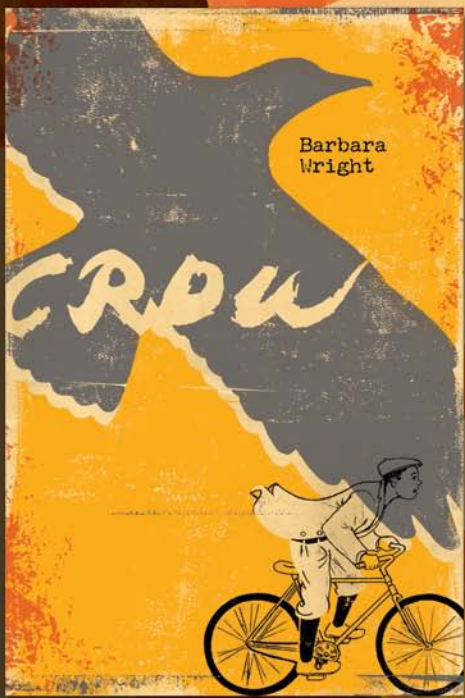


Barbara  
Wright

# CROW

Educators Guide





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## About the Book

# CROW

The year is 1898—33 years after the conclusion of the Civil War—and the end of slavery. Although the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution have ended slavery and granted Negro Americans due process and voting rights, segregation and racism are alive and well in Wilmington, North Carolina, where 12-year-old Moses Thomas lives in “Darktown” with his family. Moses’s father, a professional journalist and one of the city’s first “colored” alderman, has raised his son to believe that education and the democratic process will level the playing field between the races, yet Moses is beginning to understand the realities of being black in the South: insults, humiliations, and worst of all, the Jim Crow laws that legalize segregation.

When the editor of the Negro newspaper publishes an editorial that challenges racist conceptions, tensions rise, and in the words of Moses’s grandma, Boo Nanny, “Big trouble’s a-brewing.” As the city teeters on the brink of a race war, Moses must face the truth about the hatred that surrounds him, and figure out a way to save his family from disaster.

## Pre-Reading Activity

Many students will be unfamiliar with the term Jim Crow, the vernacular for the racial segregation laws that existed in a majority of states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. (The actual name, Jim Crow, was based on an exaggerated, stereotypical Negro stage character.) First, introduce/review the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. (This is important, as Moses’s father, Jack, is a strong believer in the rule of law and an elected member of the Board of Alderman.) To help build background knowledge, take students to the library or computer lab and give them time to conduct a web quest on Jim Crow.



# Thematic Connections

**HYPOCRISY**—Define *hypocrisy* and discuss these demonstrations of hypocrisy in the book: In chapter three, the author describes the musical act of Millie-Christine, conjoined twins known as “the two-headed nightingale.” Boo Nanny makes the comment, “One of our own gots two heads and four feet, then white folks can’t get enough of them. The two-legged kind, they fine and dandy to do without.” (p. 53) On page 273, Sadie says, “White folk thinks we so dangerous, yet they lets us take care of their babies. What sense do that make?”

**RACISM**—Reread the exchange from pages 121–123. How is this passage an example of the racist attitudes that existed in the South at this time? Discuss the building owner’s statement on page 123, “Give them a little power and that’s what you get. Insolence like that deserves a good thrashing.” What is insolence? Do you think this is the proper term for how Mr. Manly spoke?

**INEQUALITY**—Early on in the story, Moses describes the poor physical condition of his school. (p. 3) In what other ways is racial inequality evident in 1898 Wilmington? In chapter six, Moses enters a contest to write a slogan for an Eagle bicycle. Why did Moses never stand a chance of winning the contest? How does the contest symbolize the inequality that existed in Wilmington?

**KNOWLEDGE & EDUCATION**—Boo Nanny values common sense while Jackson values formal education, often arguing over which is best for Moses. Moses’s mother says, “Ain’t no reason in the world he can’t learn by living *and* book learning.” (p. 34) Discuss the meaning of what it means to be truly educated, focusing on both practical and formal education. Discuss Boo Nanny’s belief that, “Knowing’s first and foremost ’bout seeing what’s in front of you.” (p. 107)

**CHARACTER**—Discuss how Moses’s father shows his character in the face of racial insult. How is he a good role model for his son? Reread from the middle of page 83 to the top of page 96. How does Moses’s decision not to turn Tommy in to the police show his true character as a friend? How does Jackson’s reaction to the news show his character as a parent? How is Jackson’s death the ultimate display of his character? What do you think he was trying to say to Moses just before he died?

# Curriculum Connections

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—The story told in *Crow* illustrates examples of the racist belief known as *white supremacy*. Have students research the origins of white supremacy and how it was demonstrated in the United States from the conclusion of the Civil War, through the Civil Rights Movement, and up to the present day.

After the white mob set the newspaper building ablaze, Jackson spent the next day trying to salvage any remains left from the fire. He says, “Now’s the time our community really needs a paper to make sense of what’s going on. But it’s destroyed, along with all the back issues. I can’t stand to think about it—the voice of the people silenced, the historical record wiped out.” (p. 266) Have students do Internet research to locate primary source documents from this period in American history. Examples might include newspaper or magazine articles, government records, illustrations or photographs, or letters. Create a class museum of these documents.

**THE ARTS**—Have students research images that illustrate the state of race relations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Students can print a selection of pictures to create a collage or use them as the centerpiece of an original art work.

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—Reread pages 124–133 in chapter six. Discuss why Moses’s slogan was so effective. Give students images of popular products from the late 19th century and challenge them to write slogans for each. Expand this activity by having students write additional slogans for contemporary products.

# About the Author

Born in North Carolina, Barbara Wright moved to Korea shortly after college where she taught writing and edited a magazine. She's been a fact-checker and a screenwriter, and is the author of three previous novels. On writing a novel, Wright has said, "As you write, you discover what you're writing about . . . you just write it and hope it will speak to someone." Wright lives in Denver with her husband, and spends her spare time playing tennis and piano.

## Internet Resources

Prelude to Wilmington Race Riot  
[www.teachersdomain.org/resource/bf10.socst.us.indust.wilming](http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/bf10.socst.us.indust.wilming)

Wilmington Race Riot  
[www.teachersdomain.org/resource/bf09.socst.us.const.lossrights](http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/bf09.socst.us.const.lossrights)

Race, Racism, and the Law  
[academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/jcrow02.htm](http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/jcrow02.htm)

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow  
[www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_events\\_riot.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_riot.html)

Museum of Racist Memorabilia  
[www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/who.htm](http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/who.htm)

## Vocabulary

*scalded* (p. 1)

*cowed* (p. 6)

*denigrating* (p. 33)

*treason* (p. 40)

*sacrifice* (p. 61)

*ringleader* (p. 77)

*neutral* (p. 77)

*drudgery* (p. 100)

*hankering* (p. 104)

*slanderous* (p. 179)

*coup d'état* (p. 211)

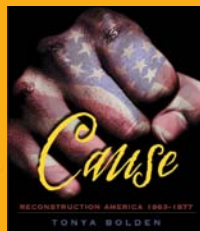
*throng* (p. 244)

*instigator* (p. 245)

*craven* (p. 251)

*gumption* (p. 251)

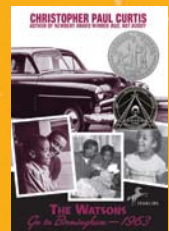
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