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author and educator



Sweetness All Around

Companion Lessons & Project Ideas, created by the author

Get students excited about the 1970s setting

- ◆ Create a 1970s playlist and/or research dance moves from that time period.
- ◆ Create a slide presentation of 1970s fashion and hairstyles.
- ◆ Watch 1970s commercials on YouTube.
- ◆ Take a look at popular 1970s toys.
- ◆ Who were the 1970s “heart throbs”?
- ◆ For the truly brave (or maybe slightly crazy) middle school teacher, you might kick off (or end) the unit with 1970s music, outfits, snacks, and dance moves. Funyuns and The Hustle, anyone?
- ◆ If funds are available, provide each student with a few 1970s-ish stickers and a yellow spiral notebook. Let students decorate and label their notebooks then leave them in the classroom. You can open each day’s lesson with a quick writing warm-up.

Digging deeper and using literary language

A good resource for literary definitions: <https://literaryterms.net>

- ◆ Discuss the use of dialect in the story and the ways in which it enhances characterization. I grew up in Tennessee and have a deep affection for the Southern dialect and all its nuances. Allow students to explore their own accents. If you’re truly ambitious, you can also research accent origins.
 - ❖ As a middle school teacher, I know this lesson might easily go off the rails, so it’s important to discuss when it’s okay to try on an accent (in a learning environment or for a theatre performance) and when it’s offensive. A teachable moment, as we say.
 - ❖ There are a number of YouTube videos on Southern accents. This four-minute one by Alabamian Maddison Bush is sweet and funny. A word of caution: In the South soda/soft drinks are frequently called Coke, and Bush addresses this. You can easily skip past this part and still get the gist of her take on Southern accents.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSyNBC8PbVM&t=177s>



Sweetness All Around
written by Suzanne Supplee
(Holiday House)

available in hardcover,
paperback, and ebook formats

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Digging deeper and using literary language (continued)

- ❖ Tie this activity to the text by investigating the differences in Josephine's and Lisa Marie's speech patterns.
Questions to ask: Why did the author make the choice to have each girl speak in a slightly different dialect? What does dialect reveal about each character's personal life? How do these differences in their dialect help to shape the story? How does it make these characters more complex?
- ◆ Clearing the **vocabulary** and unfamiliar references for each chapter will give students context.
 - ❖ Students can use sticky notes to identify unfamiliar words, expressions, or references. Students can put these sticky notes on a poster board. Be sure to have them include page numbers for easy reference.
 - ❖ Allow students to select a couple of sticky notes from the poster to investigate with a partner.
 - ❖ Students can share their findings with classmates.
- ◆ **Compare and contrast** Josephine's and Lisa Marie's summers with those of kids today.
 - ❖ **Questions to ask:** Did 1970s kids enjoy greater freedom and autonomy? Would Josephine and Lisa Marie have a better chance of finding Molly Quiver with the use of today's technology? How might a mystery story be harder to write in the age of cell phones, trackers, drones, and security cameras?
 - ❖ Consider exploring statistics from *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathon Haidt. Students can discuss the similarities and differences between kids' lives today versus kids' lives back in the 1970s.
- ◆ **Freytag's Pyramid** helps students develop a greater understanding of plot.
 - ❖ Allow students to use their yellow spiral notebooks to draw and label the diagram. Write definitions for **exposition**, **inciting incident**, **rising action**, **climax**, **falling action**, **resolution** and **dénouement**. The further students get in the book, they can begin to identify these elements in the story and cite specific examples from the text to support their responses. Have students cite their answers.
 - ❖ **Questions to ask:** Is the pyramid a perfect triangle? Why might the falling action side be shorter than the rising action side?
 - ❖ When explaining the **climax** of a story, a rubber band comes in handy. As a demonstration, you can pull the band just to the point of snapping. The snapping point is the **climax** of the story.
 - ❖ Here's a funny and informative video to help students understand Freytag and his pyramid.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty1A7N_typc



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Digging deeper and using literary language (continued)

- ◆ *Sweetness* is labeled as historical fiction by some and as a mystery by others.
- ❖ As you move through the text, allow students to discuss the genre for *Sweetness*. Sometimes books are predominantly romantic or adventurous or dystopic and so on. However, assigning a specific genre for *Sweetness* is tricky.
- ❖ Give students a chance to argue whether this book is historical fiction, a mystery, both, or neither.
- ◆ Sensory detail is an important component of any novel. Allow students the opportunity to find the author's use of imagery in *Sweetness*.
 - ❖ **Questions to ask:** What are the more obvious senses writers use in stories (sight, sound, and touch)? What might be a more unique way of describing things (taste and smell)?
 - ❖ Have students explore this by journaling about their own environments. For instance, how might their sock drawer "taste" or how might their bedroom "smell," especially if they haven't cleaned up in a while?
 - ❖ Have students explore the ways in which the olfactory system is tied to memory.
 - ❖ **Questions to ask:** Some years hence what memories might the smell of Fruit Stripe gum or Funyuns or Gee Your Hair Smells Terrific shampoo conjure for Josephine and Lisa Marie? Why are such details important to give a story texture and flavor?
 - ❖ Students can explore this further by bringing in a small jar of a spice or a dab of shampoo. This should be a scent they enjoy, one that is tied to memory. As a writing warm-up, you can have them journal about the memory associated with the scent then share with their classmates. **A word of caution,** however. Ban spray bottles of perfume and such. If you teach middle school, you already know what I'm talking about here.
- ◆ *Sweetness* is told in the **subjective/limited POV** which provides an up-close perspective from Josephine's standpoint.
 - ❖ **Questions to ask:** Why did the author choose the **limited/subjective POV** rather than tell the story in the first-person? What are the limitations of the first-person? What are the limitations of telling a story in the third-person POV?
- ◆ **Conflict** is necessary if a story is to be entertaining. If nothing bad happens, there's not much of a story.
 - ❖ Ask students to look for moments of conflict between Josephine and Lisa Marie, between Josephine and her mother, and between Penny Willoughby and Helen-Dove.

GENRES

historical fiction?

mystery?

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Digging deeper and using literary language (continued)

- ❖ **Questions to ask:** How are Josephine and Lisa Marie good **foils** for one another? How do their distinct differences lead to disagreements? Do these differences also help them solve the mystery of Molly Quiver?
- ❖ Consider having students to explore their own relationships. In their journals they can describe conflicts with siblings and friends and how their distinct differences might have led to a conflict. They should also consider how their differences might be an asset?
- ❖ Allow students to closely examine the Happy World residents. If students look carefully, they will notice significant differences among residents. In what ways do each of these characters contribute to the story and help solve the mystery of Molly's disappearance?
- ◆ Theme is often difficult for students to identify. Whereas so many of the elements of fiction feel concrete, theme is slippery, even for writers. In my teaching experience, I found it was best to explore theme at the midway point of the novel.
- ❖ **Questions to ask:** Have students research the definition of **theme in literature** and copy this in their journals. Students should include the definitions for **major themes** and **minor themes**.
- ❖ Encourage students to explore theme with a partner or in small groups. A simple way to discuss theme is to ask students what they think is the point of the novel. What is the author trying to say? Examine the title and the John Wesley quote on the introductory pages for clues.

Looking for additional discussion questions? Here's a guide from my lovely publisher.

<https://holidayhouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Sweetness-All-Around-Guide-5.pdf>

Need ideas for final projects?

1. Create a musical score for a movie adaptation of the book.
2. Create a new book cover.
3. Write a 3-7 page first chapter of a sequel to *Sweetness*.
4. Create a portrait of your favorite character.
5. Make a diorama of Happy World.
6. Create a volunteer project and go spread some sweetness.
7. Make friendship bracelets using gum wrappers and hand them out at lunchtime.
8. Reenact a scene from the book and perform it in class (or film it).
9. Create a graphic novel using Freytag's Pyramid as a guide for what to include.
10. Create a series of poems to coincide with important scenes from the novel.
11. Create a promotional book trailer for *Sweetness* (and share it with yours truly, please!).

Have project ideas not included here? Let me know, and we'll add them to the list.