

EDUCATORS GUIDE

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy

Gary D. Schmidt

themes

Coming-of-Age • Family Relationships • Friendship
Racism and Prejudice • Self-Esteem

about this guide

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy is a powerful story that will enrich the curriculum for both middle-grade and young adult readers. The following educators guide begins with thematic connections, curriculum tie-ins, and use of language ideas for grades 3–6 on pages G4–7. For older students in grades 7 up, there is a list of discussion questions and a writing activity on personification on pages G8–9. There is also an exclusive interview with Gary D. Schmidt, Internet resources, and a list of related titles by theme.





about the book

Moving to Phippsburg, Maine, from Boston certainly is not Turner's idea. Within six hours of his arrival, he knows he wants to leave. Nothing is the same, not even baseball, and Turner becomes an immediate outcast in a town where everyone expects him to behave like a proper minister's son.

When Turner meets Lizzie, a whole new life opens up to him, and they become the best of friends. They understand and appreciate one another despite their different backgrounds. When the racist town elders find out about Turner's friendship with Lizzie, an African American, Turner is forbidden from seeing her. He ignores the warnings and even has Lizzie join him when he plays the organ for Mrs. Cobb, a crotchety old woman.

Turner and Lizzie are distraught when the town's elders plan to destroy the African American community on Malaga Island in order to build elegant hotels for tourists. Try as they might, Lizzie and Turner can not turn the adults away from their blueprint for destruction and manipulation, and in the process, Turner eventually suffers the loss of both his father and his new best friend.

booktalk

What would you do if you were forbidden to see your best friend because of his or her color? It's hard for us to imagine, but that is exactly what occurs when Turner Buckminster and his family move to a small town where his father is to be the new preacher. Nothing is the same for Turner in Phippsburg—not baseball, not swimming, and certainly not the kids who live in the town. Turner is miserable until he meets Lizzie, a spunky girl from the nearby Malaga Island who shows him the pleasures of living on the coast.

But Turner's happiness is crushed when his father forbids him from seeing Lizzie. And worse than that, his father is part of a plan to force Lizzie and the people of Malaga Island out of their homes.



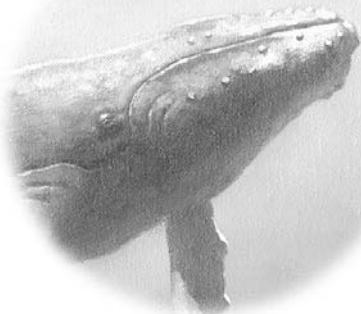
thematic connections

questions for group discussions

Coming-of-Age—Turner grows up by necessity in the time he spends in Phippsburg, Maine. What lessons does he learn that help him see life more clearly? How does the tragedy that affects the community of Malaga Island and the people of Phippsburg bring clarity to what Turner believes about life?

Gary D. Schmidt said, “I suppose the big reason [that I write for young readers] is that I am fascinated by that moment in a kid’s life when she decides that she will take responsibility for a decision—when the child says, ‘I make the call here, me.’” How does Turner feel when he “makes the call” to stand by Lizzie and the people of Malaga Island? What issues have your students felt strongly about in their own lives?

Family Relationships—Turner’s relationship with his father and the relationship between his father and mother are both strained once the family moves to Phippsburg. Why does living in Phippsburg bring out the worst in Reverend Buckminster? How do the problems between Reverend Buckminster and his wife compare to the problems between him and Turner? How does the Buckminster family finally resolve their conflicts?



Friendship—Turner develops an instant friendship with Lizzie, but his friendships with Mrs. Cobb and Willis Hurd only develop after difficult circumstances. Why are his relationships with Willis and Mrs. Cobb strained initially? What eventually happens that allows Turner to develop friendships with them? Why is it so easy from the start with Turner and Lizzie?

Racism and Prejudice—In the early 1900s the relationships between African Americans and Caucasians were different than they are today. How did society’s unwritten rules regarding race relations affect 1912 Phippsburg? Why do Lizzie and Turner continue their friendship regardless of how others view it? What impact does racism have on the town elders? How is it different from the impact it has on the African American community?

Self-Esteem—Turner’s value of himself is based on who he is—the minister’s son and offspring of a father and grandfather for whom he is named, Turner Ernest Buckminster III. Mrs. Hurd asks him, “When you look through the number at the end of your name, does it seem like you’re looking through prison bars?” (p. 15) Based on the fact that everything Turner does or does not do in Phippsburg either disappoints or embarrasses his father, how would he answer this question? What happens to help Turner think more highly of himself?

connecting to the curriculum

Language Arts—Have students read pages 79–89 where Turner first encounters the whales. As they read, ask them to list words and phrases in the author’s description that appeal to them. Then have them create a title and write a poem using the found words and phrases. Compile the poems in a book for the class to share.

Geography—Turner refers to “lighting out to the territories” throughout the story. From Phippsburg, Maine, in 1912, where would the territories be? Ask students to draw a map of the United States in 1912 and to trace the route Turner would have to take to get to the territories, noting the length of his trip and the mode of transportation he would use.

History—According to the Author’s Notes on pages 218–219, the story of Malaga Island is based on actual events. Ask students to read the sections about Malaga Island posted on the following Web sites: The Maine Coast Guides, Soul of America, and Voices of Maine (addresses can be found on page G11). Then in groups of three, have them utilize their research to write a short story based on an actual event that occurred on Malaga Island or about a person who lived there during the early 1900s. Take this a step further by having students illustrate their stories and compile them into a classroom history of Malaga Island, which can be shared with other classes.

Art—The author uses imagery to paint beautiful pictures with words. Read the first paragraph on page 2 aloud and have your class imagine the scene as the author describes it. Then ask students to illustrate that scene or another equally descriptive scene in the book, and copy a short section of the descriptive passage onto the illustration. Post the illustrations to create a “Collage of Imagery.”

Science—Lizzie and Turner often explore the tide pools on the coast and find marine life that they enjoy eating (clams and crabs) and enjoy watching (lichens and urchins). Ask students to visit the following Web sites:

Yahooligans

[yahooligans.yahoo.com/Science_and_Nature/
The_Earth/Ecology/Tide_Pools/](http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/Science_and_Nature/The_Earth/Ecology/Tide_Pools/)

Virtual Vacation Lands

www.bigelow.org/virtual/index_tides.html

National Parks Conservation Association

www.npca.org/marine_and_coastal/beaches/tide_pools.asp

Then in pairs, have students create a three-dimensional model depicting one aspect of a tide pool: types of organisms found, safety precautions, different types of tide pools, or different zones of tide pools. After they make oral presentations on their models, students can display their work in the classroom.

Vocabulary/Use of Language

Ask students to find the following words in the book and determine their meaning from context clues: *finesse* (p. 4), *gilded* (p. 9), *pirouetted* (p. 11), *aspirations* (p. 20), *smitten* (p. 72), *maelstrom* (p. 79), *impertinent* (p. 87), *melee* (p. 91).

Have students work with a partner to write a description of Malaga Island. Each sentence in the description should use a different vocabulary word and should provide a different context clue so that the reader will be able to determine the meaning of the words.

discussion questions

- Upon arriving in Phippsburg, the Buckminster family is greeted by the congregation of the First Congressional Church. Why do Willis and Turner take an immediate dislike to one another? How does their conflict create embarrassment for Turner and his father? Who is most responsible for their combative relationship? Why?
- After Sherriff Elwell tells Reverend Griffin that he and the other families who live on Malaga Island will have to relocate by the fall, Lizzie determines, “She would not ebb.” (p. 37) What are the implications of this statement? What would Lizzie need to do in order “not to ebb”? Does Lizzie accomplish her goal?
- On page 42, Turner says he hates himself for playing the minister’s son as he begins to realize his life is not his own. Does he have a choice? How could he have handled the situation without bringing embarrassment to himself and his father?
- Turner has never seen whales up close, and when he has his first experience with the whales, his view of life is altered. How does this encounter with whales affect decisions he makes? How does his encounter help him better understand the circumstances that take his father’s life?
- The conflict between the powerful, rich, educated town elders in Phippsburg and the powerless, poor, uneducated people of Malaga Island represents a major conflict that we can relate to even in the 21st century. Why does power and money always seem to win over powerlessness and poverty? How does progress play a role in the battle over Malaga Island?
- Reverend Buckminster tells Turner, “Books can ignite fires in your mind, because they carry ideas for kindling, and art for matches.” (p. 129) How does this statement come true? If

Reverend Buckminster could have foreseen the conflict and turmoil that would result from the ideas presented in *The Origin of Species*, do you think he would still have given it to Turner to read? Why or why not?

- The ideas in *The Origin of Species* do kindle a fire in Turner, but what keeps the fire burning? Even after all that happens, do you think the fire in Turner is ever put out? Why or why not?
- Everyone in town knows that Mrs. Cobb's purposeful last words are intended to be revolutionary to the community. Why doesn't Reverend Buckminster read her last words at her funeral? Does he make the right decision? Why or why not?
- In what ways does Reverend Buckminster change throughout the novel? Why do Turner and his mother begin to lose respect for him? Does he lose respect for himself? What finally happens to change the way he treats Turner?
- When Turner plays the last game of baseball, he does not hit the last pitch, even though the community members in the audience know that he had the ability to avoid a third strike. When Willis asks him why he didn't hit the ball, Turner answers: "Because everyone expects green shutters." (p. 143) What does he mean by this statement? Why is this the beginning of a friendship with Willis?
- On page 208, Turner asks himself, "What had been in their eyes? What was it that the whale knew? What was it that his father knew?" How does Turner finally answer those questions? What does he do with the new understanding his answers bring him? How does he change as a result of the new understanding?

Writing/Use of Language

Personification—The author brings the sea breeze to life by giving it human characteristics. For example:

- “But then it fell panting in the hallway, gasping for breath.” (p. 23)
- “The sea breeze determined to shove him to Malaga Island. It scooted around him and pulled at his ears.” (pp. 100–101)
- “The sea breeze dropped and slunk away.” (p. 122)
- “The sea breeze remembered that autumn wasn’t far away and began to blow colder.” (p. 212)
- “The sea breeze found him and twisted around him.” (p. 213)

In pairs, ask students to find other examples of personification of the sea breeze. Have students tell the story of Turner and the citizens of Phippsburg and Malaga Island from the viewpoint of the sea breeze, giving the breeze a definite characterization and motivation.

Guide prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, Crowley Ninth Grade Campus, Crowley, TX.

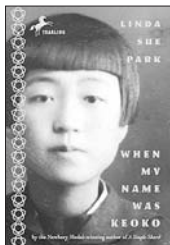


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Grades 3–6

When My Name Was Keoko

Linda Sue Park

Family Relationships
Prejudice • Coming-of-Age
0-440-41944-1 • Yearling



Year of No Rain

Alice Mead

Friendship • Prejudice • Hope
0-440-42004-0 • Yearling



Grades 7–12

Before We Were Free

Julia Alvarez

Family Relationships
Prejudice • Coming-of-Age
0-440-23784-X • Laurel-Leaf



The Secret of Gumbo Grove

Eleanora E. Tate

Family Relationships
Prejudice • Self-Discovery
0-440-22716-X • Laurel-Leaf

internet resources

The Maine Coast Guides

[www.coastguides.com/
r2/2.42bMalaga.html](http://www.coastguides.com/r2/2.42bMalaga.html)

Maine coast guide, including information about Malaga Island.

Soul of America

[www.soulofamerica.com/
towns/metowns.html](http://www.soulofamerica.com/towns/metowns.html)

Black towns established in Maine in the 19th century, including Malaga Island.

Voices of Maine

[www.visibleblackhistory.com/
19th_century.htm](http://www.visibleblackhistory.com/19th_century.htm)

Black history in 19th-century Maine.

National Parks Conservation Association

[www.npca.org/marine_
and_coastal/beaches/tide_
pools.asp](http://www.npca.org/marine_and_coastal/beaches/tide_pools.asp)

Information on coastal tide pools and the organisms and animals that live in them.

a conversation with
gary d. schmidt

Q: *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* was awarded both a Newbery Honor and a Printz Honor. What effect has this had on you personally? How do you think it will affect your future as an author?

A: To receive the Newbery Honor and the Printz Honor were amazing experiences, ones that I truly had never anticipated. I suppose the biggest effect is the affirmation that there really are readers out there who are picking up the book, and I am not just sending it out into a black hole.

That is huge. I suppose there are some writers who can write and put things away in a file, but I need to feel that somewhere out there, the writing is connecting with a young reader—that seems to me to be the closure of the writing loop, when soul reaches out to soul. To have these awards from the ALA affirms that closure in a very, very powerful way.

Q: What prompted you to write *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*?

A: My family and I travel to Maine each summer; I come again in winter with a group of students. Our tendency is to do many of the same things each summer—so one year, we bought a guidebook to help us discover some new sites, and there my wife found a tiny blurb about Malaga Island. So I went to Phippsburg that summer to find out what I could, and that led to reading the account of the destruction of the island community in the *Bath Independent*, where it was shamelessly chronicled.

You can't read that story—or at least, I can't—without a sense that here is an important tale about our American history, one that not only sheds light on what we were, but sheds light on what we could be—both in the positive and negative

sense. It seemed to me then that particularly because this was a little-known story, it needed to be told—not just to preserve, and not merely to expose, but so that we could learn from this moment in history.

Q: Turner Ernest Buckminster III and Lizzie Bright Griffin are both unusual names. What is the significance of these names? Where did they originate?

A: Turner is from Frederick Jackson Turner, whose precise and elegant writing I admire a great deal. The name, obviously, holds metaphoric meaning as well, as one who turns from one position to another. Ernest is my oldest son's middle name and my grandfather's name, and also holds a clue to something deep in Turner's character—his earnestness, if you will. Buckminster is taken from Joseph Stevens Buckminster, one of America's greatest preachers in the early 19th century, who broke new ground in his writing by using science and history in his theological work. He would have been fascinated by Darwin.

Griffin is a name of one of the prominent families that lived on Malaga Island. I took Lizzie as another name that was on the island, and one that suggested some of her defiant, witty, no-nonsense character.

Q: The relationship between Turner and Lizzie reflects a time in history when its social rules dictated that black children and white children could not become friends. Yet they did, and they both suffered the consequences of breaking the rules. How does this theme resonate for you personally?

A: The relationship between Turner and Lizzie is everything in this book, everything. In the easy peace between them, in the pleasure of their mutual interests, in their willingness to

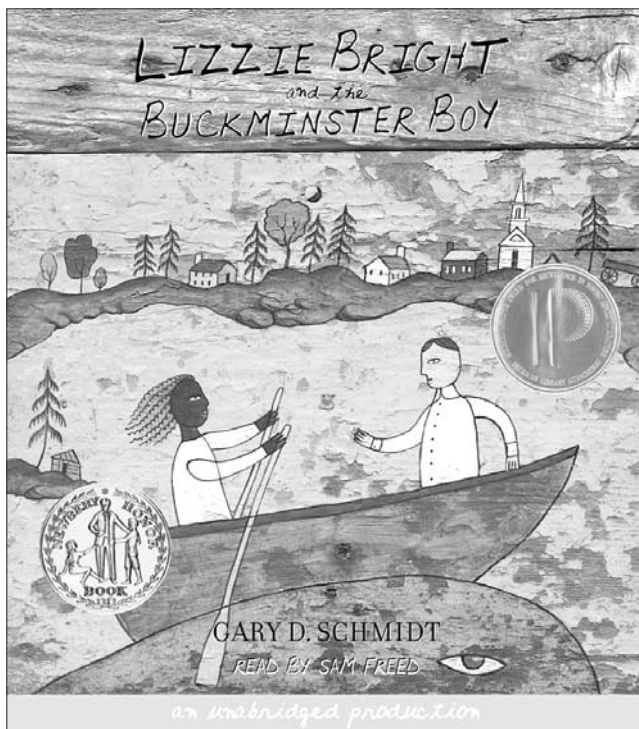
learn gladly from each other, in their absolute acceptance of each other, in their willingness to laugh at each other and to be laughed at, they capture what I think is essential when two “others” meet. I worry that in our contemporary culture we have set up so many rules for how people of different backgrounds must treat one another that we have paralyzed real relationships.

My model here is not actually from America, but from Israel—those organizations where Palestinian mothers and Israeli mothers, many of whom have lost children in this horrid conflict, come together to work together as human beings for peace. To do this, they have to shed all the definitions that are given to them about behavior toward the other group. This is how we shall overcome someday. When we see each other face-to-face, and not through the lenses—both good and bad—that we have been typically handed. I know that is naive. But hope, blessed hope, is naive.

Q: What, if any, characters or situations come directly from your own experiences in life?

A: I suspect that most writers write out of their own experience, even if the book is fantasy. So much of this book is based on moments from my own life. Turner is probably my most autobiographical character, though he is not me. His love of baseball was my own, and the experience on the field was one I experienced. His moment on the cliff over the sea is one that I did—except I jumped, like an idiot. His friendship with Lizzie is one that I guess I wished I had had—one that intense and close. Mrs. Cobb is my grandmother’s eccentric cousin. The organ Turner plays is one I played on at a summer camp—using two fingers, since I don’t know how to play. I suppose there are many other images and moments that I hardly even recognize as coming from a past moment.

also available on audio!



Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy

by Gary D. Schmidt

Read by Sam Freed, this production contains
the complete text of the original work.

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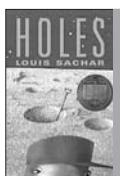
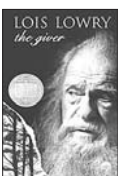
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- Hoot** by Carl Hiaasen
- Like Jake and Me** by Mavis Jukes
- Lily's Crossing**
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- Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy** by Gary D. Schmidt

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