

# Fish in a Tree



By

Lynda Mullaly Hunt

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 three or four chapters of *Fish in a Tree* and is comprised of these 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** and **topics** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include learning disabilities (dyslexia), bullying, the importance of friends and family, perseverance and personal growth, courage.

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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 *anagrams*
7. Identify *personification*
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*
14. Identification of a *cliffhanger*

### 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. Identify the climax of the novel
4. Five W's Chart

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Protagonists/antagonists
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Comparing two characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete a KWS Chart

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Design an Information Card

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## Synopsis

Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she's able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She's afraid to ask for help; after all, how can you cure dumb? However, Ally's newest teacher sees the bright, creative kid beneath the troublemaker and helps to shine a light on her gifts. As her confidence grows, Ally feels free to be herself and gets to know other kids who break the mold. When the outsiders start to fit in, surprising things begin to happen in Ally's classroom that show her there's a lot more to her – and to everyone – than a label. [Summary courtesy of the publisher]

## Author Biography

Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Lynda Mullaly Hunt's debut novel, *One for the Murphys*, is on twenty-eight (and counting) state award lists and has received many other honors, including *Bank Street's 2013 Best Book of the Year*. She's a former teacher, and she holds writers' retreats for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She lives in Connecticut with her husband, two children, an impetuous beagle, and a beagle-loathing cat. (Biography courtesy of the Publisher)



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## Student Checklist

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

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name:

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## Chapters 1 - 4



### Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist of *Fish in a Tree* is sixth grade student, Ally Nickerson, who would actually like to be anywhere but in school. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an interesting and memorable **protagonist**?




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

inappropriate	compliment	riled	pistachio
exasperated	ingredients	humiliated	manatee

1. Henry was tremendously \_\_\_\_\_ when her realized no one else was wearing a costume to the party.
2. When handed the \_\_\_\_\_, she wasn't sure whether it was edible or not.
3. Paul realized it was most \_\_\_\_\_ to belch in church.
4. What were the \_\_\_\_\_ you included in the recipe for those bran muffins?
5. Bernice became quite \_\_\_\_\_ up when she heard someone dis her brother.
6. The sight of a \_\_\_\_\_ at the aquarium frightened the small child.
7. Mrs. Silver wore an \_\_\_\_\_ expression when Ally entered her office.
8. Didn't you realize that Jeremy was simply offering you a \_\_\_\_\_?



# Questions



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


2. Match each name with the proper description:

1	Ally
2	Mrs. Silver
3	Oliver
4	Shay
5	Albert
6	Mrs. Hall
7	Jessica
8	Keisha

A	Expecting a baby.
B	Tells Shay to mind her own business.
C	His/her father owns a flower shop.
D	The walking Google page.
E	The novel's protagonist.
F	Has his/her own office.
G	Rude!
H	Explains Ally's actions to Mrs. Hall.

3. What do you think Ally meant when she said, *Teachers are like the machines that take quarters for bouncy balls. You know what you are going to get. Yet, you don't know, too?*


4. Describe how Ally's card turned out to be rather inappropriate for the occasion.


5. Do you think Mrs. Hall's response was appropriate? Why or why not? How might you have responded to this situation?


6. What was Ally's favorite book? Why?


7. What is your impression of the following students. Please give a reason why you formed this impression.

Shay	
Jessica	

8. What lay at the root of Ally's problems at school? Why do you think she refused to share this with anyone?


9. There are several examples in these chapters of the fact that Ally is actually quite smart and is a quick thinker. Find proof for this statement.


10. The feeling of **humiliation** can be devastating. Why do you think this is so? What do you think can help a person get over such a feeling?


## Language Activities



**A. Personification** is giving human qualities to something that is not human. In Chapter One the author writes, *And then I try to hold my pencil the way I'm supposed to instead of the weird way my hand wants to.* In Ally's hand takes on human characteristics by supposedly taking on a mind of its own.



a) Why do you think personification is a literary device used by many authors?


b) Create your own example of personification.


**B. A simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. We find an example of this in Chapter Three: *My brain goes blank like an Etch A Sketch turned upside down and shaken.*

In this example what two things are being compared?

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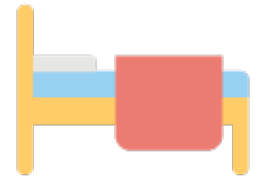
Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your imagination:

a) The howl of a timber wolf.


b) Your own example.


## C. 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 **PAN** can also form the word **NAP**. 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.

Each of the words in the left-hand column are found in this section of our novel.

Word	Anagram	Clue
taps		Dispute.
worried		More disruptive.
elbow		Underneath.
words		An ancient weapon.
weird		More broad.
meteor		Farther away.
friends		___keepers.

## D. What Do You Know About *Alice in Wonderland*?

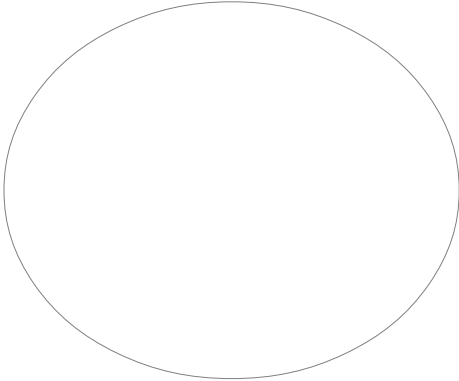
*Alice in Wonderland* is Ally's favorite book. She even cleverly names her sketchbook after an idea from this novel, the *Sketchbook of Impossible Things*. Although Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice in Wonderland* more than 150 years ago, it remains very popular, having sold more than 100 million copies. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research three fascinating facts about this novel and record this information below.



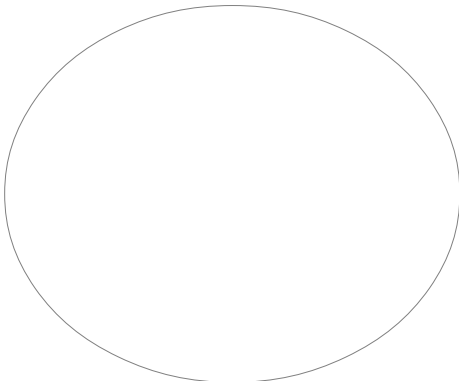
1	
2	
3	

**D. 5 Ws and an H.**

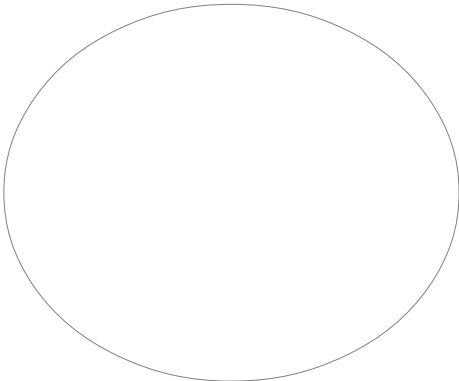
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



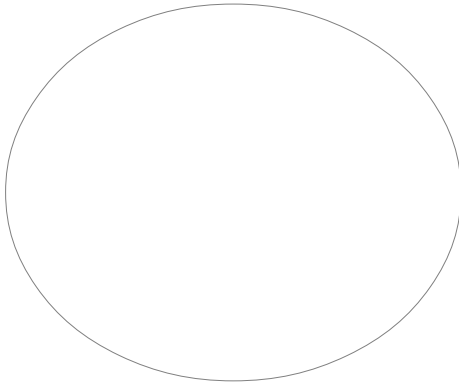
**WHO?**



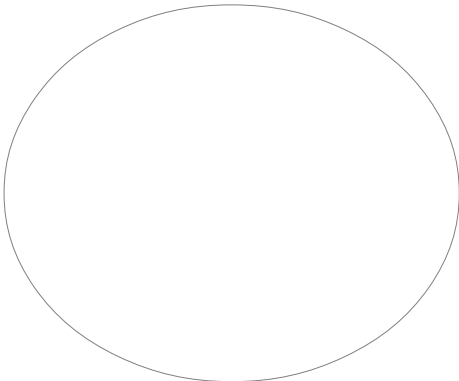
**WHAT?**



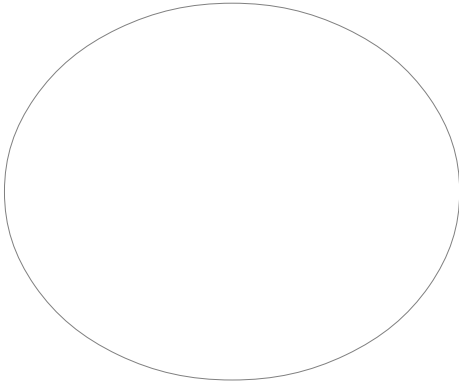
**WHEN?**



**WHERE?**



**WHY?**



**HOW?**

## E. Cinquain Poems

A Cinquain poem has five lines and most often does not rhyme. Write two Cinquain poems describing two of the characters from the novel using what you know about them so far. With your teacher's permission you may wish to collaborate with a colleague in the creation of these poems.

<p>Line 1 is one word. Line 2 is two words. Line 3 is three words. Line 4 is four words. Line five is one word.</p>	<p><i>Santa Saint Nick Long white beard Christmas Eve present-giver Jolly</i></p>
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Character 1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Character 2 \_\_\_\_\_

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## Extension Activity



### 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 four chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6