ANTICIPATION GUIDE FOR
THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM — 1963

True or False? What do you think this novel talks about? After marking each of your answers, you will have a chance to discuss why you chose either true or false for each question.

True False

1. Birmingham was a peaceful place in 1963.

2. People from the south have thinner blood than people from the north, which is why they have a harder time when the weather turns cold.

3. The Watsons are an African-American family that live in Birmingham, Alabama.

4. People who look different than the majority are always less intelligent.

5. It is okay to bully another individual as long as they are young and small.

6. The novel is told from the point of view of a young boy.

7. People who hurt others are always punished for their actions.

8. True “magic,” according to one character in the book, does exist.


10. True heroes are those that see something is wrong and are not afraid to stand up and ask, “Why can’t we change this?”

Williams, 2002
A TEACHER’S ANTICIPATION GUIDE FOR 
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Purpose:
The purpose of this strategy is to help students begin to make predictions about the text that they will be reading, or already have begun to read. The strategy not only helps students have fun in making predictions, but it allows them to also think about their reasons for why they would support a certain prediction as being either true or false. As students discuss the reasons for their predictions, they can become open to new ideas as well as learn how to defend their arguments. And when students actually read the text, they can then measure their predictions against what Christopher Paul Curtis has written. This will allow students to not only feel success at having “guessed” about what might be coming up in the story, but students will also be able to reevaluate their answers to what might be true or false and to further make opinions connected with discussions about the text.

Rationale:
*The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963*’s anticipation guide will be administered to students directly before beginning their reading of the book, after the class has discussed background information about Christopher Paul Curtis and the general condition of the United States during the early 1960's. Presenting the anticipation guide can help students immediately become interested in the text, and will help to engage them in their future reading of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham -- 1963.*

Directions:
A teacher will hand out the anticipation guide before beginning the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham -- 1963.* The teacher should not give any more directions to the students than to fill out the sheet, marking “true” or “false” for each question and asking students to be ready to defend why they have marked each question the way they have. After all students have completed the anticipation guide, small groups will be organized for students to discuss their answers. Following the small groups discussions, the entire class will discuss each answer.

Steps:
1. Hand out the anticipation guide. Tell students to mark the answer to each question with a “true” or “false” mark (“T” can stand for “true,” and “F” for “false”). Inform students that they should be thinking about why they chose each answer, and they can make notes off to the side of each question to remind them of their defense for each question’s answer.
2. Give students about five minutes to complete the anticipation guide.
3. Divide students into groups of two or three students each. Give each group about seven minutes to discuss their answers and defend them.
4. End the group discussion, and begin a classroom discussion that briefly goes over each question in the anticipation guide, but which has the main focus of giving students and their groups chances to defend their anticipations.
5. Help students realize that anticipating is good because it can get them thinking about new ideas. The anticipation will also help them to be curious about what is coming up.

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True or False “Answer” Sheet
1. Birmingham was a peaceful place in 1963.
   *This statement is false. Birmingham, Alabama, like so many other towns in the south, experienced a great deal of violence and hatred as the civil rights movement fought for equality for all people regardless of race. There were many unsolved bombings in Birmingham at the time of the story, including the one incorporated into the storyline of the novel that took place at the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church on September 15, 1963. Four young teenage girls — Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley — were killed when a bomb went off during Sunday school. Also, one girl had to have an eye removed because of the bombing, and another girl was blinded. In the unrest that followed the bombing, two other African American children died: sixteen-year-old Johnny*
Robinson and thirteen-year-old Virgil Wade.

2. People from the south have thinner blood than people from the north, which is why they have a harder time when the weather turns cold.  *This statement is false, though Byron ties to make Kenny and Joey believe that is true. The Watson children’s mother is from Alabama and their father is from Michigan. Huge temperature differences exist between these two states, and are humourously referred to often in the novel.

3. The Watsons are an African-American family that live in Birmingham, Alabama.  *This statement is false. The Watsons are an African-American family, but they live in Flint, Michigan. In the novel the family travels from Michigan to Alabama, hence the title The Watson Go to Birmingham — 1963.

4. People who look different than the majority are always less intelligent.  *This statement is false. In the novel, Rufus and Cody move to Michigan from the south. Because of their strong southern accent and faded clothes, they find themselves very different from other kids in Michigan. And sadly, because of these differences the other kids assume Rufus and Cody are less intelligent.

5. It is okay to bully another individual as long as they are young and small.  *This statement is false. Bullying is a major theme in this novel. Kenny, because of his small size and lazy eye, finds himself baring the brunt of a great deal of bullying. But, even though Kenny is smaller than his bullies, it is not right for them to bother him.

6. The novel is told from the point of view of a young boy.  *This statement is true. The novel is written in first person and told from the point of view of Kenny, a ten-year-old boy.

7. People who hurt others are always punished for their actions.  *This statement is false. Sadly, so many of the perpetrators of the violence throughout the civil rights movement were never convicted or punished. Suspects in the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church bombing were only brought to trial in April of 2001, thirty-eight years after the bombing occurred.

8. True “magic,” according to one character in the book, does exist.  *This statement is true. Despite what others tell him, Kenny does believe that “magic” exists. “[Byron] was also very wrong about there not being anything like magic power or genies or angels. Maybe those weren’t the things that could make a run-over dog walk without wobbling but they were out there” (204).

9. The Watson family moves from Flint, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963.  *This statement is false. The Watson family is only visiting and vacationing in Birmingham, Alabama. They take the trip to visit Grandma Sands and to leave Byron there for the summer.

10. True heroes are those that see something is wrong and are not afraid to stand up and ask, “Why can’t we change this?”  *This answer is true. A hero is definitely someone who is not afraid to stand up for what is right. Many heroic people died in the struggle for civil rights. Many others were injured or arrested or lost their homes or businesses. It is almost impossible to imagine the courage of the first African American children who walked into segregated schools or the strength of the parents who permitted them to face the hatred and violence that awaited them. They did it in the name of the movement, in the quest for freedom. These people are true American heroes.

Williams, 2002