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October Sky
BY HOMER HICKAM


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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Autobiography****Objective:** Writing Your Autobiography**Activity**

October Sky is an autobiography of Homer (Sonny) Hickam, Jr., primarily covering three years in his life—the three years he was in grades 10 through 12 at Big Creek High School in rural West Virginia. The author is open and honest about his experiences. He writes with a sense of immediacy, thoughtfulness, and reflection, as if he were going through this period in his life right now and trying to think through the lessons he's learning. He focuses on all aspects of his life, from his home life and his schoolwork to his friends, his town, his faith, and even his pets.

Not only does he chronicle the events in his life at this time, he also describes his feelings and responses to these events. Like every good storyteller, he uses literary devices, including similes, metaphors, foreshadowing, personification, and alliteration, to bring his narrative vividly to life.

This makes the book enjoyable to read and a real page-turner.

Take a few moments to consider how you would write your own autobiography. First, create an outline of your life. There's no need to mention everything that has happened to you, but be sure to include the events that have influenced you the most, and shaped your life up to this point. Look at all aspects of your life to determine which events—at home, at school, among your friends, at your house of worship—have meant the most to you. After you have completed your outline, transform it into a brief autobiography of your life. Feel free to use literary devices in your autobiographical write-up to add depth and feeling to your words.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1–6**Advertising Copy****Objective:** Writing a Help Wanted Ad**Activity**

Write a long and detailed Help Wanted ad for one of two openings at the Coalwood mine:

- A machinist to work in the machine shop.
- A miner to work down in the mine.

Use information about these two workplaces that you have gathered from Chapters 1 to 6. Your ad should not be like most employment ads in the paper today, filled with abbreviations and other shorthand to make the ad fit into a small space in the paper. Instead, you should make your ad a comprehensive overview of what the job entails, so prospective employees would know what the employer is looking for and what they could expect on the job.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 2**Comic Strip****Objective:** Creating Graphic Images**Activity**

For this activity, you and your group will be re-creating chapter 2 in *October Sky* in the form of a comic strip.

First, make a list of the important events that occur in the chapter, and put them in order.

Then decide on the best way to illustrate them in comic-strip form. To do this, create a storyboard in lead pencil on scrap paper, sketching out each panel in the strip, and what the characters in each panel are saying. Place each character's words in a speech balloon above each one's head, pointing to the character to indicate that he or she is saying those words.

Once your group agrees on the storyboard, create the finished comic strip, using colored pencils and following the storyboard.

Your comic strip should be at least four panels, but may include as many more than that as you feel you need to convey the events in the chapter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 8

Song Lyrics

Objective: Writing Lyrics for a Song

Activity

Imagine that, as the rocket boys develop a following among the students at Big Creek High School, the machinists at the mine, and the townspeople in and around Coalwood, a number of the faithful who show up for the Big Creek Missile Agency's rocket launches at Cape Coalwood want to create a song celebrating the accomplishments of their heroes. After all, they might have heard the boys singing while working on the "blockhouse." These fans of the rocket boys come to you for help.

For this activity, first choose a song/melody for which you'd like to write lyrics. The song may be a tune that's popular now, or a song that was a hit when your parents or grandparents were young. Once you decide on a song (that is, the melody), and you concentrate on the sound without any words, you're ready to begin writing lyrics for the song, set to its beat. Think of poems you've read or studied in school. What makes a good poem? Some of the elements in memorable poetry are rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, personification, metaphors, and similes. Brainstorm some ideas you'd like to include in your lyrics before you start writing. Remember that song lyrics are essentially a poem set to music.

With your brainstormed list of ideas, begin writing your song lyrics, keeping in mind the rhythm and beat of the music you've chosen, ways to make your lyrics come to life through figures of speech, and other poetic devices. Refine and edit your lyrics as you go along, to make them better match the tune and tone of the music.

When you're finished with your lyrics, give your song a title that will refer to what's happening in the story.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 11**Letter Writing****Objective:** Analyzing Setting**Activity**

October Sky sets up a stark contrast in readers' minds—between the sky, which the rocket boys aspire to reach with their rockets, and the mine deep in the earth, which is the mainstay of the area's economy. The conflict between the drive to reach the heavens (the vision of Sonny and the other rocket boys) and the drive to go further into the earth (what Sonny's father loves and the whole purpose of Coalwood and the surrounding towns) is one of the memoir's major thematic elements.

Imagine that you're an out-of-state relative of Sonny's, visiting Coalwood for the first time. Sonny takes you to one of his rocket launches at Cape Coalwood, and Sonny's dad takes you down into the mine.

Write a letter home to your parents, describing the two settings you've seen on your visit to Coalwood and how you think the town will evolve in the future.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-up**Top Ten List****Objective:** Determining Narrative Highlights**Activity**

For this activity, you will create an annotated list of the top ten moments in the book, from your perspective.

List the moments in order, from one to ten, with the best at the top, number-one position. Include the page numbers where each of your top ten moments appears in parentheses. For each moment you list, write a paragraph explaining why you found that moment especially compelling, heartwarming, funny, or poignant.

For example, if you particularly enjoyed the scene in which the rocket boys show Miss Riley the National Science Fair medal Sonny won, your entry might look like this:

Showing Miss Riley the National Science Fair medal:

This is a very touching moment because Miss Riley is so ill, yet she marshals the strength to look at each one of the rocket boys and say, "I'm so proud to be your teacher." Sonny and the rocket boys know how much she championed their rocket-building mission, and how she stepped in at crucial points along the way to give them help and hope (such as the book on guided missile design she gave Sonny and the support she gave the boys when the state troopers accused them—wrongly—of starting a forest fire with their rockets). They are heartsick that she has cancer and can't understand why she was stricken with this dread disease when she's such a good person.