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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Durango Street

by Frank Bonham

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Durango Street

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. infer about characters and events when these meanings are not explicitly stated.
2. define vocabulary words from the text.
3. define slang words and phrases in the text, and discuss the extent to which these slang terms help add verisimilitude to the story.
4. point out instances of the following uses of language in the story: personification, simile.
5. discuss this story as a coming of age novel for Rufus and relate incidents from the story illustrating the ways Rufus comes to understand the world in adult terms.
6. point out instances of foreshadowing in the text.
7. cite instances from the story to illustrate Rufus' leadership abilities.
8. identify the reasons Rufus, and other boys in similar circumstances, join gangs.
9. relate Alex's plan to break up Rufus' gang and discuss the extent to which his plan is successful.
10. point out instances of irony in the story.
11. cite incidents where the author uses descriptive imagery to create mood.
12. discuss the color red as a symbol in the story.
13. cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following theme: Fighting does not solve problems because fighting leads to more fighting.
14. cite incidents from the story to support the following statements:
 - The destructive behavior of gangs can be redirected into something positive.
 - Young people who need protection should trust the adults and authority figures in their lives and ask them for help.
 - Young men need a strong father figure, so they can develop pride and self respect.
15. discuss the extent to which this story, written in the 1960's, is relevant today.

Durango Street

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe Durango Street. How does Rufus feel when he learns his mother has moved to a house near Durango Street?
2. What is the main reason young people like Rufus join gangs? For what reasons is Rufus unable to simply walk away when gangs taunt him?
3. Discuss Rufus' relationship with his mother. Why does she seem to have given up on her son? For what reasons might she have invented the story about her relationship with Ernie Brown?
4. List three qualities of leadership found in Rufus. Cite incidents from the story to illustrate each quality. For example, Rufus is a crew leader at the detention camp. When he leaves the came, he misses managing the work crew. This incident illustrates that Rufus possesses the ability to help a group of individuals work together to accomplish a goal. He guides the work crew to work as one unit in order to finish their jobs.
5. One of the thematic concepts in this story deals with the relationship between dreams VS reality. Cite two incidents from the story that illustrate this idea.
6. Discuss the color red as a symbol in this story. Consider the following:
 - The Gassers all have red hair.
 - When Rufus joins the Moors, he is told he must take a can of red paint and paint "Moors is boss" on the wall of the police station.
7. Cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following statement: Bantu would not have remained the leader of the Moors for much longer even if Rufus had not joined the gang.
8. Why is the following statement ironic?

"You gets beat' into this gang, and you gets beat' out."

Find another example of irony in this story. Hint: Consider the advice Rufus gives to Curtis.
9. Describe Alex's plan to break up the Moors. To what extent is his plan successful?
10. Why does Rufus plan a raid on the Gassers? Briefly describe his battle plan. To what extent is he successful?

Durango Street

Chapter One

Vocabulary

commence – begin, start

conversed – talked

gambit – an opening maneuver, action, or remark intended to gain an advantage or offer an opinion

perplexed – full of doubt or uncertainty; puzzled

pronounced – unmistakable; clearly marked

skeptically – unconvinced, with doubt

vessel – a person thought of as being the receiver or repository of some spirit or influence

1. Briefly describe Mr. Rubio and Rufus, and discuss Rufus' relationship with Mr. Rubio.

2. Who is Baby Gibson? What secret about Rufus does Baby Gibson reveal to Mr. Rubio?

3. List two things Rufus dislikes about Pine Valley Honor Camp.

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

antiquity – the quality of being ancient or old
arbor – a place shaded by trees or shrubs
festooned – adorned
pensive – thinking deeply or seriously, often of sad or melancholy things
scrutinized – looked at very carefully; examined closely
vestibule – a small entrance hall or room either to a building or to a larger room

1. Find an example of personification in this chapter.

2. In the following passage, the author describes the area known as the “Flats.”

“Mr. Travers turned into a side street in the shadow of a booming freeway that formed a solid boundary to the Flats on the east. Durango Street passed beneath the freeway and ascended a hill. But the whole Flats area was jammed between the concrete riverbed on the west and the curving gray arm of the freeway on the east.”

What mood do you think the author is conveying about Durango Street and the Flats in the above passage?

Chapter Seven

1. One of the themes in this novel is that Rufus sometimes has trouble distinguishing reality from his dreams. In the following passage, Rufus imagines that he sees Big Ernie in the alley.

“Against the bricks stood an enormous man, black from head to foot and at least seven feet tall! It was like a miracle. Big Ernie had come up through the pavement to save him. Standing there, he seemed to say: Like the way you handle yourself in a scrap, Rufus—”

In what way does this imaginary Ernie help Rufus?

2. In what ways does Rufus try to avoid problems with the Gassers? Why is he unsuccessful?

3. At the end of this chapter, Mrs. Henry tells Rufus that she was only sixteen when she was married to Ernie Brown. She also tells him to keep the information about their relationship to himself because no one would believe it. Why do you think Rufus asks her if she “got married again right away”?

4. In your opinion, is Mrs. Henry telling her son the truth about her past relationship with Ernie Brown? If not, why do you think she might make up such a story?
