

A Teacher's Guide For **A LAKE WITH NO BOTTOM**

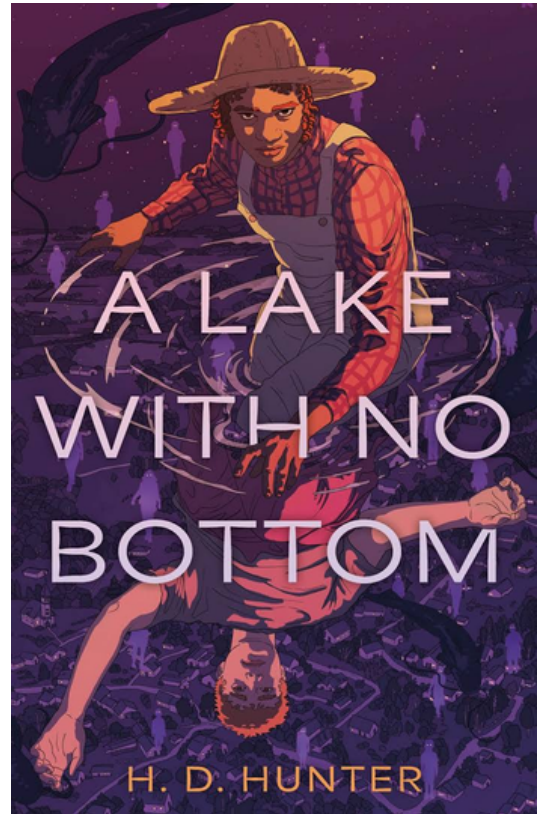
By H.D. Hunter

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Sidney Cromwell moves to rural Forsyth County, Georgia from the big city of Atlanta, all he wants is to fit in at his new high school. But when Sidney nearly drowns in Lake Lanier, an allegedly haunted lake that is the site of numerous inexplicable freak accidents and deaths, he becomes a social pariah as he starts to suffer terrifying visions from the past and hauntings by apparitions calling him to Lanier.

Sidney returns to the lake for answers, and he finds in its murky depths the spirits of former residents from Oscarville, the Black town that lies beneath the man-made lake. They enlist Sidney to remind Forsyth of its devastating history and push its citizens to make amends so that the souls in Oscarville can finally rest.

But Sidney soon learns that people will go to great lengths to avoid facing truths they'd rather not hear. The people of Forsyth County refuse to acknowledge the past, and as Oscarville's populace starts to lose their patience, their rage and thirst for vengeance rise like a tidal wave.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HUGH "H. D." HUNTER is from Atlanta, Georgia. He's the author of the Futureland series and *Something Like Right*, winner of the 2025 BCALA Children and Youth Literary Award for Debut. Hugh is committed to stories about Black kids and their many expansive worlds.

Connect with Hugh on Instagram (@hdhunterbooks), or his website: <https://hughhdhunter.com>.



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With this Guide Students will be able to:

Analyze how historical events influence fictional narratives	Trace the development of themes throughout a text	Examine characterization and character motivation
Analyze symbolism, foreshadowing, and suspense	Evaluate how point of view shapes understanding	Explore connections between historical injustice and modern social action/reform

MOTIFS

- Historical Erasure
- **Community Memory**
- Justice + Accountability
- **Identity + Belonging**
- Courage + Responsibility
- **Empathy + Human Connection**

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who gets to tell history?
- What happens when communities ignore past injustices?
- Can wrongs from the past ever truly be repaired?
- What responsibility do we have to people whose stories have been forgotten?
- How can empathy inspire action?

KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS AND VOCABULARY

Characterization	Conflict	Theme	Symbolism
Foreshadowing	Suspense	Irony	Point of View



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Dive into these resources to build Historical Context:

Topic	Resource
Indigenous Cherokee Heritage	<u>Article</u>
Oscarville	<u>News Segment</u>
Forsyth County Expulsion	<u>Podcast</u>
Sidney Lanier	<u>Article</u> <u>Poem</u>
Cults	<u>Article</u>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 💡 Why do some stories become widely known while others fade from public memory?
- 💡 What responsibilities do communities have to preserve history?
- 💡 How might forgotten history affect future generations?
- 💡 What qualities make a leader persuasive? At what point can influence become manipulation?

Common Core Standards

RI.8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text

RI.8.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text

RI.8.3: Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can communities remember or forget their history?



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LITERARY FOCUS

Characterization
Suspense
Foreshadowing

Chapters 1–9

1. What motivates Sidney to continue investigating the lake despite the danger?
2. How does the author build suspense throughout the opening chapters?

3. What clues suggest that Sidney's experience is connected to something larger than a simple accident?

4. What role does Amy Jade play in Sidney's understanding of the lake?

CCSS Alignment

- **RL.8.1:** Use details from the text to make and support inferences about the mysterious events surrounding Lake Lanier, Sidney's experiences after the accident, and the motivations of key characters
- **RL.8.2:** Analyze how themes related to historical memory, justice, belonging, and responsibility begin to emerge through Sidney's experiences and his growing connection to the hidden history beneath Lake Lanier
- **RL.8.3:** Examine how key events, dialogue, and character decisions reveal personality traits, motivations, and relationships while advancing the plot and deepening the mystery

Chapters 10–20

LITERARY FOCUS

Theme
Social Pressure
Historical Memory

5. How does social pressure influence Amy Jade's decisions?
6. What does Jeremy believe he is fighting for?
7. How do different characters define justice?
8. What does Oscarville symbolize in the novel?

CCSS Alignment

- **RL.8.2:** Analyze how themes of justice, historical memory, community responsibility, and accountability develop as Sidney uncovers more information about Oscarville and the forces connected to Lake Lanier
- **RL.8.3:** Analyze how Sidney, Amy Jade, Jeremy, JD, and other characters respond to new information and challenges, and how those responses advance the plot and reveal deeper aspects of their character (motivations, values, and...)
- **RL.8.6:** Analyze how different perspectives influence the way characters understand the past and how the author's use of point of view creates suspense, tension, and dramatic irony



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LITERARY FOCUS

Conflict
Symbolism
Point of View



Chapters 21–30

9. What does The Murk Symbolize?
10. How is Jeremy both sympathetic and dangerous?
11. Which characters are most committed to uncovering the truth?
12. How does Forsyth's treatment of Sidney reinforce the novel's themes?

CCSS Alignment

- **RL.8.1:** Support interpretations and draw conclusions about the growing conflict between Sidney, Jeremy, and TOTL, while examining how new revelations deepen the mystery and increase the stakes for the characters
- **RL.8.2:** Analyze how themes related to justice, revenge, accountability, and historical remembrance continue to develop as characters struggle to determine how the past should be acknowledged and addressed
- **RL.8.6:** Examine how different perspectives build tension and shape characters' beliefs, decisions, and responses to the truth about Oscarville, and analyze how these perspectives influence readers' understanding of the conflict



Chapters 31–39

13. How has Sidney changed since Chapter 1?
14. What ultimately motivates Jeremy's decisions?
15. Explain the significance of the community chanting Sidney's name on the final pages of the novel.
16. What message does the novel communicate about accountability?

LITERARY FOCUS

Theme
Character Growth
Resolution

CCSS Alignment

- **RL.8.2:** Analyze how the novel's central themes reach resolution as characters confront the consequences of past actions and work toward understanding, healing, and accountability
- **RL.8.3:** Analyze how Sidney, Jeremy, Amy Jade, and other characters change throughout the story and how those changes influence the outcome of the novel



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CCSS Alignment

- W.8.1: Develop and support an argument using clear claims, relevant evidence, and logical reasoning drawn from the novel. Students will defend a position, consider multiple perspectives, and support their ideas with textual evidence when responding to argumentative prompt
- W.8.2: Analyze and explain important ideas from the novel using evidence, examples, and thoughtful interpretation. Students will explore themes, symbolism, point of view, and character development to communicate a deeper understanding of the author's message and craft
- W.8.9: Draw evidence from the text to support analysis, reflection, and research. Students will cite specific events, dialogue, and character actions from *A Lake With No Bottom* to strengthen their claims and demonstrate a clear understanding of the novel's themes and author's purpose

Literary Analysis

Why Was Sidney Chosen?

Consider why authors sometimes use outsiders, newcomers, or unlikely heroes to help readers learn about important social issues and historical events



What theme do you think H.D. Hunter most wants readers to take away from *A Lake with No Bottom*?

Identify three recurring ideas from the novel and rank which one they believe is most important to the author's message

Thematic Analysis

Argumentative Essay

Do you think Sidney should help TOTL? Take a position and support your claim with evidence from the text.

Create a T-chart identifying the potential benefits and drawbacks of Sidney helping TOTL. Consider whether justice and revenge are the same thing

WRITING CONNECTIONS

Analyze how H.D. Hunter's use of third-person omniscient point of view strengthens the novel and helps readers understand its larger message.

Compare a scene involving Sidney and Jeremy. Discuss how understanding both characters' perspectives helps readers view the conflict as more complex than a simple battle between heroes and villains

Author's Craft Essay



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Deep Dive Essay Prep

Analysis Prompts

- Why do you think H.D. Hunter chose to tell a story centered around Oscarville and Lake Lanier?
- What lessons do the main characters learn by the end of the novel?
- Which characters help develop the novel's central message most effectively?
- How do historical events influence the story's larger meaning?
- How can readers apply the lessons learned in the novel to their own lives and communities?

Argumentative Prompts

- What risks does Sidney face by becoming involved? Consider the physical, emotional, and social consequences of helping TOTL.
- How might Sidney's actions benefit or harm TOTL, the people of Oscarville, or the larger community?
- To what extent is Sidney successful because of the support he receives from Amy Jade, his family, and other allies?
- Does helping TOTL make Sidney responsible for their actions, or is he simply helping them seek justice?
- How do Sidney's values and sense of right and wrong influence his decision?

Thematic Prompts

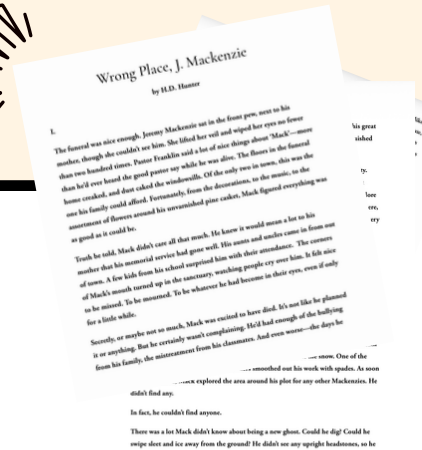
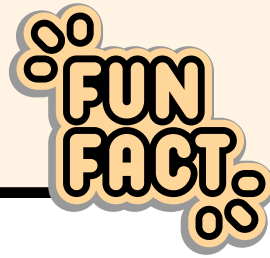
- Why do you think H.D. Hunter chose to tell a story centered around Oscarville and Lake Lanier?
- What lessons do Sidney, Amy Jade, Jeremy, and other characters learn by the end of the novel?
- Which characters help develop the novel's central message most effectively?
- How do historical events influence the story's larger meaning?
- How can readers apply the lessons learned in the novel to their own lives and communities?

Author's Craft Prompts

- How does access to multiple characters' thoughts, experiences, and perspectives deepen readers' understanding of the conflict?
- In what ways does seeing events from different viewpoints help readers understand the history of Oscarville and its impact on the present?
- How does the narration build suspense, tension, and dramatic irony throughout the novel?
- What information would readers miss if the story were told only through Sidney's perspective?
- How does the point of view help develop the novel's themes of empathy, memory, and accountability?



OTHER WORLDLY CONNECTIONS



The character, Jeremy Mackenzie, from *A Lake With No Bottom*, appears in a short story by H.D. Hunter

“It’s clear you ain’t never met Jay Mackenzie. He’s one of a kind.”

Compare how Mack is treated in Evergreen Cemetery with how Jay is treated in Aberdeen Cemetery. What message do you think Hunter is trying to convey with this distinction?

Mack and Jay find themselves in the same situation, yet they handle their circumstances completely different. What do you think this signifies about their character, values, privileges, and place in their communities?

How does the Jeremy in *Wrong Place, J. Mackenzie* differ from the Jeremy readers came to know in *A Lake with No Bottom*?

Why do you think Hunter wrote this character into two separate stories?

[Read *Wrong Place, J. Mackenzie* HERE](#)

CCSS Alignment

RL.8.9: Analyze how a work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, and develops a character across multiple texts

RL.8.3: Analyze how dialogue, events, and decisions reveal character and advance the plot

RL.8.6: Analyze how differences in point of view create effects such as suspense or dramatic irony

Guide created by Alexis “Aliyyah” Ross. She is a Georgia Educator and Instructional Designer with a decade of experience developing literacy and curriculum resources for middle and high school learners. Aliyyah is passionate about creating engaging materials that inspire critical thinking and meaningful connections between literature, history, and identity. **For questions about this resource or opportunities to collaborate on other materials, please contact rossalexisn@gmail.com.**