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INTRODUCTION: TO THE TEACHER

This *Teacher's Guide* contains a number of activities to use with the thirteen novels in the Bluford Series. The novels focus on the lives of a group of urban high school students and their families. The series draws its name from the school that many of the characters attend—Bluford High, named after African-American astronaut Guion Bluford. Relatively short and highly readable, the books address the lives of students—their interests, concerns, experiences, and worlds.

THE VALUE OF THE BLUFORD BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

1 Encouraging Reading for Its Own Sake

On their own, even without this *Guide*, the Bluford books are a valuable addition to your classroom. They'll help you give students a priceless experience: the pleasure of reading for its own sake. Widespread class testing of the series has made it very clear that students love reading the books, and they love following the characters' stories from one book to the next.

The books are available at reduced prices to increase the chance that they can be given outright to students, becoming part of their own personal libraries. Research and experience tell us that many middle and high school students simply do not own enough books, and few are habitual readers. It is our hope that the Bluford books can serve as a gateway to the world of reading for many students, including reluctant readers. With humor, drama, suspense, and mystery, the Bluford Series may help students discover an activity long known to promote concentration, improve vocabulary, and enhance writing: reading for its own sake.

2 Developing Reading, Writing, and Thinking Skills

Each Bluford novel will grab your students' attention by addressing topics and situations they care about. The activities in the guidebook will then help you use that classroom energy to strengthen students' reading, writing, and thinking skills.

Notes:

- a Each item described below appears on one or two pages and can be easily reproduced. You have permission to copy as many pages as you wish.
- b There are a number of activities in order to give you a range of choices. Select those that seem most suited to your students.

Following are the activities provided for each of the thirteen novels:

- Brief and full summaries of the novel, along with a list of the characters. You may want to use these just for your own personal reference.
- Reading comprehension questions (10) after each unit of two to four chapters. These questions provide practice in four key reading skills: 1) vocabulary in context, 2) supporting details, 3) main ideas, and 4) inferences or conclusions. (The terms “inferences” and “conclusions” refer to the same skill: reading between the lines to pick up ideas that are not directly stated. In this book, implied main ideas will simply be referred to as conclusions.)
- Short-answer questions (5) after each unit.

- Discussion questions (3) and short writing assignments (3) after each unit. For your convenience, suggested answers to the discussion questions are provided in the answer key beginning on page 361 of this *Guide*. In the writing assignments, choices are given so that students can select the topic they are most comfortable writing about.
- Final reading comprehension questions (10) that apply to the book as a whole. The questions cover three key reading skills: central ideas, supporting details, and conclusions. These questions should be saved until students have finished reading the entire book.
- Guided paragraph writing assignment (1). This structured assignment helps reinforce basic principles of effective writing: making a point, supporting that point, and organizing the support.
- Guided essay writing assignment (1). This structured assignment also helps reinforce basic principles of effective writing: making a point, supporting that point, and organizing the support.
- Additional paragraph writing assignments (2–3) and additional essay writing assignments (2–3).
- Creative writing assignments (5–6).

An Important Note about the Activities

Please keep all of these activities in perspective. We suggest selecting several activities rather than using all of them. Too many assignments can detract from the fun of reading. The challenge always is to find a happy medium: teaching important skills without undercutting the pleasure of reading the story, which is an end in itself. Be sure to allow time and space for students simply to enjoy the stories.

A TEACHING SUGGESTION: USE A WORKSHOP APPROACH WITH THE ACTIVITIES

As already stated, you have permission to make copies of the activities for your students. We then suggest using a workshop approach with the activities. For example, pass out to students the ten reading comprehension questions that follow the first two chapters in *Lost and Found*. Then do one of the following:

- **Use a whole-class approach.** Ask a student volunteer to read aloud the first question and answer it. Then ask all the students who agree with that answer to raise their hands. If everyone agrees, ask for a volunteer for the second question. If some students have a different answer, discuss answers with the class until the correct one is clear to everyone. Continue in this manner until all ten comprehension questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- **Use a small-group approach.** Divide the class into groups of three or four and ask them to work together to do the answers for the activity. Small groups are a great change of pace: students can wind up teaching each other within their groups (make adjustments when needed to get the right chemistry within each group); peer pressure within the group keeps them motivated; and there is often deeper, more sustained interaction and reflection within a group than when it's just you teaching the entire class. After the groups have worked together for a time, and one or more groups have finished, switch back to a whole-class format for a review of the material. Chances are the review will be a lively one.

- **Use a pairs approach at times.** Having two students work together on an activity is another way to energize the learning situation and help students teach one another. After most pairs of students have completed the exercise, you can again switch to a whole-class discussion for quick review purposes.
- **Use a silent-reading approach at times.** Have students work quietly and individually at their seats, answering the questions. When a majority of the class has finished, call on someone to read the first question and answer it. If the answer is right, say something like “Good job,” and call on someone else to read the next question. If the answer is wrong, say something like “Does anyone have a different answer?” After a brief discussion, continue on with the questions.
- **Use a one-on-one approach at times.** If your class is small, have students work on their own on a given activity. You can then call students up to your desk individually to check their answers and to confer on the material. Even though the conferences may be short, students can benefit from the individualized personal contact and one-on-one attention.
- **Use some of the activities as tests.** Students are conditioned by school to work with great concentration during tests. Take advantage of this conditioning by telling students that you may use a given activity as a test. That it may count as a test will ensure that students give their full effort. You can then collect their papers and grade their answers, or you can say, “Let’s simply make this an activity. Why don’t we just go over this now in class?”

When you do intend to count an activity as a test, consider grading the test in class. Doing so, you’ll save yourself grading time; you’ll also be giving students helpful immediate feedback on how they did. As students finish, collect papers and distribute them to students in other parts of the room. (Students are more comfortable marking wrong answers if the person in question is not sitting right next to them.) Have class members read and answer the questions as well as grade the papers before you finally collect the papers.

- **Often include some writing at the end of a class.** To help students integrate what they have learned in a given class, have them do a writing assignment in the last part of the period.

One good summarizing activity is to have students write a “Dear _____” letter to a missing classmate, telling him or her what was learned in the class that day. Have students give you the letters before they leave, and explain that you will read the letters and perhaps pass them on to the missing student.

Another assignment is a “review the class” paper in which students react to ideas or skills that were covered in class—or indeed to anything that happened in class. Ask students to write about what they liked or agreed with and why, and what they did not like or agree with and why. The first sentence of this paper can read, “Here’s my personal review of what went on in today’s class.”

Your Role as Workshop Manager

Using the above approaches makes it possible for you to be less of a lecturer in class and more of a manager. Instead of just talking to students (which can at times make the learning process passive and even boring), you can use the workshop approach to inject a great deal of energy into a class. Instead of you doing most of the speaking and getting most of the language experience, students can do the talking, thinking, and discussing—the active learning in the classroom. You serve, then, as a conductor or manager, blending the right mix of activities to ensure that students are active participants in their own learning.

THE WRITING SKILLS HANDOUTS

Following this introduction are ten pages of writing skills handouts that you have permission to reproduce. These handouts, which include brief activities when possible, will help you teach students the basic skills they need to write effectively. They will also complement the many writing assignments provided in this *Guide*.

The titles of the ten handouts are as follows:

- 1 Two Basic Goals in Writing—Point and Support
- 2 Effective Paragraph Writing
- 3 Another Example of an Effective Paragraph
- 4 Practice in Recognizing Specific Details
- 5 Practice in Adding Specific Details
- 6 A Third Basic Goal in Writing—Organization and Transitions
- 7 More on Organization and Transitions
- 8 Your Attitude toward Writing
- 9 Essay Writing in a Nutshell
- 10 The Form of an Essay

A FINAL WORD

You have a challenging task: helping students enjoy reading and helping them develop the reading, writing, and thinking skills they need to succeed in school. We hope the Bluford novels and this accompanying *Teacher's Guide* prove to be of help in your vital work with young people, and we wish you great success.

The Editors at Townsend Press