The Twenty-One Balloons

By

William Pène du Bois

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.

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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 one chapter of the novel and is comprised of the following activities:

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

A portfolio cover (page 7) as well as a Checklist (page 6) are included so that students may keep 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 loyalty, balloons and balloon travel, scientific inventions of the late 1800s, the lure of wealth, the importance of community, cooperation, creativity, and acceptance of others.

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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
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

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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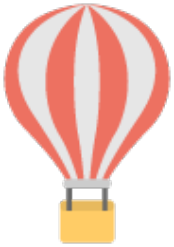

Synopsis

Professor William Waterman Sherman intends to fly across the Pacific Ocean. But through a twist of fate, he lands on Krakatoa, and discovers a world of unimaginable wealth, eccentric inhabitants, and incredible balloon inventions.

Winner of the 1948 *Newbery Medal*.

"William Pene du Bois combines his rich imagination, scientific tastes, and brilliant artistry to tell a story that has no age limit."—*The Horn Book*

[Summary courtesy of the publisher]

Author Biography
William Pène du Bois

William Sherman "Billy" Pène du Bois was an American writer and illustrator of books for young readers. He is best known for *The Twenty-One Balloons*, published in April 1947 by Viking Press, for which he won the 1948 Newbery Medal. He was twice a runner-up for the Caldecott Medal for illustrating books written by others, and two Caldecott Honor picture books, which he also wrote. [Biography courtesy of Wikipedia]

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

Ruby Holler

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1 – Professor Sherman's Incredible Loyalty

Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or "good guy". The main character of ***The Twenty-One Balloons*** is not your typical protagonist, but Professor William Waterman Sherman, who suddenly finds himself the center of world-wide attention. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read. 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.

fraternity	illustrious	agitate	entice
ascension	balustrade	unprecedented	disposal

1. I don't think that Cooper meant to _____ the coach as much as he did.
2. "All of my resources are at your _____," the president offered.
3. Georgina's actions were completely _____ and caught everyone off guard.
4. The Western American Explorers' Club is indeed a well-respected _____.
5. Do you think you can _____ the rabbit to come closer by offering a carrot?
6. His _____ to the leadership of his party was most unexpected.
7. Tom Hanks' _____ acting career was capped off with an Oscar.
8. Peter Pan leaned over the _____ and shook his fist at the pirates.

Questions

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

2. What was Professor Sherman's goal?

3. Describe how this mission had a rather mysterious and unfortunate end.

4. Answer True or False:

a) The story took place in the year 1983. True or False

b) The captain of the S.S. Cunningham was John Simon. True or False

c) The Western American Explorers' Club was located in San Diego. True or False

5. Why did Sherman feel it necessary to first tell the story of his extraordinary adventures to the Western American Explorers' Club?

6. Of all the people that put pressure on Sherman to divulge the details of his trip, who would <u>you</u> have found the hardest to say “no” to? Why?

7. How did Captain Simon take advantage of his part in the adventure?

8. How did Captain Simon's actions make life even more difficult for the professor?

9. From what you have learned about Professor Sherman to this point in the story, how would you describe his personality? Support your answer with proof from the novel.

Language Activities

A. Balloons

It already seems evident that balloons are going to play an important part in this novel. What, though, do you really know about this everyday item which we mostly take for granted? Did you know, for instance, that the first rubber balloon was made by the scientist, Michael Faraday in 1824? Did you know that before this they were made from dried animal bladders? Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research <u>three</u> additional facts about balloons and record these points below.

1	
2	
3	

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 chapter of ***The Twenty-One Balloons***.

Word	Anagram	Clue
wired		Uncanny.
weather		A garland or decoration.
wrote		A tall, narrow building.
report		You may carry my luggage.
worse		A distributer of seeds.
later		Wide awake.
tender		Paid someone to use something.

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

Word	Anagram	Clue

C. Next to each pair of words indicate whether each is an example of a Synonym (S). Antonym (A), or Homophone (H).

1	approach - depart		6	flotsam - debris	
2	withhold - donate		7	fashionable - antiquated	
3	medicine - pharmaceutical		8	exhaustion - debilitation	
4	persuade - coax		9	course - coarse	
5	healed - heeled		10	bestow - deprive	

D. A Quatrain Poem Celebrates Balloons.

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 famous poem, ***My Balloon***, written by the renowned poet, Atrocious Halitosis.

For my birthday I got a red balloon,
As big as my daddy's truck.
I attached it to my sister's cat,
Now its halfway to the moon.

Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A – B – C – A.** 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 chapter of our novel (like **balloons**, ***ships or explorers***).

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: _____

E. Cliffhanger

Chapter One 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 in Chapter One? Why do you think the author ended the chapter this way?

F. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration –** a literary device where the author **r**epeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One: *They sent a reporter to the Murray **H**ill **H**otel . . .*

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

The popping of a balloon.	
A ship's whistle as it comes into port.	
Your choice.	

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

1	2
3	4
5	6