

The Westing Game



By

Ellen Raskin

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

The Westing Game

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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 two to four chapters of **The Westing Game** and is comprised of the following different activities:

3. Before You Read
4. Vocabulary Building
5. Comprehension Questions
6. 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 mystery stories (and solving a mystery), the importance of family, how people interpret differently information given to them, people aren't whom they appear to be (identity), overcoming obstacles in life, perseverance when facing difficult circumstances.

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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 *foreshadowing*.
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*
14. Identify *personification*

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. Write a description of personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Complete an Observation Chart
8. Complete a KWS Chart

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 brochure

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Synopsis

A bizarre chain of events begins when sixteen unlikely people gather for the reading of Samuel W. Westing's will. And though no one knows why the eccentric, game-loving millionaire has chosen a virtual stranger – and a possible murderer – to inherit his vast fortune, one thing's for sure: Sam Westing may be dead . . . but that won't stop him from playing one last game! (The publisher)

Winner of the Newbery Medal - Winner of the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found online at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Westing_Game

Author Biography

Ellen Raskin

Illustrator, writer, and designer Ellen Raskin was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on March 13, 1928. As a child during the Depression years, she "...had straight dark hair, tap-danced with two left feet, . . . and always had her nose in a book". Ellen described herself as a "self-critical, running-scared, compulsive perfectionist" since the age of ten. She entered the University of Wisconsin-Madison at age 17 with the intention of majoring in journalism but changed her major to fine art. Ellen Raskin then married, had a daughter, Susan, moved to New York City, was divorced, and took a job in a commercial art studio. After two years, she began a free-lance career as a commercial artist. Raskin illustrated for *The Saturday Evening Post*, and made illustrations and designed and illustrated more than 1000 book jackets. In 1966 she wrote the picture book *Nothing Ever Happens on My Block*. Gradually she began to concentrate her time on her own children's books. *Figgs & Phantoms* was named a Newbery Honor Book and *The Westing Game* won the 1979 Newbery Medal for distinguished writing. Humor marked much of her writing, illustration and book design. Ellen Raskin died in 1984.



Courtesy of Penguin Young Readers

Adapted from the website: <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/authors/raskin/main.htm>

The Westing Game



By Ellen Raskin

Name: _____

The Westing Game

By Ellen Raskin

Chapters 1-3



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist of *The Westing Game* is thirteen-year-old *Turtle* Wexler, infamous for the kicks to the shins she administers to many of the people she meets. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an especially interesting **protagonist**?

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Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

| | | | |
|----------|----------|---------|--------------|
| content | gruesome | hassock | elegant |
| amputate | rational | gaunt | confidential |

1. Jackson appeared exhausted and extremely _____ after fasting for two weeks.
2. I would be most _____ knowing that all of you are safe and healthy.
3. Please be sure that your choice is both _____ and easy to prove.
4. I think she would look especially _____ in an evening gown.
5. If the infection doesn't leave soon we will have to _____ his arm.
6. I can only say that a cannonball will inflict a most _____ injury on anyone.
7. This is a very _____ message meant only for the ears of the queen herself.
8. He placed his feet up on the _____ and took a long sip of hot chocolate.

Questions



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

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2. What unusual message did the invitations contain that were delivered by Barney Northup?

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3. **Foreshadowing** is defined as a warning provided by the author about a future event. Find the example of foreshadowing in the first six paragraphs of Chapter 2.

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4. A fairly large number of characters are introduced in the first three chapters of this novel. Match each of the characters listed in the left-hand column with the correct descriptions in the column to the right.

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| A | Flora Baumbach |
| B | Grace Wexler |
| C | Sydelle Pulaski |
| D | Sandy McSouthers |
| E | Doug Hoo |
| F | Turtle Wexler |
| G | Chris Theodorakis |
| H | J.J. Forde |

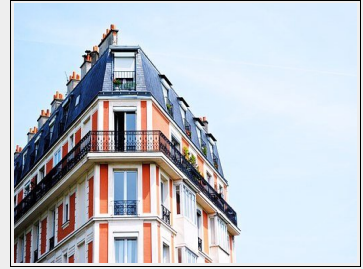
| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | A doorman. |
| 2 | Angela's younger sister. |
| 3 | The state's first black woman judge. |
| 4 | Watcher of birds. |
| 5 | A dressmaker. |
| 6 | A secretary without a lake view. |
| 7 | Quite the athlete. |
| 8 | Middle name is <i>Windsor</i> . |

5. In Chapter One we meet Barney Northrup, a 62 year old delivery boy. In Chapter Two what name has Barney apparently taken?

| |
|--|
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Good to Know – The Price of Lakefront Apartments

Although we aren't told the name of the city in which this novel is set, we do discover later that the lake mentioned in Chapter One is Lake Michigan, and the state is Wisconsin. A number of Wisconsin cities border on Lake Michigan including Milwaukee. The luxurious Park Lafayette apartment building, for instance, stands on the shores of Lake Michigan. It features *a true luxury high-rise community located along Milwaukee's beautiful lakefront*, and accommodations can be had for between \$1585 and \$4990 per month! Interested?



6. What would cause Turtle to kick someone in the shins?

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7. According to the story told by Otis about the two fellas who entered the Westing house on Halloween night, what two words were said by one of the men afterwards?

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8. What was rather distinct about the person that Chris saw enter the abandoned Westing house?

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9. What is your impression of the way that Mrs. Wexler treats her two daughters?

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10. What is your impression so far of Turtle? Do you think she will make for an interesting protagonist? Why or why not?

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CLUE BOX

The Westing Game has been regarded by many readers as one of the most interesting mysteries ever written for young readers. As the mystery unfolds you will be given the opportunity to record any thoughts / clues in the Clue Box provided with each chapter of the novel study. In this way you can jot down your thoughts as they unfold and go back and review clues, etc. Have fun – and good luck.



Language Activities



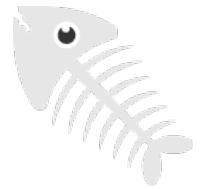
A. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One ... *and one by one, family by family, talk, talk, talk.*



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 an old truck starting up. | |
| The moan of the wind through the branches of an old elm tree. | |
| Your choice. | |

B. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. Here's an example from Chapter 2: ... *his flesh is rotting off those mean bones...*



Describe how the bones are personified in this example.

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Create your own example of personification.

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If you find another example of personification later in the novel, come back to this question and record it below.

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C. A quintet is a five-line verse that tells a story. The quintet has a syllable pattern and can bring an exciting scene to life. (It doesn't have to rhyme.)

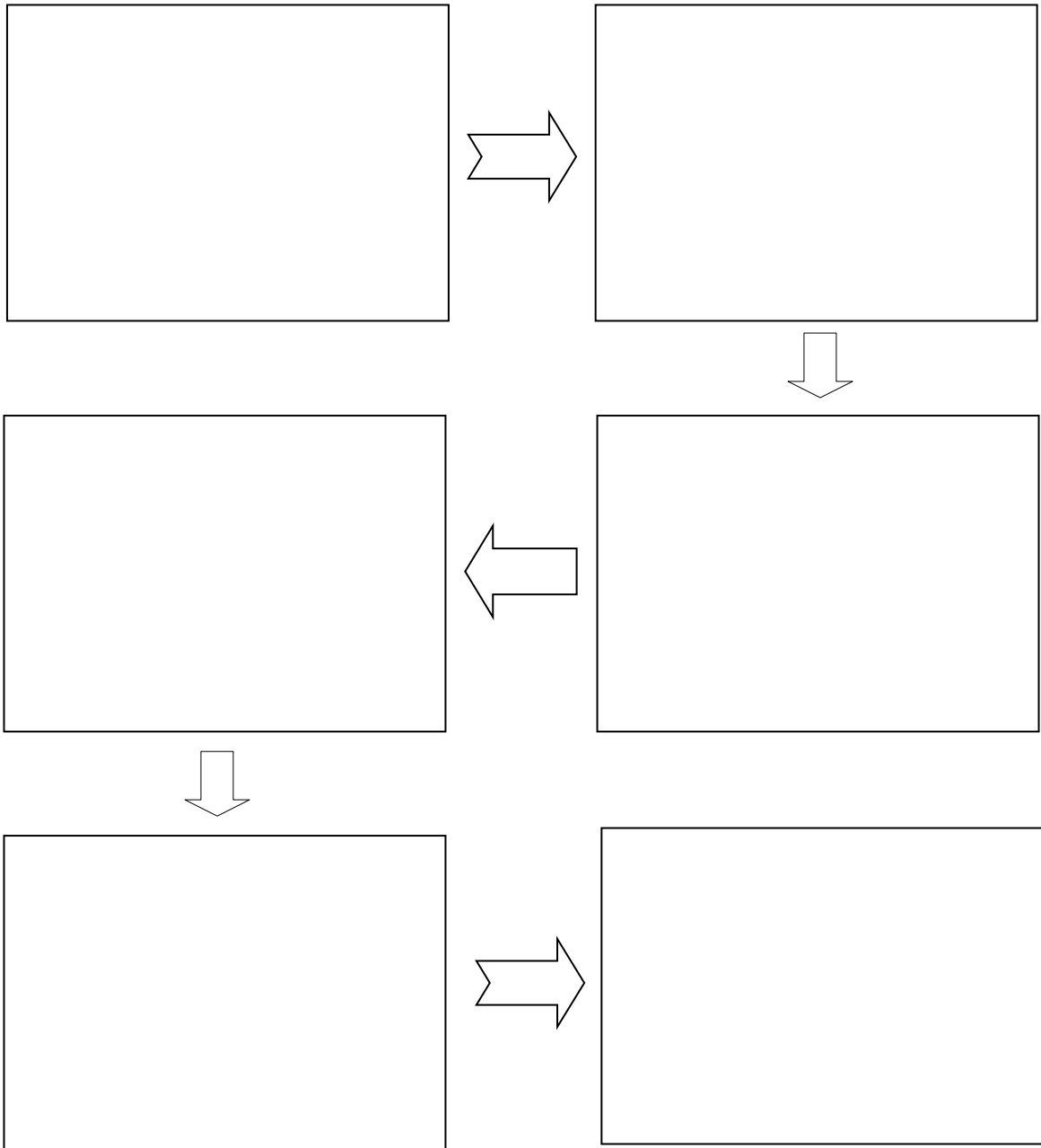
| | |
|--|---|
| Line 1 – tells when , 3 syllables Line 2 – tells where , 5 syllables Line 3 – tells what , 7 syllables Line 4 – describes activity , 9 syllables Line 5 – contains a thought , 3 syllables. | Now create a quintet poem using ideas from recent events in <i>The Westing Game</i> . |
|--|---|

TITLE: _____

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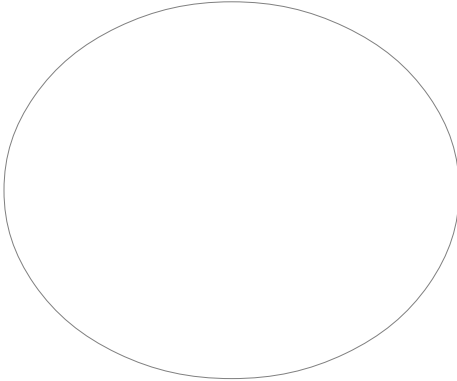
D. Sequence Chart

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.

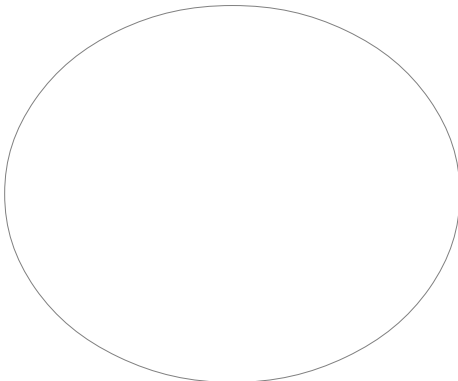


E. 5 Ws and an H.

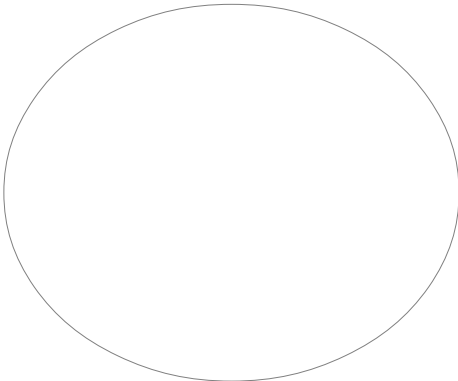
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



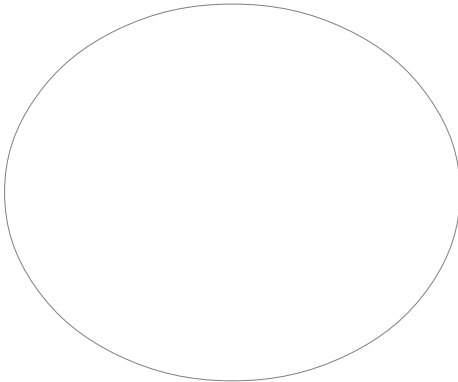
WHO?



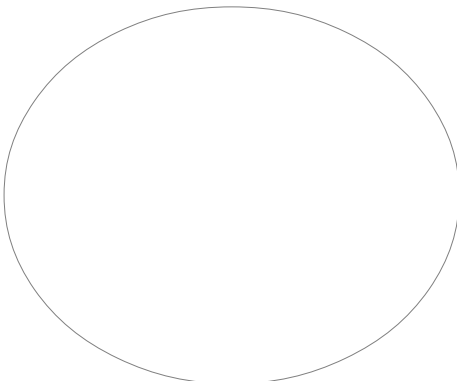
WHAT?



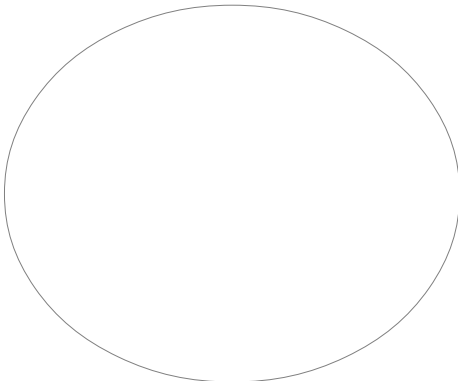
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activities



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 Chapters 1 - 3 of *The Westing Game*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 |