

The Underneath



By

Kathi Appelt

A Novel Study
by Joel Michel Reed

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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 several chapters of *The Underneath* and is comprised of five of the following 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.

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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 *anagrams*
7. Use of singular / plural nouns
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Determining alphabetical order
11. Identify *personification*
12. 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.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Complete a character comparison
3. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write an author biography
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Sheet
9. Write a poem

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

A calico cat, about to have kittens, hears the lonely howl of a chained-up hound deep in the backwaters of the bayou. They are an unlikely pair, about to become an unlikely family. Ranger urges the cat to hide underneath the porch, to raise her kittens there because Gar Face, the man living inside the house, will surely use them as alligator bait should he find them. But they are safe in the Underneath ... as long as they stay in the Underneath. (Courtesy of the publisher)

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found on the following website:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Underneath_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Underneath_(novel))

Author Biography

Kathi Appelt

Kathi Appelt (born July 6, 1954) is an American children's writer and writing teacher. She won the annual PEN USA award for Children's Literature recognizing *The Underneath* (2008).

Kathi Appelt was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and grew up in Houston, Texas. She graduated from Texas A&M University and lives in College Station, Texas. Appelt is the author of more than 30 books. She writes novels, picture books, poetry, and nonfiction for children and young adults. Her books have been translated into several languages: Spanish, Chinese, French and Swedish.



Her first novel was *The Underneath*, illustrated by David Small and published by Simon & Schuster in 2008. It features a cat and dog who live mainly beneath an old house in the Louisiana-Texas bayou. For that work she received the annual Children's Literature award from PEN Center USA and she was also a runner-up for the National Book Award and the American Library Association Newbery Medal (Newbery Honor Book).

Courtesy of Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathi_Appelt

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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Chapters 1-10



Before you read the chapter:

Briefly predict what you think the plot of *The Underneath* will be about.



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

watching	uncertain	enormous	loblolly
slumped	backward	tumbled	gathering

1. On the other side of the forest, there is an old _____ pine.
2. The upper stories have long ago _____ to the forest floor.
3. It wasn't the chirring of the mourning doves that woke the calico cat, or the _____ sun peeking through the clouds, or even the rustling of a nearby squirrel.
4. In front of her sat a shabby frame house with peeling paint, a house that _____ on one side as if it were sinking into the red dirt.
5. Here, underneath the canopy of the _____ willows and birches and ash.
6. Crawdads scoot _____ in the gumbo-like water of the bayous.
7. Only something _____, sinking fast, could cause whirlpools that far apart.
8. As he made his way to the tilting house, he could feel the cells in his body _____ up into a tangled mass of yearning, yearning for something stronger than liquor.

Questions



1. Briefly describe the setting of Chapter One.

2. Circle the correct narrative that our novel follows, and the reason for your choice.

First Person Second Person Third Person

3. What was the strange sound that the calico cat heard in the distance?

b. What did the calico cat do as a result of hearing the strange sound?

4. Briefly describe what happened to the boy who was struck by his drunken father?

5. Why did Gar Face only care about hunting alligators and not the other animals?

Language Activity



A. There are many writers that enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device is where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's an example of an alliteration: “. . . screeching, screaming, shrieking about something or other.”



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 rustling leaves.	
The sound of water flowing.	
The appearance of a forest.	

B. PERSONIFICATION is giving human qualities to something that is not human. Here is an example taken from Chapter Two of our novel: *"This tree, a thousand years old, huge and wide, straight and true, would say how it lifted its branches and welcomed the heavy rain, how it shivered as the cool water ran down its trunk and washed the dust from its long needles. How it sighed in that coolness."*



Why do you think personification is a popular literary device used by many authors?

Create your own example of personification.

C. Writing Poetry

Poetry can be a very fun and imaginative way of expressing yourself. Many famous authors enjoy using poetry in their work, including writers such as Kathi Appelt, Dr. Seuss, Roald Dahl, William Shakespeare, Robert Munsch, and C.S. Lewis.



Your task is to write a poem similar to the one found in Chapter Four, on a topic of your own choosing. Your poem should have three verses with three lines each, and use one of the rhyming schemes listed below.

Select one of the following rhyming schemes:

ABAB	AABB	AABA	ABBA
------	------	------	------
