**Witness**

**Concept Analysis**

A Brief Plot Summary

Through the format of poetry, free verse, Karen Hesse explores the tensions the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) brings to a small town in Vermont in 1924. The small town community slowly breaks apart as the KKK, a band of all white males who believe that whites are the most supreme race, forces its way into the town. Suddenly, the African-Americans and the one Jewish family in the town are pegged as targets because of their race. Twelve year old Leanora Sutter, an African American experiences alienation from the small town. Taunted by others because of her race, Leanora becomes friend with Esther Hirsch a Jewish girl in the town. Together the two face threats from the KKK, and learn to overcome the prejudice of the town. The KKK, however, also uproots Merlin Van Tornhout, an 18 year old boy, who tries to join the KKK. When Merlin is unable to carry out the task of poisoning the Sutter's well he runs away. Mr. Alexander the newspaper printer boldly stands out against the KKK by publishing the truth about them in his papers. Finally, Johnny Reeves, the town’s clergymen also must learn to confront the KKK in his own way as well.

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Organizational Patterns

Hesse’s novel is written in free verse poetry and is divided into five different acts. The novel is 161 pages long and has a reading level score of 5.9 and is written for a 6-8 grade audience. The novel is written from the perspective of eleven different people from the small town in Vermont. Every few pages the author switches to the voice of a new character. All of the voices follow in sequence and help to create one cohesive narrative. There is a reading character chart at the beginning of the book that contains a picture of each character.

The Big Question or Enduring Issue

Hesse’s novel allows readers to explore the connotations associated with courage. As the KKK worms its way further into the town, the community members are forced to examine what their feelings about the KKK are. The town citizens all have to consider if a person’s race is also the determiner of a person’s merit. Additionally, the characters each respond to the KKK in a different way; some characters show considerable amounts of courage and are honest others are not.

Leonara Sutter is a 12 year old African American. She shows remarkable courage throughout the text as she faces discrimination because of her race. She also helps to clear Merlin’s name from being charged with murder after he attempted to poison her families well. This is a remarkable act of courage. This will serve as an excellent example for students to discuss courage.

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Leonara can serve as a model for standing up what is right even when it is difficult.

Esther, a six year old girl (5), and Sara, a middle aged farmer who cares for Esther, (11) also show remarkable courage throughout the text. After Sara’s father is shot at, Sara and Esther keep going and do what is right in spite of extreme difficulty. Sara also shows courage, and lives with a Jewish family in though at the time, the KKK discriminated against Jews.

Additionally, Viola, a middle aged shop owner (24), is another strong character who shows courage by sticking up to her own family members for what she knows to be right. And Alexander, the town newspaper man (26), also will serve as another example of one who exhibits courage. Even though his life is threatened he refuses to embrace the KKK and speaks about the KKK’s destruction openly in his newspaper.

While the book provides many examples of characters who show remarkable courage, Hesse contrasts these characters with ones who do not. Several characters in the book disagree with the KKK, but don’t stand up to them. These characters include Flitt, the town doctor (22), and Iris, who secretly runs liquor (19), as well as Merlin, and 18 year old who gets caught up in the KKK (4), will also be interesting character to look at. At first Merlin agrees with the KKK, he later disagrees with them, but does not do anything to stand up to them. Finally, Harvey, the shop owner (24), and Johny Reeves, the town clergyman (14), represent examples of people who joined the KKK.

The novel is full of rich examples of characters who show courage and who act courageously. It also contains examples of characters who don’t agree with the KKK, but who remain silent.

**Background Knowledge**

The story’s setting is critical for the novel. If the students do not understand the historical background they will not be able to fully understand the narrative. If they understand the historical setting, their reading comprehension will be greatly increased.
• **KKK:** The Ku Klux Klan eventually became known as the nation's largest “Invisible Empire,” or what is more commonly known as the KKK. The group was originally started when six young men raided the linen closets and pulled white sheets over their heads and rode through Tennessee enlisting people in their group with secret passwords and handshakes. The KKK wrought havoc, claiming to be the ghosts of Confederate soldiers, destroying property, participating in threatening night rides and frightening African Americans and Jews into not voting, owning land or attending school. The group was largely popular in the south during the Reconstruction era.
  o Information taken from *They Called Themselves The K.K.K.* by Susan Bartoletti

• **Roaring 1920’s:** Known as the Roaring Twenties. Jazz music flourished and flappers turned up on the scene. In 1920, women were granted the right to vote.

• **Prohibition:** In 1920, with the passing of the 18th Amendment the manufacturing or sale of liquor was prohibited. However, many resisted this amendment and made their own alcohol or sold it on the black market.

• **Free verse:** The text is written in free verse meaning that it contains no consistent meter or rhyme or pattern.

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**Issues Related to the Study of Literature**

• **Themes:**
  o **courage:** Many characters throughout the text including Esther, Sara, Leonara and Viola show a great deal of
courage in standing up for what is right and speaking out against the KKK. While many characters simply do nothing.

- “so i told my story to constable Johnson, and told it again inside the courtoom” sic (60).
- “Lenora sutter snatched esther from the path of the maine central locomotive” sic (73).
- I could climb pretty high with the klan, handing them those keys, but I wouldn’t do it” sic (87).

**prejudice:** The book deals with the KKK attempting to move into a small town in Vermont in 1924. The KKK shows prejudice towards African-Americans and Jewish people.

- “only esther didn’t mind about me being colored” sic (3).
- “I don’t know if he could see me well enough to judge the color of my skin” sic (4).

**forgiveness:** While Leonara is angry at Merlin for attempting to poison her family's well, she learns to forgive him and helps him to be proven innocent.

- “someone had to pay for me being a colored girl in a white world I thought. merlin ought to pay. so I waited but then mr. field said, leanora, no way to pay a debt by stealing from someone else to do it” sic (160).
- “and all he’s done lately to make things right” sic (157).
• **Setting:** *Witness takes place in a small town in Vermont in 1924.*

Students would need to understand the rapid changes the 1920’s underwent including the women’s movement, and prohibition as well as the flapper movement.

• **Point of View/narrative voice:** *Witness* is told from the perspective of eleven different characters: Percelle Johnson (town constable), Fitzgerald Flitt (doctor), Leanora Sutter (12), Sara Chickering (farmer), Harvey Pettibone (shop owner), Merlin Van Tornhout (18) Johnny Reeves(clergyman), Viola(shop owner), Esther Hirsch (12), Iris Weaver(restaurant owner), Reynard Alexander (newspaper editor). Each character has a picture included in the front of the book. While reading it would helpful to remind students to refer to this chart.

• **Characterization:**

Hesse does not create long and detailed descriptions about her characters. Instead she allows readers to see inside the characters minds through a type of stream of conscious.

  o **Leonara Sutter:** “a long time ago I wrote miss Helen keller about how maybe we’d be better off if no one could see. then nobody would mind a person’s skin color” sic (152). 

  Leonara is a fearless twelve year old African American. Loving to dance, like most 12 year old girls, Leonara exhibits great courage and strength beyond that of a 12 year old. Leonara is discriminate against and often left of the town’s activities because of her race. Daringly courageous, she also saves the life of Esther Hirsch.

  o **Percelle Johnson:** “more than 200 negores have moved into the state to build a dam. I’ll have to protect them from the ku Klux.”sic (101)

  Percelle is the town constable and is 66 years old.

  o **Sara Chickering:** “ all of these years I have managed fine without a man” sic (30).
Sara is a farm women and is middle aged. Sara lives with Esther and her father. Sara is very courageous and extremely independent.

- **Merlin Van Tornhout**: “If I had done what the klan sent me out to do, I’d be in jail a long time” sic (150).

  Merlin is an 18 year old boy who get caught up in the whirlwind of the KKK. Originally, wanting to a part of the KKK, he tries to join, but later decides that he does not want to be a part of all of the KKK's doings. Merlin is full of prejudice.

- **Esther Hirsch**: “and no one did here my little talks with God because no one is supposed to know the thinking's of little girls” sic (141).

  Esther is a 6 year old Jewish girl who is very innocent.

### Other Literary Terms:

- **conflict**
  - In literature, a conflict is a struggle between two opposing forces or characters. Some conflicts are external while others are internal. An internal conflict is a mental or emotional struggle that occurs within the character itself. For example, person versus self is an example of an internal conflict. An external conflict is a struggle that occurs between a character and their environment, or society, nature, or another character. *Witness* is full of conflicts. It will be especially helpful for students to examine the different kinds of conflict. The study of conflict will link directly into the units big questions about courage. Listed below are some examples:
    - Leonara v. Leonara: Leonara struggles with her identity and has to learn to accept her race
    - Vermont V. KKK: Some of the characters do not agree with the KKK, while others do.
    - Viola V. Harvey: Viola does not agree with the KKK and stand up to her husband telling him that he should not be a part of the KKK
    - Alexander v. Society: Alexander stands up against the KKK even though some of society does not want him to do so.

- **resolution**
  - Teaching conflict and resolution go hand in hand. Resolution is the solving of a conflict or problem. It will be important for the students to discuss the resolutions of the various conflicts that occur throughout the novel. Students will want to examine how the KKK
was driven from Vermont, and how Leanora overcomes her own individual conflict and tells the truth.

- **connotations**
  - Connotations are the emotional implications or cultural implications that may be associated with the word. A denotation of a word would include its dictionary definition. Throughout the unit it will be important for students to create their own connotations for the word courage.

- **setting**
  - The setting of the novel is rich in history. The novel is largely influenced by its historical surroundings. The KKK makes up a huge portion of the novel as well as prohibition and elements of the women’s movement. This text will provide students with a great opportunity to explore how setting influences characters.

- **free verse**
  - *Witness* is written in free verse. Many students will be unfamiliar with this genre and form. Free verse is written with no particular rhyme scheme, meter or pattern. While students are familiar with narrative, the format of this text may be difficult for them to understand at first. However, because the format is so different, this will make a great text for teaching students inferences with.

- **voice**
  - Because *Witness* is in free verse it is a great text to teach students voice with. The novel depicts the voices of 11 different characters. Each character has a distinct voice and personality. Merlin's voice is often full of prejudice while Esther voice is very innocent and full of hope. Viola's voice is full of warning and caution while Harvey’s is rash and obstinate. Along with studying inferences, students will be able to look at each character's voice.
    - Merlin van tornhout: “that witchy girl with those fuming eyes” sic (4).
    - Esther Hirsch: “and I do catch the wiggle fish” sic (5).
    - Leanora Sutter: “why can't folks just leave me alone” sic (7).

**How will students relate to this work?**

Many adolescents face a great deal of peer pressure at school. In a world of vast social changes, teenagers often are faced with the dilemma of deciding what is morally right and what is not. Students are faced with an onslaught of drugs, violence, sex and of course the
ethics of displaying honesty versus cheating or stealing. Just as the characters in this book are faced with the moral dilemma of deciding how to handle the KKK, teenagers are faced with their own moral dilemmas. Students will be able to relate to the pressure Merlin feels to join a group that he does not want to be a part of. Viola is forced to stand up for what she believes in when her husband joins the KKK; this can provide students a chance to explore how they might act if their friends started doing things they knew were wrong. Additionally, this work will help students to see how race does not determine their identity and consider how they can overcome racism and prejudice.

**Vocabulary Issues**

The format of the novel will be difficult for some students to understand. Because the novel is written in free verse it will require the students to make more inferences than a prose style of text would require of them. Since the text is told from the perspective of 11 different characters, students must also learn to negotiate 11 different voices.

The text is also worded just as the characters would say something. Esther Hirsch’s voice might be particularly for students to decipher as it is written as a 6 year old would speak. For example Esther says, “all the circus people and animals had knowings of the joy they must do men and women with big hammerings. tent poles did stand up so quick and a cookhouse did nearly put itself together” sic (85). While it is still possible to understand what Hesse is saying here, teachers will need to scaffold for their students how to read this and piece together what it means.

Hesse also frequently describes things differently then students may be used to. This is because she is capturing the setting of the 1920’s. For example at one point the town constable is referring to a flapper, however nowhere does the text refer to a flapper. Instead it just says “a girl goes and bobs her hair and her head starts filling with nothing but monkey business” sic (46). It will be essential for students to have a good understanding of the time period in order to help them negotiate the text.

Since the text is written in free verse it does not follow traditional conventions of grammar. This may difficult for students to cognitively grasp. The text contains several periods; however there is not capitalization and the periods are often several lines apart.

**Implications for Students with Diversity**

The novel ultimately calls for acceptance for people from all genders, races, and ages. The novel especially calls for a greater acceptance of Jews. Jews were a commonly targeted group for the KKK. This is manifested on page 48 as Merlin voices his concern that his girlfriend Mary "bought all her shoes from the Jew store” sic (48). It may be helpful to mention the Holocaust or to examine several Jewish traditions. This is a great opportunity
to bring Jewish voices into the classroom to help celebrate diversity. Also, the KKK targets African Americans. Likewise, this is a great opportunity to bring in African American voices. Right from the beginning of the text, readers are confronted with racism. Leonara notes that “the ones who wouldn’t dance with a negro, they went home in a huff that first day” sic (3). These issues can be directly linked to issues in today's society. Students can discuss how they are affected by prejudice or racism or incidents that they have seen. It could also serve as an opportunity for students to study other cultures in linked texts in order to broaden the idea of diversity.

**Gender Issues:**

Because the novel takes place in 1924, there are many themes from the Women's movement that are manifested in the novel. The text refers to women running for office and one character even claims, “she’ll be the first woman governor” sic (28). For example, the character Sara Chickering is a very independent woman especially for her time. Sara decides never to marry a man, because she claims that she does not need one. She states, “all these years i’ve managed fine without a man” sic (30). The text largely addresses how women’s roles were changing during the 1920’s. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to examine gender roles in society today and compare and contrast them to the 1920’s.

**Research Issues**

The setting and historical time period will provide students with several research issues.

- historical effects of KKK: Students will research the historical effects of the KKK and present their findings to the class. Students can create a pledge wall, where they will pledge to overcome prejudice
- role of prohibition in history: Students can watch several You Tube clips on prohibition. Students can then write a poem from the voice of Iris.
- the women’s movement: Students can research the women’s movement and then discuss the impact that this has had on society today.
- flappers: Students can research flappers and the culture of the 1920’s and compare it to society today

**Project Ideas**

- Multi-genre Research Paper: Because this novel is rich in history and themes, students could research the setting and recreate it through short stories, newspapers, pictures, songs or even dances. In order to incorporate more than the setting of the
book into the project, students would depict this information through the voice of one of the characters.

- **transmediation:** Because the novel is written in free verse this creates an excellent opportunity for students to use transmediation. Students can keep a journal of pictures and images that they have drawn or collected that they associate with the text in order to help them understand the meaning of the text. Students could also transform the free verse into prose.

- **photo essay:** The 1920's is an exciting time in history. After frontloading, students will search for images from the 1920's or images that they associate with the characters from the novel and create a photo essay.

- **Courage Discussion:** Students will complete anticipation guide with statements pertaining to courage. Students will then discuss their answers in groups of 3 or 4. The teacher will then call the class back together. The teacher will then read a statement and have the students stand if they agree. Then call on several students to share their response. Finally, after this discussion, students will need to do something that requires them to have courage and write a reflection piece on it.

- **Personal Narrative:** Students will create a personal narrative describing a time in their lives where they showed courage.

- **Town Newspaper:** Student's can create a town newspaper from this time period. Each student can sign up to write about different parts including obituaries, society news and court cases.

### Text Sets and Enrichment Resources

- **They Called Themselves the KKK** by Susan Bartoletti (Historical Fiction): **Informational Text**

- “Forgiveness has power to change future” by Jay Evensen (Desert News article): **Newspaper**

- Jazz collections from the 1920's including Louis Armstrong and Lillian Roth (music): **Music**
  - [www.newsplayer.com/1920s-videos](http://www.newsplayer.com/1920s-videos) clips from the 1920's (website and film): **Media**

- “For Obese People, Prejudice in Plain Sight” by Harriet Brown (New York Times): **Newspaper**

- Brave Irene by William Stieg (picture book): **Children's book**

- The Empty Pot by Demi (picture book): **Children's book**

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-When Jessie Came Across the Sea by Amy Hest (picture book): Children’s book
A KWHL for *Witness*


**Context:** The KWHL is an excellent pre-reading strategy to help introduce students to the KKK. Many younger students will have had a limited understanding of who and what the KKK is. This strategy will help provide the necessary scaffolding and vocabulary for students to gain experience with this topic. It will be most beneficial if this activity is used with images, discussions and clips. This activity will take place before students have begun reading *Witness*.

**Statement of Purpose:** The KKK will be a very difficult concept for many students to grasp. It also can be a very sensitive topic. However, understanding who and what the KKK is essential for understanding the plot of *Witness*. This activity will allow students to draw upon knowledge that they already have, and will give them room for discovery and exploration at the same time.

**Materials:** KWHL handouts, and overhead, *They Called Themselves the KKK*

**Directions:**

1. Introduce the novel, *Witness* to students. Tell students that this book deals with courage, prejudice and racism. Tell them that it is mainly about how the KKK works its way into a small town in Vermont in 1924. Explain to them that it will be essential for them to understand what and who the KKK is in order to understand the story. Give the KWHL charts out and ask students to write their names on them.

2. Give students time to brainstorm and write down what they already know about the KKK in the first column of their handout. You may need to guide students at the beginning. You could ask: “After the Civil War, were African Americans readily welcomed into society?” “What types of difficulty did the African Americans have after the Civil War?” After they have had sufficient time, have students share their responses and
record them on an overhead. This will allow you to see what the student’s already know, and what areas will need additional scaffolding. [5 minutes]

3. Then give students time to brainstorm and list what they want to learn about the KKK in the second column of their handout. Have students’ pair-share their responses with a neighbor. [2 minutes]

4. As a class discuss different ways that the students might go about obtaining answers to their questions. Their answers may include the Internet, a history teacher, a friend, books or movies or even newspapers. [3 minutes]

5. Share with students Susan Bartoletti’s book *They Called Themselves the KKK*. Place the book on a doc camera and allow the students to look at the pictures. Read the captions aloud to students. Also read the chapter headings out loud. Pages 17, 53, 101, 103, and 153, have pictures that will be great for prompting discussion. [7 minutes]

6. If there is time assign the students into groups of 3-5. Read Chapter 2 aloud to students. This chapter depicts the beginning of the KKK. [10 minutes]

7. Have students fill in the final column on their worksheet about what they have learned. Encourage students to go home and search out some of the answers that they still have. [3 minutes]

**Follow Up Activity:**

Have students frequently refer to their charts and continually add what they are learning about the KKK onto their charts. As they read *Witness* they will be able to add things from the book on their chart as well. It will be helpful to create a class chart as well that students can refer back to frequently.

**Assessment:**

This activity serves as a great pre-assessment to determine what students already know about the KKK. Additionally, it will allow you to see what questions your students have. Participation points can be awarded for completing the chart.
## KWHL Chart for *Witness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I already Know about the KKK?</th>
<th>What do I want to learn about the KKK?</th>
<th>How can I find this out?</th>
<th>What have I learned about the KKK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The KWHL Chart for *Witness* Model Chart Partially Filled In

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I already Know about the KKK?</th>
<th>What do I want to learn about the KKK?</th>
<th>How can I find this out?</th>
<th>What have I learned about the KKK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• white hoods</td>
<td>• how did it begin?</td>
<td>• internet</td>
<td>• The KKK discriminated against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fear</td>
<td>• is it still going on today?</td>
<td>• library</td>
<td>African Americans and Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Civil Rights</td>
<td>• how many people joined at first?</td>
<td>• history teacher</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Racism</td>
<td>• Did they only discriminate against African Americans?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lynching</td>
<td>• Why did the wear white hoods?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• They tried to frighten people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• night rides</td>
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<td></td>
<td>from voting, going to school, and</td>
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<td>• south</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>owning land</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• it started with 6 men raiding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the linen closet</td>
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Anticipation Guide for *Witness/Instructional Routine*


**Context:** The anticipation guide is a helpful pre-reading strategy. It will allow students to experience some of the themes they will encounter in the text. It will help to open student’s minds up to new ideas and pave the way for them to think about courage analytically. Students will complete this activity before reading the text, that way when they start reading they will be able to grasp the more difficult concepts of the book.

**Statement of Purpose:** “Three reasons for using anticipation guides according to Erickson, Huber, Bea and Mckenzie (1987) include: (1) relating prior knowledge to new information to enhance comprehensions, (2) creating interest which stimulates discussion on the topic, and (3) creating possibilities for integrating reading and writing instruction.” As students grapple with the themes of the text in new ways they will be ready to dive into *Witness* and get the most out of their reading experience.

**Materials Needed:** anticipation guides, student journals

**Unit Integration:** This activity would ideally be done at the beginning of the unit and would serve as a frontloading activity. This could be done before or after KWHL charts.

**Step 1:** Have students respond to the prompt “What does courage mean to you?” in their writers notebooks or on a piece of paper. This will allow the students to begin thinking about courage. [5 min]

**Step 2:** Have some of the students volunteer to share their responses. [2 min]. Tell students that for this next unit we will be examining the questions: “What is courage?” and “How can we stand up for what is right in our community?” In order to start thinking more about these ideas they will need to complete the anticipation guide. Tell students they most work quietly and quickly. [10-15 minutes] Walk around and monitor students progress.

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Step 3: Assign students into groups of 3-4. Tell the students that they are to share their responses with their group and try to convince their group in a respectful manner why their response is correct. [7-10 minutes] Be sure to monitor students while they are working to help ensure that groups stay on task. It might be helpful to tell the students that it might be difficult to reach a consensus since everyone will have a different opinion.

Step 4: Discussion: Call students attention back to the front of the room. Tell students that you are going to read several of the statements. After each statement I will say if you agree stand up. Ask several students to share why they agreed. Ask students who disagreed to stand up. Call on several to share why they disagreed. [7-10 minutes]

Step 5: Have students turn in their handouts so you can check for completion, but hand them back the next day. Tell them that as they are reading they will keep their anticipation guides out with them. As they read the text their ideas may change and they can make changes accordingly.

Step 6: Revisit the Guide: After finishing *Witness* students will write in their journals about how their responses changed and why they think they did. If they did not change they may write about why they did not change.

Step 7: Assessment: After students complete their anticipation guides you should be able to get an idea of how students view courage and how they based their decisions. This will help indicate what ideas you may want to come back and revisit.
Anticipation Guide for *Witness* by Karen Hesse

Name: __________________

*Directions:* Write “agree” or “disagree” next to each statement. Then, in 1-2 sentences, explain why you feel that way.

1. One must always stand up for injustices even if the personal cost is great.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

2. It is easier to show moral courage than it is to show physical courage.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

3. Revenge is the same thing as displaying courage.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

4. You are only displaying courage if all of the odds are against you.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

5. “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the mastery of it.”
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

6. In order to show courage you must speak up, you can’t remain silent.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

7. Courage means doing something difficult even if it is frightening.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

8. You are only showing courage if you have a positive attitude about it.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

9. Everyone is capable of showing courage.
   - agree/disagree: ____________
   - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________

10. Courage can never be an ordinary act, it has to be something extraordinary.
    - agree/disagree: ____________
    - Explanation: ____________________________________________________________________________
Literary Mandala Revised

(A During Reading Strategy for *Witness* by Karen Hess, Scholastic 2001 Edition) Adapted from Dr. Grierson BYU

**Context:** *Witness* is written through the voice of 11 different characters. Every 1-2 pages, the perspective and voice is changed to a different character. Because the perspective switches so often, it can be difficult for students to keep the characters distinct. This during reading activity will allow students to carefully examine each character and look at the individual voices of the characters depicted in the book. The students will be able to search the text and find surface answers, but they also will be able to employ character analysis and make inferences.

**Statement of Purpose:** This during reading strategy is designed to help students “tangle” with the text. This activity will help the students make the characters come to life. As the students search the text they will be able to use analytical and critical thinking skills as well as employing creativity. This activity will be better served if completed after reading at least a third of the text.

**Materials Needed:** class set of books, markers, and poster boards or butcher paper

**Directions:**

**Step 1:** Tell students that you will divide them into groups and assign them a character from the book. Explain to students that they will need to pick ten adjectives that describe their character and write their responses on their brainstorming worksheet. Divide students into groups of 2-5 and assign each group to be a character (Leanora Sutter, Percelle Johnson, Sara Chickering, Fitzgerald Flitt, Harvey Pettibone, Merlin Van Tornhout, Esther Hirsch, Johnny Reeves, Iris Weaver, Viola Pettibone, Reynard Alexander). [5 minutes]

**Step 2:** Tell students that they will now need to pick an animal, plant, color, mineral, shape and number that describes their character. Remind students that these are not just randomly assigned symbols, but symbols that actually
represent the personality of their characters and will need to refer to their list of adjectives. Have students record their responses on their brainstorming worksheet. It may be helpful to put a list of animals, plants, and minerals on the board. [10 minutes]

**Step 3:** Tell students they will need to back up their responses. They will then search for 3 quotes that back up their symbols or adjectives. [7 minutes]

**Step 4:** Call students attention back together. Explain that they will now be creating a mandala. Explain that mandalas have a sunnyside and a shadowside. The dark and light side represents the dark and light sides of our personalities. Have students draw an image of their character large enough to fit on a poster board. [2 minutes]

**Step 5:** Have students draw a line down the middle of their character and label one side “Sunnyside” and “Shadowside”.

**Step 6:** Have students put the information from the brainstorming sheet (adjectives, quotes, and symbols) on the appropriate side. [3 minutes]

**Step 7:** Have each group share their Mandala. (If you would like, you can then hang them around the classroom)

**Follow Up Activity:** After hanging posters around the classroom, you can provide students time to update their posters. As they read more of the text, they can add adjectives, quotes or change their character’s symbols.

**Assessment:** After students complete this activity, you will be able to assess if students are completing their reading, and how much they are interacting with the text. The information depicted on the mandalas will also reveal any questions or gaps that students have.
Mandala Activity for *Witness*

Your Character is: ________________________________

List 10 Adjectives that describe your character!

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 

What animal best describes your character and why?

What color best describes your character and why?

What mineral best describes your character and why?

What plant best describes your character and why?

What number best describes your character and why?
What shape best describes your character and why?

List Three Quotes that describe your adjectives or offer support for your symbols. Be sure to include page numbers.

1.

2.

3.
List Group Label

(List Group Label/ A During Reading Strategy for *Witness* by Karen Hesse, Scholastic 2001 Edition) Adapted from Dr. Grierson, BYU

**Context:** The novel takes place during the 1920's. The 1920's is full of historical events that students will need to understand in order to fully grasp the book. This activity will be best if used at the beginning of students reading. The List Group label will help students gain insights into the 1920's as well as teaching them categorization skills.

**Statement of Purpose:** This activity will immerse students into the world of the 1920's. The activity will allow students to dive into the setting of the novel and allow them to employ higher thinking skills as practice labeling and categorizing.

**Materials Needed:** Louis Armstrong music, pictures of the 1920's and post it notes

**Directions:**

**Step 1: Get the Classroom Ready** Have Louis Armstrong music playing in the classroom as students walk in to the classroom. Have pictures from the 1920's hanging up around the classroom.

**Step 2:** Write the words “The 1920's” on the board. Have students brainstorm, and list as many words that they can associate with the 1920's down. [5 minutes]

**Step 3:** Give students a post it note, and a marker. Have students write down their best response on their post it note. Have students go up to the board and post their response on the board. Tell students that if their response is already posted on the board that they will need to post a different one that is not already on the board. [5 minutes]

**Step 4:** Read through the student responses. Ask students if there are any other words that they associate with the 1920’s that should be placed on the board. Post any new responses on the board. [2 min]

Baird, BYU 2012
Step 5: Have students put the words into groups. This is not the time to label the categories, but rather just put them into groups. Discuss with students their reasons for placing their responses into those categories. Point out to students that several of the items may overlap into more than one category. [5-10 minutes]

Step 6: Have students assign labels for the groups now. [7 minutes]

Follow Up Activity: At the beginning of several class periods, you can present several of the topics addressed in the 1920’s in short mini presentations. These topics can include the women’s movement, prohibition, jazz, and the flappers.

Assessment: This activity will allow you to see what students know about the 1920’s. As an exit card you can have students list two things that they have learned about the 1920’s.

Example Words and Labels

- flappers
- jazz
- prohibition
- women’s rights
- voting
- bobs
- Roaring Twenties
- Babe Ruth
- discrimination
- immigration
- Harlem Renaissance
- dance marathons
- Al Capone

Labels: people/groups, movements, culture, feelings
Comic Strip Activity Revised for Witness

(After Reading Strategy for Witness by Karen Hesse, 2001 Scholastic Edition) Adapted from Dr. Grierson BYU and Dorothy Beck Black Hawk College

Context: The comic strip activity allows students to draw inferences from what they have discovered about the text. It also allows them to work with creating dialogue—a great transition into writing a narrative or short children’s story. This activity will work best as an after reading strategy.

Statement of Purpose: The comic strip activity will allow students to experiment with the rich voices found throughout Witness. Making inferences was essential to understanding the text, and this activity will allow students to flush out their ideas and the inferences they have already made. Additionally, this will help students practice dialogue, allow them to re-examine the themes of courage, and forgiveness found throughout the text and finally it will prepare them to write a narrative of their own.

Materials Needed:

- comic strip examples
- comic strip prompt
- computer access

Directions:

Step 1: Place several examples of comic strips on the overhead. Have student’s point out certain characteristics that they notice about the comic strips. The newspaper will have plenty of examples to pull from. Students should notice how there are not very many words. Be sure to point out that the dialogue is marked with quotes. Students show point out the images. If you need to prompt students you can ask them how they know what the comic strip is saying and then ask how you know? This may help to prompt more answers. [5 minutes]

Step 2: Have students look at a comic that contains no words and have them come up with their own words for the comic. Tell students that it is important to consider the following questions. It may be helpful to place these on the board or to give them their own handout. These questions are taken from Dorothy Beck, Black Hawk College Moine Illinois. [5-10]

- When and where is the cartoon set?
- Describe each of the characters.
- What is the relationship of the characters to each other?
• What mood or emotion does each character display?
• What is each character thinking?
• What is each character saying?
• What happens in this cartoon?
• How do you know?

Step 3:
Tell students that they will now create a comic of their own. The prompt will read the following: Your mission is to create a comic of your own. This comic must be about you, and it must tell about a time that you showed courage. It must contain 6 panels or squares. You can either have students create their comic on paper, or you can have them visit http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/ create their comics online. [15 minutes]

Step 4: Tell students they will now create a comic about a character from Witness. The prompt will read the following: Your mission is to create a comic about a character from Witness. You are free to pick any character, but it must be realistic and pertain to some aspect of the book. You can either have students create their own comic on paper, or you can have them visit the same website as listed above. [15 minutes]

Step 5: Have students share their comics for the rest of class.

Assessment: Have students write on an exit card how they create dialogue.

Follow Up Activity: Have students use their first comic and have them turn it into a longer narrative.
Hot Seat Revised


**Context:** After finishing reading students will participate in a hot seat. The hot seat will play on the book’s title *Witness* and the class will temporarily turn into a courtroom. This activity will help students to make inferences from the text, make evaluations and allow them to work on their discussion skills.

**Statement of Purpose:** This activity will allow students to review the text and to delve into the characters. The activity will also foster an environment of creativity that will help students discuss, analyze and ask effective questions.

**Materials Needed:** copies of the text for the students and name tags for each student (lawyer(4), Leanora Sutter, Percelle Johnson, Sara Chickering, Fitzgerald Flitt, Harvey Pettibone, Merlin Van Tornhout, Esther Hirsh, Johnny Reeves, Iris Weaver, Viola Pettibone, Reynard Alexander, juror( as many as needed so everyone can have a tag)

**Directions:**

**Step 1:** Tell students that today we will be holding court. Ask students what they know about court cases. Remind them of the different jobs that people have in court. Ask them what the judge does? The lawyers? The jury? The witnesses? Assign each student a role/character and have them write their role/character on the name tag. Tell the class that the jury’s job will be to decide if they stayed true to the characters assigned from the book, and will decide if the lawyers asked appropriate questions. Tell the class that you will be the judge. The lawyers will be in charge of asking the characters different questions.

**Step 2:** Have the lawyers get into a group and come up with a list of questions that they can ask each character. Give them some example questions. Here are list of some questions lawyers could ask characters:
• To Reynard Alexander: Why did you speak out against the KKK in your newspaper? (possible answer: I attempted to remain neutral until I had reason otherwise, and they gave me reason page 26)
• To Sara Chickering: Why didn’t you ever get married? (possible answer: I manage fine without one page 30)
• To Iris Weaver: How do you feel about prohibition?(possible answer: I know I shouldn’t sale liquor, but it is a way out of this valley page 46)
• To Leanora Sutter: Why do you like Mr. Fields? (I learn when I am with him 99-100).
• Why didn’t you poison the Sutter’s well? (Because I didn’t want to kill them and Mr. Harvey pushed it on me 115).

Have each character pair up with a member of the jury. For example a jury member with Esther Hirsch, a jury member with Iris Weaver. Tell them that will need to study their character and write down their many personality traits, describe how they feel about the KKK, prohibition, the women’s movement to help them prepare for their role. [Give the students about 20 minutes]

Step 3: Prepare the classroom. Place a desk at the front of the classroom, this will be for the witness or character that is called to the front of the room. Tell the lawyers to stand in the front of the classroom (they could also move their desks to the front). Tell the jury members to move to the left side of the classroom. Tell the characters to move to the right side of the classroom.

Step 4: Have the lawyers call their first witness to the stand and let the court case begin. Let the lawyer ask each character 3or 4 questions. Give the jury a minute to decide if the character was accurate and then have the lawyers call the second witness to the stand. Repeat the process. [20 minutes]

Assessment: Leave a few minutes as the end of class for the students to go back to their seats and fill out an exit card describing what they learned.

Follow up Activity: Have students get into groups and use their handout to review for the test.
Witness: A Court Case

Lawyers Handout: You will need to come up with 3 questions that you can ask each character.

Leanora Sutter
1. Why do you like Mr. Fields?
2.
3.

Percelle Johnson (town constable)
1.
2.
3.

Sara Chickering
1. Why didn't you ever get married?
2.
3.

Fitzgerald Flitt (Doctor)
1.
2.
3

Harvey Pettibone (shop owner)
1.
2.
3.

Merlin Van Tornhout
1. Why didn't you poison the Sutter's well?
2.
3.

Esther Hirsch
1.
2.
3.

Johnny Reeves
1.
2.
3.

Iris Weaver
1. How do you feel about prohibition?
2.
3.

Viola Pettibone
1.
2.
3.

Reynard Alexander
1. Why did you speak out against the KKK in your newspaper?
2.
3.


Witness: A Court Case

Juror Handout

Your job is to help your partner become an expert on their character. Help them list key personality traits for their character and how they feel about important social issues addressed in the book. It may also be helpful to write down major quotes and page numbers.

The character is:________________________________________________________

Personality traits____________________________ has.

How does this character feel about the KKK? What about Prohibition? The Women’s Movement?

What are 3 key quotes from the character?

Witness A Court Case

Character Handout

Baird, BYU 2012
Your job is to become an expert on your assigned character. Your partner, a member of the jury will help you. You will need to list key personality traits for their character and how they feel about important social issues addressed in the book. It may also be helpful to write down major quotes and page numbers.

The character is:_________________________________________________________

Personality traits__________________________________ has.

How does this character feel about the KKK? What about Prohibition? The Women’s Movement?

What are 3 key quotes from the character?
Witness A Silent Discussion

(Discussion Strategy for Witness by Karen Hesse, Scholastic 2001 Edition)

Context: This discussion strategy will allow students to discuss the theme of prejudice in an analytical way. Students will be able to draw upon examples they have read from the text, their own lives and the world. This activity serves as a great way to help prepare students to voice their opinions in a respectful manner. This activity will be used when the students are finished or at least partially through the novel.

Statement of Purpose: This activity will allow students to develop discussion techniques that will help them prepare for a vocal discussion. The activity will allow students to analyze the theme of prejudice, which is prevalent throughout the novel.

Materials:

- copies of the article “For Obese People, Prejudice in Plain Sight” by Harriet Brown (New York Times)
- reading prompts

Directions:

Step 1: Have students write in their journals about what the word prejudice means to them. [3 minutes]

Step 2: Pair Share: Have students share their response with a neighbor. This will help get ideas flowing for the silent discussion. [2 minutes]

Step 3: Hand out the article “For Obese People, Prejudice in Plain Sight”. Have students read it, tell them to underline it and make notes as needed. [10 minutes]

Step 4: Put students into groups of 4 and give each person in the group a different prompt. Tell students that they will have 5 minutes to write and respond to the prompt quietly and without talking. Tell students they will need to sign their name under each response they make.

Baird, BYU 2012
Step 5: Have students pass their prompt to the person to the right of them in their group. Tell students that they will now need to read the prompt and what their classmate wrote and respond to the prompt or to the classmate. It may be helpful to review appropriate discussion techniques: “I agree,” “I understand what you are saying, but I think that...” etc. [6 minutes]

Step 6: Have students pass their prompt to the person to the right in their group. Tell them that they will need to respond to the prompt and to their classmates. [7 minutes] - give students more time with each prompt so they can have time to read what their peers wrote.

Step 7: Have students pass their response to the right one last time. Tell students that this time instead of writing their own response that they will read the prompt, and then annotate their classmate’s responses. [5 minutes]

Assessment: Have students write on an exit card what they liked about the silent discussion and what they didn’t like. Also have them write one thing they learned.

Follow Up Activity: Have student’s participate in a fish bowl discussion the next day on prejudice.
Witness Silent Discussion Prompt One

In the article, Harriet Brown, the author claims that people are often more openly prejudiced against obese people than they would be about racial or gender prejudices; do you agree? Why or why not?

- 

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

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Baird, BYU 2012
Witness Silent Discussion Prompt Two

Why do you think people have prejudice?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________
Witness Silent Discussion Prompt Three

Society has come a long way and prejudice is not really an issue anymore. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- 

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Baird, BYU 2012
**Witness Silent Discussion Prompt Four**

What examples of prejudice can you think of that are depicted in *Witness*?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

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Baird, BYU 2012
Apply it Vocabulary for *Witness*  
*(A Vocabulary Strategy for *Witness* by Karen Hesse, Scholastic 2001 Edition)* Adapted from Dr. Grierson BYU

**Context:** The format of the novel will be difficult for some students to understand. Because the novel is written in free verse it will require the students to make more inferences than a prose style of text would require of them. Since the text is told from the perspective of 11 different characters, students must also learn to negotiate 11 different voices.

**Statement of Purpose:** This activity will give students an opportunity to learn new tier 3 vocabulary words in a collaborative way. Students will able to participate in an exciting and engaging activity that will increase their reading comprehension. It can be used prior to reading so that students will be prepared to engage with the text. Students will also be able to use their vocabulary words in a variety of ways.

**Materials:** markers, note cards,

**Directions:**

**Step 1:** Give each student a 5 different note cards. Have the students split their note card into a T. Write the first vocabulary word on the board. *scorched*. Ask students if they recognize the word. Ask students to turn to page 10 of their books. Tell them to look at the bottom stanza and read the sentence and look for the word scorched. Have them copy the sentence in the top right corner of the card.

**Step 2:** Write the definition of scorched on the board and have students copy it down in the top left corner. Scorched is to wither with pain from intense heat, or to have been severally burned. Tell students to imagine that they have been out swimming at the pool all day. Tell them that the sun felt so nice. Now they are going home and realize they terrible sunburn. Now tell students to write the definition in the bottom square on the left. [5 minutes]

**Step 3:** Now tell students to draw a picture that symbolizes wither to them in the top right hand corner. [2 minutes]

**Step 4:** Now have them write a sentence in the last square that will help them remember the word. [3 minutes]
**Step 5:** Repeat this process for the following words: drudge (30), scrawny (40), crevice (158), disregarded (145).

**Assessment:** Have students turn in their note cards and look at their work to see if they understood the concepts.

**Follow Up Activity:** When you come to the part in the novel where each of these words are addressed you can check for understanding to see if students remember.

**Sample note cards for Witness:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scorched</td>
<td>“I didn’t feel that cold, I was that scorched” 10.</td>
<td>Picture here!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition: to wither with pain from intense heat or to have been intensely burned</td>
<td>After spending the day at the beach, my skin was scorched so badly it hurt just to touch it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drudge</td>
<td>“I may work as hard as my mother, but I’m drudge to no one” 30.</td>
<td>Picture here!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition: a person who does menial or distasteful and dull tasks</td>
<td>Doing the dishes was such a drudge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrawny</td>
<td>“Mr. Field is a white man with cheeks shrunk in enough to make his ears and his eyes too big for the rest of his face and a scrawny neck” (40).</td>
<td>Picture here!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition: unattractive and thin, small</td>
<td>The boy looked scrawny next to the sumo wrestler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crevice</td>
<td>Picture here!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we got hold of the buck and pulled it out of the crevice “(158).”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: a narrow opening</td>
<td>The crevice in between the canyon seemed endless.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disregarded</th>
<th>Picture here!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“he totally disregarded all attacks made upon him” (145).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: to pay no attention, or to treat as unworthy or not worth noticing</td>
<td>He completely disregarded my excuse for being late.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cause and Effect for *Witness*

*(A Free Choice Strategy for *Witness* Scholastic 2001 Edition)* idea adapted from Dr. Grierson BYU

**Context:** This activity will allow students to determine the relationship between cause and effect in the novel. It will also allow students to use higher levels of thinking and practice using analytical skills. *Witness* is an excellent text for students to study cause and effect relationships because Hesse depicts the consequences of characters actions.

**Statement of Purpose:** This is an excellent during reading activity that will allow students to see how the events of *Witness* unfold. It will also serve as a review for the students to help them remember what has happened in the story.

**Materials:** cause and effect handouts and copies of the text for each student

**Directions:**

**Step 1:** Ask your students what would happen if they did not turn any assignments for the entire year? They might say they would fail. Tell students that this is a consequence or an effect of not turning in their homework.

**Step 2:** Tell students that every event is followed by an effect. Some effects are positive and some effects are negative.

**Step 3:** Tell students that today they will be looking at causes and effects that occur throughout *Witness*. Pass out the handout to each student. Have them work on it quickly and quietly. [15 minutes]

**Step 4:** Have students pair-share their answers.

**Assessment:** For an exit card have students write down another cause and effect example from the novel that was not listed on the worksheet.

**Follow Up Activity:** Have students use their worksheet to help review for the test
### Witness a Cause and Effect Study!

Name: __________________________ Date: __________ Period: ________

**Directions:** Match the effect with each cause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leanora joins the dance school</td>
<td>A. “I wasn’t home ten minutes when constable Johnson showed up and brought me in on charges of attempted murder” (148).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alexander speaks out against the KKK</td>
<td>B. Leanora testifies in court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Merlin attempts to poison the Sutter’s well</td>
<td>C. “they went home in a huff that first day some came back” (3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Harvey joins the KKK</td>
<td>D. Sara never gets married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Iris Weaver secretly sells alcohol</td>
<td>E. “the gentleman’s going to jail for her” (66).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mr field says that “no way to pay a debt by stealing from someone else to do it” (160).</td>
<td>F. “we lit up prospect hill with a fiery cross” (53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sara watches her mom work “from every morning until night” (30).</td>
<td>G. “Viola says: I’m trying to buy back your goo name..with your broom sales and your liquor smashing and your klan” (128).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The KKK comes to down</td>
<td>H. “a threat came from the klan, in the form of a letter, advising me to be careful of what I print” (108).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>