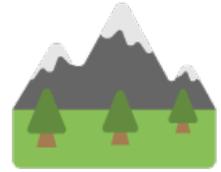
Title: \_\_\_\_\_


### Bonus Question.

In the above poem why do you think the lyricists used the expression *most to slow* instead of *much too slow*?


## C. Cliffhanger

The chapter, *Lost at Sea*, contains an important literary device called a **cliffhanger**. A cliffhanger usually occurs at the end of a chapter when the author leaves the reader in suspense. How is this true of this chapter? Why do you think the author ended the chapter this way?




**D.** A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. The following is an example from Chapter Two is: *Jazz sounded like angry elephants blowing their trumpets at each other.*



What is being compared in this example?

--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

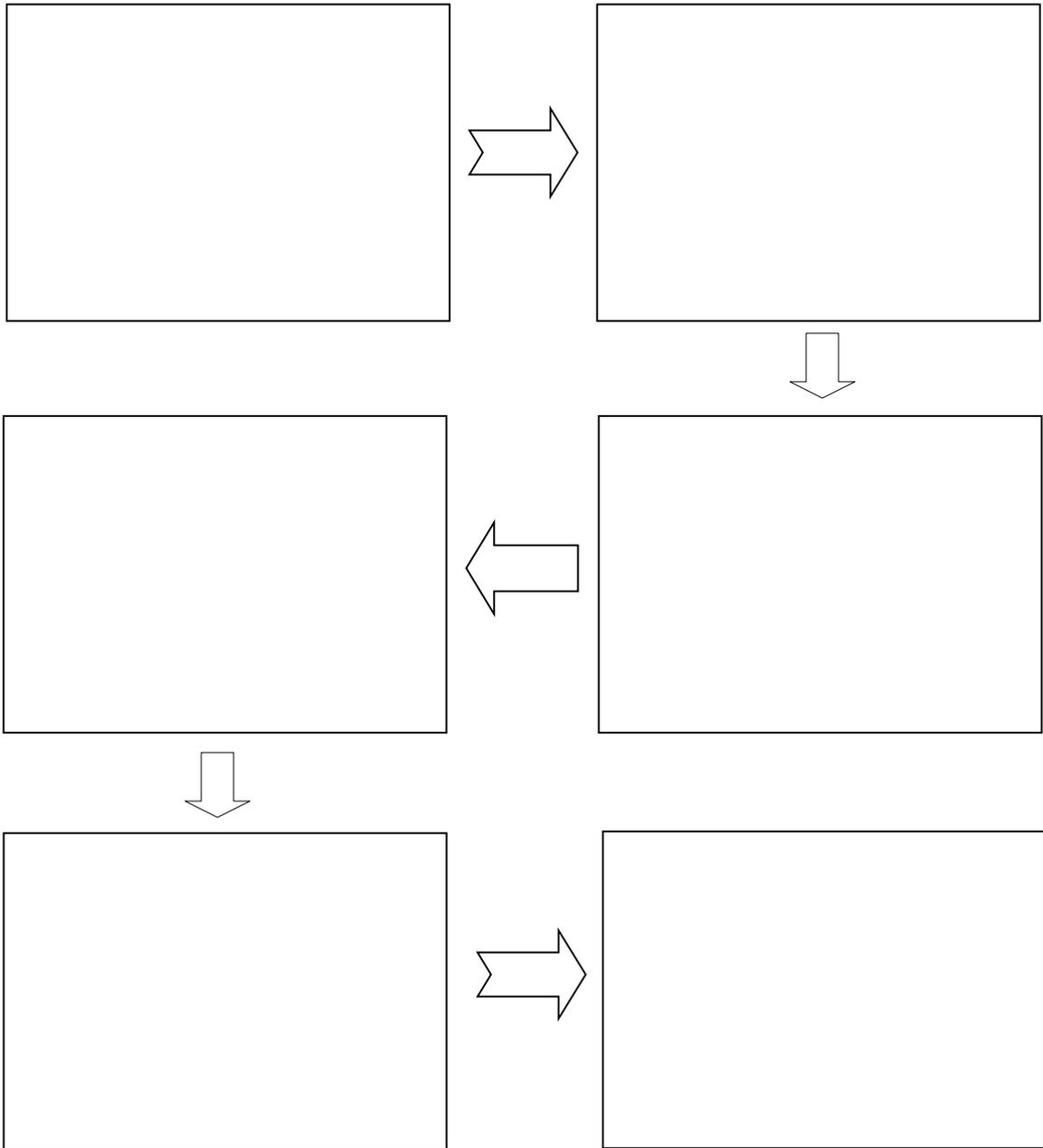
a) a person playing the guitar (but not very well)


b) the roar of the crowd


c) your choice

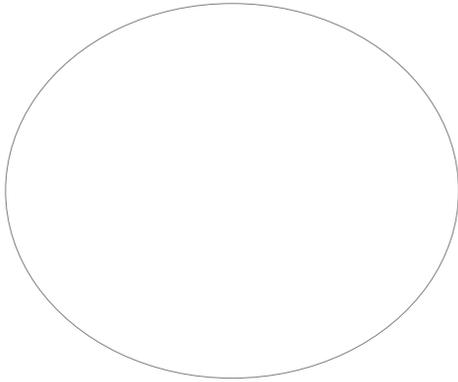

## E. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in this section. 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.

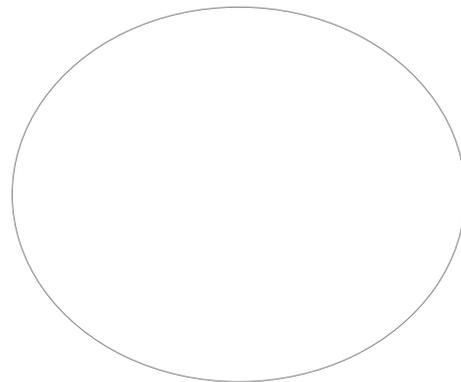


## F. 5 Ws and an H.

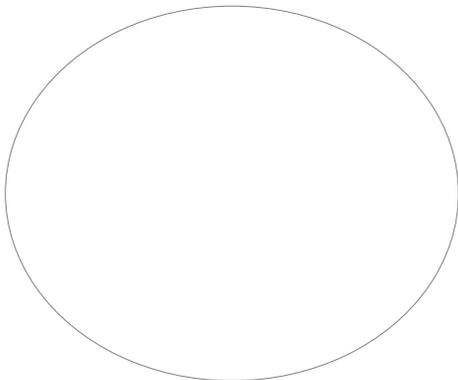
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



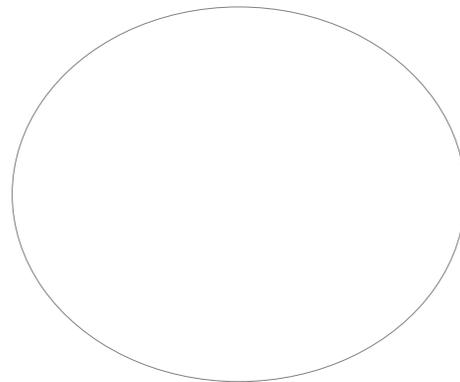
**WHO?**



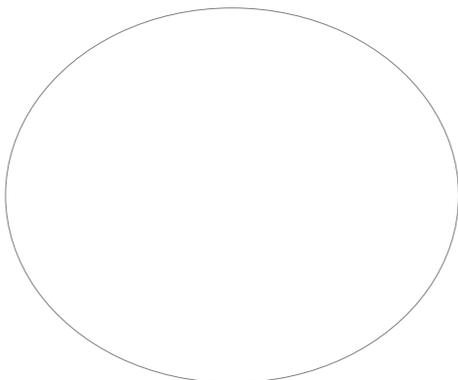
**WHAT?**



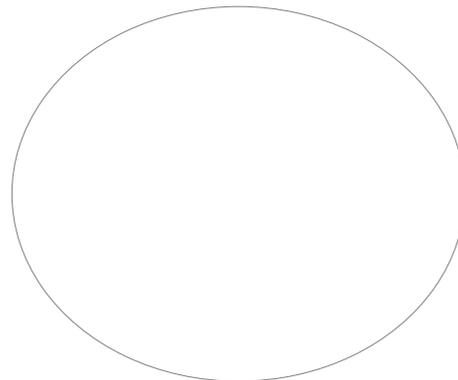
**WHEN?**



**WHERE?**



**WHY?**



**HOW?**

## 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 three chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6