

# A Taste of Blackberries



By

Doris Buchanan Smith

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one chapter of *A Taste of Blackberries* and is comprised of the following activities

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include friendship, personal growth, dealing with loss, death and grief.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

# A Taste of Blackberries

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## Synopsis

Jamie isn't afraid of anything. Always ready to get into trouble, then right back out of it, he's a fun and exasperating best friend.

But when something terrible happens to Jamie, his best friend has to face the tragedy alone. Without Jamie, there are so many impossible questions to answer – how can your best friend be gone forever? How can some things, like playing games in the sun or the taste of blackberries that Jamie loved, go on without him? [The Publisher]

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found online at such sites as the following: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Taste\\_of\\_Blackberries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Taste_of_Blackberries)

### Author Biography *Doris Buchanan Smith*

Doris Jean Buchanan was born June 1, 1934 in Washington D.C. At the age of two she began memorizing nursery rhymes read to her by her mother, and inventing stories of her own. Smith grew up in the Virginia-Highland neighborhood of Atlanta and remained there until the early 1960s. Noticing that she had a flair for storytelling a sixth-grade teacher, Miss Pruitt (to whom *A Taste of Blackberries* is dedicated), asked Doris if she planned on becoming a writer one day. The suggestion resonated and a "closet" writer 'was born. She met R. Carroll Smith while attending South Georgia College, Douglas, Georgia, and in December 1954 they were married. The Smiths settled in Brunswick, Georgia, where they raised four children



of their own and cared for dozens of foster children, including one whom they reared from age 12 to adulthood. After the author's youngest child entered public school, Smith began to focus on her writing, forming a writers group and attending writers conferences while honing her craft. Smith's first completed novel was never published, but her second, *A Taste of Blackberries*, became a classic. Doris Buchanan Smith succumbed to cancer in August, 2002. [Courtesy of Wikipedia]

# A Taste of Blackberries

*By Doris Buchanan Smith*

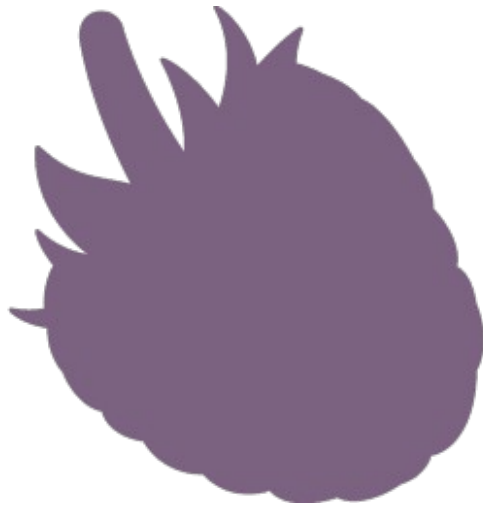


## Student Checklist

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

# A Taste of Blackberries



*By Doris Buchanan Smith*

Name:

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# A Taste of Blackberries

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## Chapter 1



### Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist in *A Taste of Blackberries* is a young boy of about eleven years old, but interestingly is never named by the author. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels that you have read. What do you think makes for an especially interesting **protagonist**?




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

aggravate	scornful	confidence	paradiddles
buoy	accidentally	exaggeration	puckered

1. I think that \_\_\_\_\_ can do a lot to spice up a good story.
2. My heart was beating \_\_\_\_\_.
3. My father \_\_\_\_\_ shot off his big toe in a hunting mishap.
4. It is not a good idea to \_\_\_\_\_ a hive of bees.
5. Samantha's lips \_\_\_\_\_ after she popped the blackberry into her mouth.
6. “I have all the \_\_\_\_\_ in the world,” the runner exclaimed boastfully.
7. The driver of the boat veered sharply to the left as soon as he spotted the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. It was difficult not to be \_\_\_\_\_ of such a crazy idea.



# Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?


2. When the boys were picking blackberries they hear two nearby voices speaking about Jamie. What was the opinion of one of the speakers about Jamie?


3. What was one other thing about Jamie's personality that the narrator found remarkable?


4. What did Jamie do in this chapter that was quite brave?


5. Why didn't the narrator eat the apple that Jamie offered him?


6. What is your impression of Jamie at this point in the story?


7. Do you think you would like to have Jamie for a friend? Why or why not?


## Good to Know ~ The Japanese Beetle

The Japanese beetle is about 15 millimetres (0.6 in) long and 10 millimeters (0.4 in) wide, with copper-colored fore-wings and green thorax and head. It is not very destructive in Japan, where it is controlled by natural predators, but in North America it is a serious pest of about 200 species of plants, including rose bushes, grapes, and birch trees.



It is a clumsy flier, dropping several centimeters when it hits a wall. These insects damage plants by eating only the leaf material between the veins, and may also feed on fruit on the plants if present.

## Language Activity



**A.** A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. The following is an example from Chapter One, ... *and stared at the apple, floating like a buoy*. What two things are being compared in this example?



--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) the blast of a shotgun

--

b) the flight of a Japanese beetle

--

## Blackberry Pie

Blackberries form an important part of this story as they do in the novel by Sharon Creech, ***Walk Two Moons***. Using resources in your school library, the Internet, or a recipe book at home, see if you can find an intriguing recipe which calls upon the use of blackberries in its creation. Copy out the recipe and share it with your friends.



## B. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first chapter of *A Taste of Blackberries*.

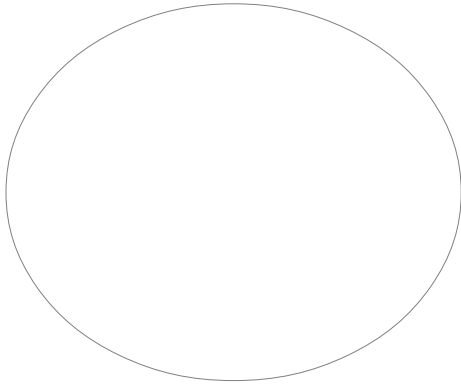
Word	Anagram	Clue
never		Jamie had a lot of this.
swipe		Mops; sponges.
street		Someone who gives an exam.
time		A thing.
else		Long, thin fish.
faces		Small restaurants.
field		Sorted into an office cabinet.

Now find four additional words from the first chapter which have interesting anagrams and see if you can stump a classmate.

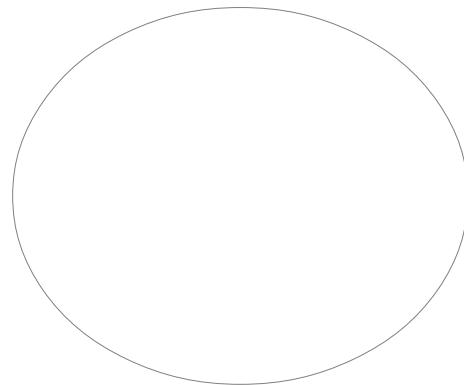
Word	Anagram	Clue

### C. 5 Ws and an H.

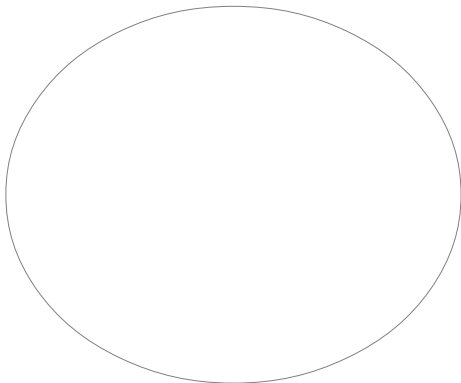
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



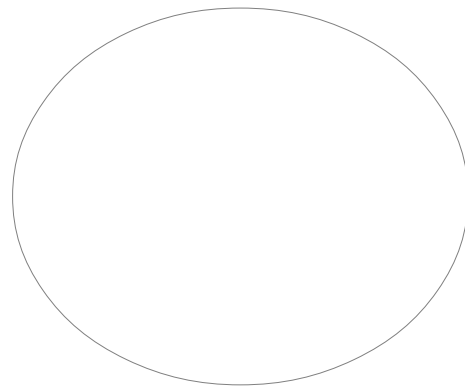
***WHO?***



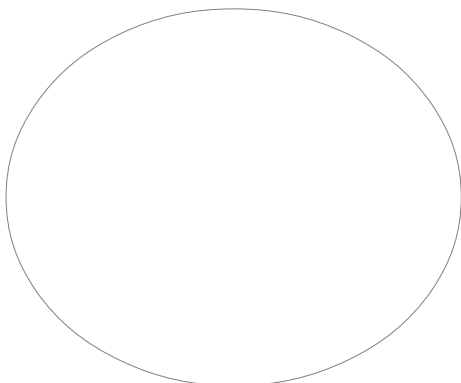
***WHAT?***



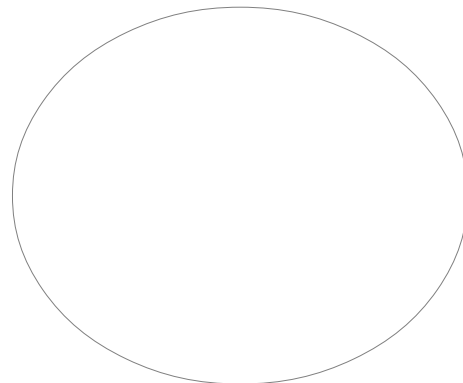
***WHEN?***



***WHERE?***



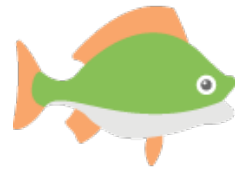
***WHY?***



***HOW?***

## D. Caviar Words

The author of this novel is noted for her use of elegant, tasteful words. Someone once stated that some words have the sound of **caviar** (rich and elegant) and others are more common (**peanut butter** words). With a colleague come up with 6 examples of each type of word. You may use any chapter of the novel to find these words.



Caviar Words	Peanut Butter Words

## E. My 02¢ About Chapter 1.

<b>What I Liked Best:</b>

<b>I Didn't Like The Part:</b>

<b>I Didn't Like It Because:</b>

## Extension Activities



### A. Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6

## B. A Poem Even Jamie Would Enjoy

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and humorous. The following quatrain is actually one verse of a longer poem called **Japanese Beetle** by Gary Bryson which is found on the [poetryhunter.com](http://poetryhunter.com) website.

*Shimmering, crawling, rolling in flight,  
They eat up my rose bushes by day and by night.  
I scarcely could count to number them all,  
An insatiable appetite from a beetle so small.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - A - B - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: AABB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBB, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The topic should have something to do with the themes established in the first chapter of our novel.

### The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem on a subject of your choice. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: \_\_\_\_\_
