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## Study Guide

for

# Sounder

by William H. Armstrong



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## To the Teacher

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The *Glencoe Literature Library* presents full-length novels, plays, and nonfiction bound together with shorter selections of various genres that relate by theme or topic to the main reading. Each work in the *Library* has a two-part Study Guide that contains a variety of resources for both you and your students. Use the guide to plan your instruction of the work and to enrich your classroom presentations.

In **For the Teacher** you will find the following timesaving instructor aids:

- *About the Work*: pertinent background information on the work and a detailed synopsis of its plot
- *Media Links*: annotated listings of audio, visual, electronic, and print resources related to the work
- *Teaching Options*: high-interest activities for introducing the work and individualizing instruction
- *Assessment Options*: alternative assessment activities for greater flexibility in evaluating students' understanding of the work
- *Options for Using Related Readings*: suggested approaches to the Related Readings included with the work
- *Answer Key* and *Assessment Rubrics*: detailed answers to all questions and reading activities and evaluations for alternative assessment activities

**For the Student** consists of the following reproducible blackline masters:

- *Meet the Author*: a lively overview of the author's life
- *Introducing the Work*: background information that provides a meaningful context in which to read the work
- *Before You Read* and *Responding* pages: pre- and postreading questions and activities
- *Active Reading*: graphic organizers for students to complete as they read activities
- *Test*: a comprehensive two-part test of the work

**NOTE:** *The main characters in this novel are portrayed with sympathy and admiration. The story, however, deals with hardship and injustice. Certain words, phrases, references, and situations may offend some readers.*

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# About the Work

## **SOUNDER BY WILLIAM H. ARMSTRONG**

This award-winning novel tells the story of an African American family living in the rural South at the turn of the century. Although trapped in a web of grinding poverty and discrimination, this nameless family perseveres because of their deep love for one another, religious faith, respect for hard work, and determination to forge a better life. The oldest son manages to escape from this life of hardship by acquiring an education. Much of the book describes the difficult transitions he must make and the important lessons he must learn as he becomes a man.

Note that the novel includes graphic scenes depicting violence. Page 10 contains the offensive racial epithet “nigger.” Before assigning these scenes, you may wish to explain that the author includes such material in order to depict realistically the time in which the novel is set and to show the devastating effects of racial prejudice on people. Keep in mind that such material may be particularly offensive to African American students. You will want to provide opportunities for students to express their feelings in ways that would make them feel comfortable.

## **CHARACTER LIST**

A **boy** who dreams of learning to read and of finding his father

Three **younger children**, two girls and a boy

The **father**, a sharecropper who steals to feed his family and is imprisoned

The **mother**, a hardworking woman who takes in laundry and entertains her family with Bible stories and spirituals

**Sounder**, a mixed-breed coon dog, known for his distinctive voice and hunting ability

A **sheriff** and two **deputies**, white law enforcement officials who brutally apprehend the father and shoot Sounder

A **jail guard** who humiliates the boy when he visits his father

A **guard** at a convict road camp who injures the boy when he tries to find his father

A **teacher** who provides the boy with an education

## **SYNOPSIS**

A family of sharecroppers inhabits a cabin, located at some distance from other sharecroppers' cabins, on a large estate. During the winter months, the father earns extra money for the family by hunting possums and coons with his dog Sounder. The mother works as a laundress during the day and at night shells walnuts to sell at a local store. When he is not exhausted from walking to and from school, the oldest boy hunts with his father and Sounder.

As the story opens, the reader learns that cold, strong winds have made the hunting unprofitable for weeks, forcing the family to subsist on corn mush and biscuits. The father steals meat to feed his family and is arrested by white law enforcement officials. Sounder runs after the wagon in which his master is chained, is shot down, and then crawls under the cabin. Convinced that Sounder is dead, the boy searches unsuccessfully for his body.

On Christmas day, the boy brings a cake to his father, which a cruel jailer destroys. The father forbids the boy to visit him again. The next day Sounder returns, in a badly mutilated state. The family learns the father has been sentenced to hard labor, but is not told his whereabouts. Some years later, the boy begins to search for his father throughout the state. During his journeys, he teaches himself to read from discarded newspapers and magazines. An injury to his hand results in his meeting a kind schoolteacher, who invites him to share his home during the winter months so that he can attend school.

One summer the father finally returns home. He has been so badly injured in a dynamite blast that his family doesn't recognize him at first. Sounder, however, greets him with joyous barking. The father dies that October, destroying Sounder's will to live. In the boy's memory, the man and the dog forever hunt together under a harvest moon.

## MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVEL

Several important themes run through the novel.

- *The pain of loneliness:* The boy experiences acute loneliness, particularly at night and following his father's arrest. The boy yearns to live closer to other people, but through the example of the schoolteacher, comes to appreciate the value of solitude.
- *Racial discrimination:* The family suffers great hardship because of racial injustice. Family members are exploited by a white landowner, kept ignorant so they cannot escape a life of menial labor, and brutalized by white authority figures.
- *The importance of education and religious faith:* The boy yearns to learn how to read. His dream seems hopeless, however, since his parents cannot read and school is difficult to attend. A serendipitous encounter with a schoolteacher results in his acquiring an education. Though his parents don't own books, the boy learns important values and life lessons from the Bible stories his mother relates.
- *The nobility of the natural world:* The family is deeply connected to the natural world, which provides a source of income and solace in times of trouble. In the boy's memory, the father and Sounder are forever among the pine trees.

## APPROACHES TO TEACHING THE NOVEL

Suggest that students focus on the historical aspects of the novel. They might, for instance, try to identify social/economic conditions that were typical of the deep South at the turn of the century, such as the sharecropping system.

- Point out the narrative technique used in the novel. The story is told from the perspective of a narrator outside the story, who knows only the thoughts and feelings of one character—the boy. This type of narrator is called a **limited third-person** narrator.
- Encourage students to notice the author's use of figurative language and sensory images. Have them pay particular attention to William H. Armstrong's use of images that appeal to the reader's sense of hearing. Students should try to clarify any figures of speech they have difficulty understanding.

## FURTHER READING FOR THE TEACHER

- *Something About the Author* (*Autobiography Series*, Volume 7) Gale Research Co., 1988.
- *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick, St. Martin's Press, 1978, offers a lucid and well-argued essay on Sounder by William D. Anderson.
- *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*, by Nate Shaw and Theodore Rosengarten, University of Chicago Press, 2000, describes the life of an African American cotton farmer living in Alabama.

# Media Links



## Videos

The following videos may be used to help students better understand the characters, historical setting, events, and themes presented in *Sounder*. Most films are available through local video stores and internet sites.

- *Sounder*, a film adaptation of Armstrong's book starring Cicely Tyson and Paul Winfield (1972, 105 minutes)
- *Sounder, Part II*, a motion picture that continues the story of the family's struggle to educate their children (1976, 98 minutes)
- *Once Upon a Time . . . When We Were Colored*, a film adaptation of an autobiography relating one man's experiences in the Deep South (1996, 113 minutes, PG)



## Audiocassettes

Students may enjoy hearing the novel as well as reading it.

- *Sounder*, read by Avery Brooks (1995), includes a background of blues riffs and spirituals sung soulfully in Brooks's deep bass voice



## Music

Students may enjoy hearing "Lonesome Valley," the spiritual sung by the boy's mother, as well as other African American spirituals.

- *Richard Dyer-Bennett* (1975). This CD contains a hauntingly beautiful version of "Lonesome Valley."
- *Wade in the Water, Vol. 1: African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition* (1994). This CD features spirituals by various singers.



## Internet Connection

- Students can learn about dogs in history, myths, and legends, and about dog-related careers at: <http://dogs.about.com/pets/dogs>
- A site containing the life story and thoughts of a sharecropper can be found at <http://www.nelson.usf.edu/mclin/res.1.11.html>

***At the time this study guide went to press, the Web sites were in operation. Before assigning students to visit the sites, check to ensure that the sites still exist.***



## Further Reading for the Student

- *Sour Land* by William H. Armstrong, 1971, continues the story of the protagonist of *Sounder*, who is now called Moses Walters and is a teacher at an African American school in Virginia. *Sour Land* contains some graphic descriptions of violence and some offensive racial epithets.
- *Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson, 1956, is the story of a stray dog and its effect on the life of a fourteen-year-old boy.

***Be sure to preview all media links to determine whether the material is appropriate for your class.***

# Teaching Options

## Options for Motivating Students

### Telling Stories

**Help students to understand the important role that storytelling plays in the novel.**

- Read the Author's Note of the novel with students and encourage them to visualize what it describes: an elderly African American man telling stories to children around a great table. Point out that the story of Odysseus and his dog, Argus, inspired the man to tell the story of *Sounder*, because it too features a faithful dog who remains loyal to its master throughout its life. Explain that only Argus recognizes Odysseus when he returns home after a twenty-year absence.
- Ask students to read the Old Testament stories of David and Joseph, which figure prominently in the novel. Then have them discuss the following questions: What are these stories about? What themes do they share?

### Reading and Literacy

**Help students to understand that illiteracy severely limits a person's ability to function in the world.**

- On the blackboard, write a list of things students read during the course of a typical day: street signs, bus destinations, package labels, TV program listings, and so forth. Then have students discuss how their life might change if they could not read any of these things.
- Have students consider the ways in which their parents helped them learn to read. Pose the following questions: Did your parents read to you? If so, how often? What kinds of reading materials do your parents use?
- Help students to understand that for the boy in *Sounder* learning to read gives him greater access to the world at large.

### A Period of Oppression

**Provide a brief overview of the sharecropping system and of racial oppression in the South.**

- Tell students that the family works as sharecroppers in the South in the early 1900s, and then share the information in **Introducing the Novel** on page 14.
- Invite students to do further research into the sharecropping system. To guide their research, use the suggestions in **Assessment Options** on page 7.

Ask students to share what they have learned about racial injustice during this period from movies, television, and books.

For many students, especially African American students, discussing the extreme racial oppression during this shameful period of United States history will be emotionally upsetting. Permit them to express their feelings in ways that make them feel comfortable.

### Understanding Allusions

**Prepare students for the many allusions to Old Testament stories in the novel.**

- Point out that until the boy learns to read, the only stories he knows are the Bible stories his mother learned in church. Explain that the boy identifies with such biblical heroes as Joseph and David, in part, because they triumph over great obstacles.
- Write the words *Bible Stories* on the board and leave space under them. Ask students to list each allusion they find to a Bible story as they read the novel. Encourage students to read these stories in the Old Testament and to discuss how they might illuminate the novel's meaning.

## Meeting Individual Needs

The writing style, plot, and literary elements of *Sounder* make it appropriate for average readers. The following activities are designed to help you present the novel in ways that meet the needs and interests of all students.

### Less-Proficient Readers

**Help students understand figures of speech in the novel.**

- Explain that Armstrong often uses **similes**, **metaphors**, and **personification** in describing places, people, and events. Remind students that **similes** compare unlike things using *like* or *as*; **metaphors** are comparisons that do not use *like* or *as*; and a **personification** is a figure of speech in which an animal, object, or idea is given human characteristics.
- Put the following sentence from chapter 1 on the board and ask students to identify the simile in it. “The white man who owned the vast endless fields had scattered the cabins of his Negro sharecroppers far apart, like flyspecks on a whitewashed ceiling.”

Encourage students to first visualize tiny black flyspecks on a white ceiling and then cabins on a vast landscape of fields, similarly tiny and far apart.

### English-Language Learners

**Help students to understand the dialect used by the characters.**

- Tell students that Armstrong tried to capture the speech patterns and vocabulary of poor African Americans in the South in the early part of the twentieth century. English-language learners may find any dialect difficult to understand. On the board, write the following sentence: “If it’s still here when mornin’ comes, you take it down the road and scold it and run so it won’t foller you no more. If somebody come lookin’, you’d be in awful trouble.”

- Ask students to identify nonstandard constructions and words. If necessary, point out that the final *g* is dropped from words ending in *ing*, the phrase “won’t foller you no more” contains a double negative, the word *foller* is a variant of *follow*, and the subject and verb in the phrase *somebody come* don’t agree. Remind English-language learners to ask for help if they have difficulty understanding any of the dialogue.

### Gifted and Talented

**Encourage students to respond to literary criticism.**

On the board write the following passage from a review of *Sounder* published in the book *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*.

*[One] may question whether a superb book like Sounder is not also aesthetically flawed by its moral limitations—its nostalgic evocation of endurance with all hostility (except in one fantasy package) repressed; an insensitivity which puts a man [in] jail for stealing food yet neglects to describe the economic impact of his imprisonment on his family; and its final tone of specious [false] optimism which denies the irrevocable psychic damage to the child of the experiences so vividly evoked.*

- Have students first read the sentence carefully and clarify its meaning. Then have them write a brief essay in which they tell whether they agree with each point and why. In writing their responses, ask students also to consider the comments in **Critic’s Corner** on page 15.
- Have students analyze how sound and silence function in the novel. As students read, have them keep a list of the different references to sound and silence. Then ask them to determine what sound and silence might symbolize in the novel.

# Assessment Options

## Writing

### A Letter to Father

- Have students write a letter from the boy to his father describing the activities of various family members, including Sounder, since the father's arrest. Remind students that when the boy visits his father he is eager to reassure him of the family's well-being.

### Different Storytellers

- Have students write an essay comparing point of view in *Sounder* and "The Circuit." Refer to the activity suggested in the **Options for Using Related Readings** on page 8 of this Study Guide.

### Explaining a System

- Have students research the evolution of sharecropping in the post-Civil War South. After they complete initial research, have students pinpoint a topic, write a thesis statement about that topic, then develop questions to guide further research. Remind students to either write information in their own words or to enclose the exact words of a source within quotation marks and to accurately credit that source.

## Listening and Speaking

### Presenting a Radio Play

- Have students write and present a radio play based on the novel. Whenever possible, they should incorporate dialogue (but not necessarily the use of dialect) from the novel. Additional dialogue should be made consistent with the characters' personality traits. Remind students that

they can use a narrator for some scenes and that they can incorporate background music for dramatic effect. Have students practice the dialogue until they are familiar enough with it to add gestures, expressions, and vocal emphasis.

## Viewing and Representing

### Paint a Portrait

- Have students paint or draw a portrait of a specific character. Before they begin, students should identify that character's chief personality traits and analyze his or her response to different events. Encourage students to look at character illustrations in a variety of books. After completing their portraits, students should write a brief caption describing it.

## Interdisciplinary Connections

### Science

The novel does not name the crops the father and the boy cultivate or mention the farming methods they use. Ask students to conduct research to learn about the crops grown in the deep South before the Civil War, around 1900, and today. Also have them try to discover how and why agricultural practices changed in the South over the years. After students have completed their research, have them present their findings in an oral report. They may wish to use maps or other graphic aids to help their audience understand the information.



**Students should save their work for their portfolios.**

# Options for Using Related Readings

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>Sounder</i>
<p><b>The Circuit</b> by Francisco Jiménez (BLM page 32)</p>	<p><b>The narrator of “The Circuit,” like the boy in <i>Sounder</i>, must struggle to attend school.</b></p> <p>Before reading, provide the following information: Francisco Jiménez is now a professor of literature in California but was once a migrant farm worker. This story is based on journal notes he wrote about his childhood while in college.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students compare the life of the boy in <i>Sounder</i> to Panchito’s life. Then have them discuss the following questions: Which character struggles more? Why do you think so?</li> <li>• Have students imagine what Panchito might be like as an adult. Then have them compare this older Panchito to the man described in the Author’s Note to <i>Sounder</i>.</li> <li>• Ask students whether Jiménez’s use of the first-person point of view is effective in the story and how <i>Sounder</i> might be different if told from the first-person point of view.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The White Dog</b> by April J. Miller (BLM page 33)</p>	<p><b>Like <i>Sounder</i>, the dog in “The White Dog” proves himself useful to a family.</b></p> <p>Before reading, have students identify questions to ask an older friend or relative about living conditions during the Depression. Then have them conduct the interview, using audio or video equipment if available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the theme of responsibility. Which character has more responsibility—the narrator or the boy in <i>Sounder</i>? How do the characters respond to the additional responsibility they receive?</li> <li>• After reading, have students compare and contrast Armstrong’s writing style with Miller’s. Which do they find more powerful? Why?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Frisk: the Cat with Many Lives</b> by James Herriot (BLM page 34)</p>	<p><b>Like <i>Sounder</i>, the cat in “Frisk: the Cat with Many Lives” provides companionship.</b></p> <p>Share with students the following quote by James Herriot: “The life of a country vet was dirty, uncomfortable, sometimes dangerous. It was terribly hard work and I loved it.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before reading, encourage students to look up the following words in the dictionary: <i>boisterous</i>, <i>conjunctiva</i>, <i>conviction</i>, <i>emaciated</i>, <i>haggard</i>, <i>impending</i>, <i>improvised</i>, <i>inscrutable</i>, <i>prone</i>, <i>transfigured</i>.</li> <li>• After reading, ask students if Herriot’s love of the life of a country vet is reflected in the story.</li> <li>• After reading, have students identify characteristics of the Yorkshire dialect (dropping the “h” sound from the beginnings of words, for example) and practice speaking it.</li> </ul>

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>Souder</i>
<p><b>I'll Walk the Tightrope</b> by Margaret Danner (BLM page 35)</p>	<p><b>“I’ll Walk the Tightrope,” like <i>Souder</i>, shows the devastating consequences of racial injustice toward African American people.</b></p> <p>Encourage students to visualize the images in Danner’s poem: the speaker walks a tightrope set up for her by others. She has no parasol to help her balance, no stick to guide her, and no net below her. She walks quickly so that she will not fall, but frowns, wondering why others are allowed to walk on the ground.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After reading, ask students what adjectives they would use to describe the tone of Danner’s poem.</li> <li>• Point out that Danner uses rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism to give her poem a musical quality. Ask students to identify examples of each.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Three Poems of Remembrance and Hope Words Like Freedom Question and Answer and History</b> by Langston Hughes (BLM page 36)</p>	<p><b>Langston Hughes’s poems convey a deep yearning for equality and justice for all people.</b></p> <p>Point out that Langston Hughes felt optimistic about the possibility of solving racial problems. “Most people,” he once said, “are generally good in every race and in every country where I have been.” Ask students if this optimistic outlook is expressed in Hughes’s poems and in <i>Souder</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before students read, have them conduct research to learn about civil rights and civil rights events in the South African cities of Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg and the U.S. cities Birmingham, Atlanta, and Watts.</li> <li>• After reading, discuss the tone of each poem. Is it angry, sad, or a combination of both?</li> <li>• After reading, ask students the following question: Have racial relations improved since Hughes wrote these poems? If so, in what ways?</li> </ul>

# Answer Key

## ACTIVE READING

### Chapter 1

Students' answers should be similar to these:

First Evening: Father is mostly silent, seems to be listening; later he goes out without Sounder. Mother picks walnuts and tells boy a story. Boy feels lonely and afraid, is comforted by story, and wonders what father is doing.

### Chapters 2–3

Causes and Effects. C: Sounder goes hunting by himself; E: he can't warn family of Sheriff's approach. C: Sheriff finds evidence of theft in cabin; E: he arrests father. C: Sounder is too strong and too excited for boy to restrain; E: Sounder is shot. C: Boy places Sounder's ear under his pillow and wishes Sounder doesn't die; E: Boy's wish comes true. C: Mother knows boy will search for Sounder under cabin; E: she makes him wear old clothes. C: Boy knows people can see through curtains; E: he is always careful near windows with curtains.

### Chapters 4–6

Next day: Boy discusses Sounder with mother, thinks about "cabin quiet" in evening. Next day: Boy searches for Sounder in woods. Day before Christmas: Mother bakes cake. Christmas: Boy visits father in jail, dreams of father and of teacher that night. Next morning: Sounder returns. Following spring: Boy works in fields to pay family's rent. Autumn of another year: Boy begins to search for his father and learns to read on his journeys.

### Chapters 7–8

Mother advises patience (40), cautions boy about taking discarded book (47), permits him to live with teacher (48), informs him father is proud of his learning (51) and that learning is "the most important thing" (52), comforts him when father dies (53). Father assures boy that the family will be fine when he's at school (52) and that he and Sounder can hunt without him (52). Teacher cares for boy's hand and explains about caring for plants (45), tells about Montaigne and his work (46), relates a story about friendship and listens to boy's story (46), advises him to wait for his father's return and invites him to attend his school (47), explains Montaigne's philosophy on death (54). Effects: Boy ignores mother's advice to be patient and her caution about taking book but wants her permission to live with teacher, her approval, and her love; he appreciates father's approval of and support for his education; he trusts teacher and values his advice.

## RESPONDING CHAPTER 1

### Recall and Interpret

1. He's probably about ten. He started school the year before.
2. The school is too far to walk during the cold winter months. The boy yearns to attend school.
3. Sounder looks part Georgia redbone hound and part bulldog. He is an eager and expert hunter and barks with great enthusiasm. Sounder provides the family with extra income and companionship.
4. The hunting has been terrible because of cold, gusty winds.
5. His parents are cooking meat. She hums instead of singing, suggesting that she is worried.

### Evaluate and Connect

6. By keeping the characters nameless, the author calls attention to the universal quality of their suffering.
7. Students may respond that they would want to have Sounder as a family pet because of his musical voice, his

strength, his enthusiasm, and his sense of loyalty.

## RESPONDING CHAPTERS 2–3

### Recall and Interpret

1. A piece of his pants is torn, having been caught in the door hook of the smokehouse, and the ham and sausages are in the cabin. He is not used to hearing his father being called "boy."
2. Sounder growls and scratches at the door, makes an awful noise that is half growl and half bark, then lunges after the wagon. He openly expresses anger. Family members fear openly expressing their feelings.
3. The boy cries when he sees the wounded Sounder, follows him under the porch, and spends the night worrying about him. He channels his grief for the harm done to his father into grief for Sounder.
4. The boy puts it under his pillow. He believes that if he does so, he can make a wish and the wish will come true.
5. The mother takes what's left of the ham and sausages back to the owner of the smokehouse. She hopes the owner will encourage the sheriff to release her husband; she thinks it's the right thing to do.

### Evaluate and Connect

6. He imagines that the deputy killed his father or that his father feels cold because of the rip in his overalls. He is very frightened. Students may respond that they would feel terrified and angry.
7. The simile conveys the idea that the cabin is physically isolated. In beginning the chapter with this simile, Armstrong makes the appearance of the strangers dramatic.

## RESPONDING CHAPTERS 4–6

### Recall and Interpret

1. The mother tells the boy that Sounder has gone into the woods to search for oak leaves to heal his wounds. The mother is deeply connected to the natural world.
2. He remembers selling mistletoe and bittersweet berries with his father. He is afraid of the townspeople, the policemen, and the red-faced jailer. He fears these people because he has learned through experience to distrust white people.
3. Sounder is very thin and has only one eye, one ear, a lame leg, and a large bald patch on one side of his head and shoulder. The boy feels sick and wants to cry. He no longer barks or ventures far from the cabin because he misses his master.
4. The mother's employers read her the court news from their newspapers. Students may conjecture that because of racial prejudice, the white authorities don't feel obliged to inform the family of the father's fate.
5. The characters in the newspaper stories seem like strangers, and the stories make him more afraid. The biblical stories feature heroes who triumph in the end, whereas the newspaper articles feature people who often suffer defeat.

### Evaluate and Connect

6. She means that he must accept the losses he suffers in life. Students may agree with mother since the family has lost both the father and Sounder.
7. Yes. The boy shouldn't risk losing the opportunity to visit with his father.

## RESPONDING CHAPTERS 7–8

### Recall and Interpret

1. She wishes he would remain home, but she understands

# Answer Key *(continued from previous page)*

- his compulsion to look for his father. She realizes she cannot stop him and/or yearns for news of her husband.
2. As in the case of the jailer, he fantasizes about killing the guard. This time he imagines that he is a righteous hero (David) destroying an evil person (Goliath). He is less afraid on this occasion and more defiant.

3. He finds the teacher's talking to his plant strange. He realizes the teacher is genuinely interested in knowing and helping him.
4. The teacher tells him to be patient and to avoid searching for his father. He believes that what is happening to the father is the Lord's will.
5. Sounder barks and acts like a young dog again. Mother acts shocked but soon recovers; the boy acts relaxed; the children act natural and considerate. Sounder and the father have similar injuries and limp when they walk.

### **Evaluate and Connect**

6. Students may respond that the foreshadowing helps to build suspense.
7. Armstrong might set the novel in a place where minorities suffer great poverty. He might explore racial discrimination.

### **RELATED READINGS**

#### **The Circuit**

##### *Responding to the Reading*

1. He dreads moving, whereas his siblings are excited by the adventure of moving. The father's attitude toward his car reveals he is a proud and careful man; the mother's attitude toward her pot reveals she is a loyal person.
2. He feels very hot and thirsty, becomes sick to his stomach when he drinks cold water, and remains dizzy for hours afterward. The next day he aches and can hardly move. The work is physically grueling.
3. He has difficulty speaking English and is anxious about reading aloud. He becomes angry at himself for not reading and asks Mr. Lema for help.
4. Mr. Lema appreciates Panchito's efforts. He helps Panchito with his English every lunch hour and offers to teach him to play the trumpet.
5. Panchito does not attend school during the grape season because his family needs the income he earns. The boy in *Sounder* does not attend school because he is too young to walk eight miles each way in cold weather. No. The boy's parents cannot move closer to school, and Panchito's parents need the income he earns.

#### **The White Dog**

##### *Responding to the Reading*

1. The narrator is a fourteen-year-old girl. She wishes above all else to be treated like a grown-up.
2. The narrator doesn't trust the dog, fearing it might be dangerous; Kenny wants to adopt the dog; Kenny's mother is wary; and Kenny's father is concerned with the dog's usefulness. The narrator and her mother are cautious, Kenny is enthusiastic and impulsive, and the father is practical.
3. Her mother is pregnant and is not feeling well. It makes her feel proud and excited.
4. The narrator proves she is responsible, and the white dog proves it is useful.
5. The rural setting of the story is similar to that of *Sounder*, but the story takes place at least thirty years later.

#### **Frisk: the Cat with Many Lives**

##### *Responding to the Reading*

1. The narrator does not understand why the cat recovers so quickly from its episodes of unconsciousness. The cat is consuming its owner's pain medication.
2. The narrator displays good deductive reasoning.
3. Dick is dying of cancer. He displays no feelings of self-pity.
4. Dick feels deeply about his pet and depends on him. His wife has died, and he has few friends.
5. The cat amuses the old man and is pampered in return.

# Assessment Rubrics

Sounder helps to feed the family and is loved, but he is not a pampered pet.

## **I'll Walk the Tightrope**

### *Responding to the Reading*

1. The tightrope symbolizes the obstacles African American must overcome to achieve success in this country. Most students will find the tightrope symbol effective.
2. She doesn't understand why she must walk on the tightrope while others are allowed to walk on the ground.
3. "Without a . . ." the parallelism reinforces the idea that African Americans haven't been given the same advantages as other Americans.
4. The speaker suggests that if she compares her situation with that of white Americans, the resulting anger will prevent her from succeeding in life.
5. Both works suggest that racial injustice has a devastating impact on African Americans.

### **Words Like Freedom, Question and Answer, and History**

#### *Responding to the Reading*

1. The speaker means that words like *freedom* are important to him because his freedom has been severely limited.
2. He mentions Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town in South Africa, and Atlanta, Birmingham, and Watts in the United States. These are cities with long histories of racial discrimination. He mentions places where civil rights demonstrations, racial rioting, or racial violence took place.
3. People could use power to remake the world.
4. The speaker hopes that the future, unlike the past, will not feature violence and suffering.
5. Students may respond that the boy would agree with the ideas in the poems but would be more reluctant to take political power than the speaker of "Question and Answer."

## **TEST**

### **Recall and Interpret**

1. c
2. b
3. d
4. a
5. c
6. He thinks that he would not be so lonesome then.
7. The mother believes that life is difficult and lonely and that people must nonetheless persevere.
8. The boy does not show his bravery in an obvious way, but he is brave all the same.
9. It shows that he became a well-educated, digni-

fied man.

10. The quote stresses that cruel people such as the jailer and the guard are actually weak and cowardly.

### **Evaluate and Connect (any two)**

1. The boy is told by his teacher, and later understands, that anything that has once lived remains alive for the person remembering it. The father and Sounder live on in the boy's memory in the vital state they were before the arrest.
2. Like the biblical characters, the boy is determined, courageous, and strong, and he believes right will prevail. The boy faces many obstacles but ultimately succeeds.
3. The boy is powerless against the guards. Fantasizing about revenge prevents him from crying and so allows him to maintain a quiet dignity. His response suggests that African Americans had no power in the South.
4. The father steals food because he believes his obligation is to feed his family; the mother works hard to support her children; the younger children are obedient and considerate toward their parents; the boy journeys to find his father and does his father's share of farm work. The father is self-sacrificing and stoical, the mother is loving, hardworking, steady, and coolheaded, the younger children are well behaved; and the boy is responsible, determined, hardworking, courageous.
5. Some students will agree that the events depicted in the book are too horrible for young children to read about. Most students will agree that the book is honest in its portrayal.

# Meet William H. Armstrong



*I write with a pencil on a lined tablet. For most of my books begin with an idea that I take inside and keep there for a long time before I write a single word. It gets into my blood and is filtered through my heart until it is a part of me.*

—**Something About the Author Autobiography Series, Volume 7, 1989**

**W**illiam H. Armstrong was born on his parents' farm near Lexington, Virginia, in 1914. As a young boy, he helped his parents with farming chores, which taught him the value of hard work. Though books were scarce, Armstrong's mother educated her children by reading from the Bible every day.

**A Life in School** Armstrong suffered terribly during his early years in school. His small size, glasses, chronic asthma, and stuttering caused other students to tease him. In the sixth grade, however, a favorite teacher changed Armstrong's life by singling out one of his assignments for its neat appearance. "Now, suddenly, I knew where I could win. I could have the most nearly perfect written work," Armstrong recalled.

Armstrong continued his schooling at Augusta Military Academy in Virginia and then at Hampden-Sydney college and the University of Virginia. Although he had considered becoming a

journalist upon graduation, he made "perhaps the wisest decision [he] ever made" and chose a teaching career instead.

He taught for several years in Virginia, married Martha Stone Street Williams in 1943, and in 1945 took a job as a ninth-grade teacher at the Kent School in Connecticut, where he was to teach for the next fifty-three years.

**Armstrong's First Book** Armstrong became so well known around school for teaching his students good study habits that the school's headmaster suggested he write a book about his techniques. Despite initial reservations, Armstrong decided to write the book, which would prove difficult to complete. In 1953 his wife Martha died suddenly, leaving Armstrong with three small children to raise and a household to run. As a result, he formed a habit of getting up early to write so he could write without disturbance. "Early in the morning is my time to write—from 4:00 A.M. to 7:00 A.M. There is something very satisfactory about having one big job done before breakfast."

*Study Is Hard Work* was published in 1956. Several other books on study habits, history, and other educational subjects followed. In 1963 he received the National School Bell Award from the National Association of School Administrators for "distinguished interpretation in the field of education." *Sounder*, his most popular and most successful book, was published in 1969.

**Influences from Childhood** Values Armstrong learned during his childhood—a respect for nature, hard work, education, and religious faith—made their way into *Sounder*. In developing his characters, Armstrong drew upon his memories of adults important to him in his childhood—the mother who read the Bible to her children; the quiet, stoical father; and the exceptional teachers who influenced Armstrong to become a teacher himself.

Although *Sounder* brought Armstrong acclaim as a writer, he insisted that writing was his second career and teaching his first. Armstrong died on April 11, 1999, in Kent, Connecticut.

# Introducing the Novel

*I'm a loner and some of the characters in my books begin to appreciate the quiet harvest of aloneness, the quiet symphony of creation and earth, the quiet music of the earth—and its deep agony.*

—William H. Armstrong, *Something About the Author Autobiography Series, Volume 7, 1988*

## BACKGROUND

William H. Armstrong stated in several interviews and autobiographical essays that he heard the story of the coon dog from an elderly African American friend named Charles Jones. As told in the novel, the story has a universal quality; it could involve almost any poor family living in the deep South at the turn of the century. Armstrong didn't give family members names for this reason: "without names," he stated, "[the characters] . . . represent all people who suffer privation and injustice, but through love, self-respect, desire for improvement, make it in the world."

The boy in the novel loves Old Testament stories, and Armstrong said that he too loved them as a child. "Not until years later did I understand why I liked the Bible stories so much. It was because everything that could possibly be omitted was omitted. There was no description of David so I could be like David," he said.

Armstrong may have had these Bible stories in mind when writing *Sounder*, because the novel, like the stories, omits extraneous information. For example, readers are told little about the three younger children in the family and about the mother's and father's thoughts and feelings. Nor does Armstrong tell them the boy's age or what he looks like.

What readers do learn is what goes on in the boy's mind: what he sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells; what he wishes; what he loves; what he fears; and even what he dreams. By the end of

the novel, readers know the kind of man the boy has become.

## THE TIME AND PLACE

The family in *Sounder* are sharecroppers. Sharecropping began in the South just after the Civil War. Previously enslaved farm workers needed jobs; southern land owners needed workers to farm their land but had little money to pay them. Sharecropping seemed a good solution for both groups. The landowner provided living quarters, land, and the means to farm it—seed, equipment, and animals. The sharecropper provided his own and his family's labor. Typically, the landowner and the sharecropper each received one-half of the crop's value when it was sold at market.

The system might appear fair on the surface. In practice, however, it was manipulated to benefit landowners. For example, between harvests, sharecroppers often had to borrow money for living expenses against their share of future crops. Landowners also owned the stores where sharecroppers shopped and charged a high interest rate on items purchased through credit. When crops were sold, sharecroppers often received very little after landowners collected the money owed them. Sharecroppers were powerless to protest, having no political power and no protection against unscrupulous landowners.

The sharecropping system also prevented many sharecroppers' children from pursuing an education. One former sharecropper recalled, "White people would tell you . . . 'you got to take that boy or that girl out of school to help you work. You can't do this work by yourself . . .' You just had to let them work to satisfy him and to get the supplies he was going to furnish you that month. Now I understand that the landowners did not want to see my children educated."

## Did You Know?

The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, passed soon after the Civil War ended, respectively state that every person is entitled to “the equal protection of the laws” and that a person could not be denied the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

During the 1870s, however, southern states began to pass laws designed to prevent African Americans from voting. As a result, the number of African Americans who voted in the South dropped dramatically. In Louisiana, for example, 130,000 African Americans voted in 1896 and only 1,342 in 1904. States also passed laws forbidding

African Americans to use public facilities used by white Americans such as schools, libraries, hospitals, parks, and drinking fountains. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled that such laws, often called “Jim Crow” laws, were constitutional.

African Americans and others began to organize to change these laws. But many years passed before the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that having separate schools for African American and white children was unconstitutional. In 1964 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed, among other things, discrimination in public housing and employment.

## CRITIC’S CORNER

*The characters have no names . . . a stylistic device that tends to universalize them. What happens to these characters extends itself to represent the general conditions for blacks at that period of history. . . In the course of [the father’s] arrest, the family dog, Sounder, is lamed and rendered mute. The dog’s voice has been carefully described by the author as making “music as though the branches of all the trees were being pulled across silver strings.” The unity of the family and its closeness to nature are equated with the music of the dog’s voice. The dog is made silent . . . by the overreaction of an oppressive white society . . . Armstrong never backs away from a realistic portrayal of police brutality or of the well-motivated and justified murderous anger of the boy when he encounters sadistic jailers and deputies. The portrayal of violence is always at the service of art in Sounder.*

—William D. Anderson, in *Twentieth-Century Children’s Writers*

# Before You Read

## ***Sounder* Chapter 1**

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

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The novel is named for the dog Sounder, who plays an important role in its owners' lives. Do you know a family in which a dog plays an important role?

**Think-Pair-Share** With a partner, try to identify the reasons why the dog is so important to the family.

#### **Setting a Purpose**

Read to find out why Sounder is important to the boy and to his family.

### **BACKGROUND**

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#### **Did You Know?**

Dogs and humans have hunted together since prehistoric times. For hundreds of years, different kinds of dogs have been bred for hunting different kinds of animals. Terriers and dachshunds were originally bred to hunt small animals; mastiffs and elk hounds to hunt larger animals. A coon dog, such as Sounder, surprises a raccoon or possum on the ground or chases it up a tree and barks to inform its master of the fact. Once the animal is shaken down, the dog breaks the animal's neck with a quick jerk and lays it at its master's feet.

#### **Sensory Images**

In the first chapter, Armstrong vividly describes the family's home and the surrounding land. He uses sensory images—images that appeal to the sense of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—to help readers to comprehend the family's living conditions. Notice the sensory images in the following sentences from page 5: "The boy pressed his head deep into his straw pillow. The pillow was cold, but it felt smooth, and it smelled fresh. . . . He heard the thump, thump, thump of Sounder's paw hitting the underneath side of the porch floor as he scratched at a flea in his short tan hair."

### **VOCABULARY PREVIEW**

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**addled** [ad'əld] *adj.* confused (p. 4)

**callused** [kal'əsɪd] *adj.* having patches of hardened and thickened skin (p. 2)

**mellowed** [mel'ōd] *v.* ripened; having become rich and full (p. 2)

**peering** [pēr'ing] *v.* looking closely (p. 1)

**precision** [pri'sizh'ən] *n.* strict accuracy; exactness (p. 2)

**punctuated** [pungk'chōō āt'əd] *v.* marked or divided as with punctuation marks (p. 1)

**quarry** [kwôr'ē] *n.* animal that is hunted or pursued (p. 3)

**successive** [sək ses'iv] *adj.* following each other without interruption (p. 1)

# Active Reading

## **Sunder Chapter 1**

Two evenings and the day between are described in chapter 1. Both evenings are cold and windy, forcing the boy to remain inside. Though the weather remains constant, the mother's and the father's behavior changes. Complete the chart to keep track of the father's and the mother's behavior on each day and the boy's reaction to their behavior.

First Evening	Second Day and Evening
Father: Is mostly silent; seems to be listening.	
Mother:	
Boy:	

# Responding

## **Souder Chapter 1**

### **Personal Response**

What kind of impression does Souder make on you? Why?

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### **Analyzing Literature**

#### **Recall and Interpret**

1. In your opinion, how old is the boy in the story? Why do you think so?

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2. Why does the boy no longer attend school? How does the boy feel about school?

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3. How does Souder look and act? Why is Souder important to the family?

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4. How successful has the hunting been during the month of October? Why?

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5. What change does the boy notice when he wakes up the next morning? How does his mother react to this change? Why?

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# Responding

## **Sounder Chapter 1**

### **Analyzing Literature (*continued*)**

#### **Evaluate and Connect**

6. Armstrong does not give any of the human characters names. Why do you think he kept them nameless? Do you think he made the right decision?

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7. Is Sounder the kind of dog you would want to have as a family pet? Why or why not?

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### **Literature and Writing**

#### **Drawing Conclusions**

Write three paragraphs comparing the behavior of the boy's parents on the two evenings described in the chapter. What can you conclude about their personalities based on this comparison. Use the **Active Reading** notes on page 17 to help you.

### **Extending Your Response**

#### **Literature Groups**

With your group, identify sensory images in the chapter. Then discuss the following questions: What senses does Armstrong appeal to with these images? How do they contribute to your understanding of the novel's setting and characters.

### **Interdisciplinary Activity**

#### **Mathematics**

The mother receives fifteen cents per pound for shelled walnuts. Look back through the chapter to estimate the approximate amount of time different family members spend gathering, cracking, and shelling walnuts. Then try to determine how much their work is worth per hour.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## ***Souder* Chapters 2–3**

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

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Many people are desensitized to the violent images they see in the media because the images are so numerous. They respond to real violence, however, in a very different way.

#### **Quickwrite**

Imagine that you have witnessed a violent act against a family member or a friend. How do you think you would react? What feelings might you have? Jot down your ideas.

#### **Setting a Purpose**

Read to find out how family members react when the father and Souder are victims of violence.

### **BACKGROUND**

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#### **Did You Know?**

Dogs will exhibit great bravery and risk possible injury to protect people. As a result, dogs are often used to guard people and their homes. Policemen frequently use dogs as part of their teams.

#### **Stream of Consciousness**

**Stream of consciousness** is a technique that a writer uses to imitate the flow of thoughts, feelings, images, and memories of a character. Some thoughts may seem unconnected to story events but may be connected to what the character is feeling. For example, when the boy hears the click of handcuffs (page 11), he is reminded of the click of a gate latch at the landowner's house. The boy makes this association because the fear he feels when his father is handcuffed recalls the fear he felt when the landowner ordered him away from the gate.

### **VOCABULARY PREVIEW**

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**constrained** [kən strānd' ] *adj.* held back; limited ( p. 13)

**deputies** [dep'yə tēz] *n.* assistants (p. 11)

**fallow** [fal'ō] *adj.* not planted or farmed (p.10)

**floundering** [floun'dər ɪŋ] *v.* struggling to move (p. 13)

**heaved** [hēvd] *v.* to strain to do something (p. 13)

**lunge** [lunj] *v.* to move forward suddenly and forcefully (p. 12)

**mongrel** [mong'grəl] *n.* an animal of mixed breed (p. 12)

**plaintive** [plān'tiv] *adj.* expressing suffering or sadness (p. 13)



# Responding

## ***Sounder* Chapters 2–3**

### **Personal Response**

Were you surprised by anything in these chapters? What surprised you? Why?

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### **Analyzing Literature**

#### **Recall and Interpret**

1. How does the sheriff know that the father stole the meat? Why does the boy raise his hands when the sheriff's deputy says, "Stick out your hands, boy."

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2. How does Sounder react when the father is handcuffed and chained? In what way does Sounder's reaction differ from that of the other family members? Why do you think he behaves differently from them?

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3. How does the boy respond to the harm done to Sounder? Why does the boy seem to worry more about Sounder than his own father?

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4. Where does the boy put Sounder's ear? Why?

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5. What does the mother do with the remaining ham and sausage? Why do you think the mother acts as she does?

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# Responding

## **Souder Chapters 2–3**

### **Analyzing Literature (continued)**

#### **Evaluate and Connect**

6. What are some of the things that the boy imagines may happen to his father? How do you think he is feeling? How might you feel in a similar situation?

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7. The road that passes by the cabin is described on page 10 as lying “like a thread dropped on a patchwork quilt.” What idea does this simile convey? Why does Armstrong begin the chapter with this simile?

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### **Literature and Writing**

#### **Paraphrasing**

Using your own words, paraphrase the paragraphs on pages 13–14 that describe Souder’s progress from the road to the cabin. Try to include details that convey how Souder looks, sounds, and moves. Then compare your sentences to Armstrong’s. How are they different? How are they alike?

#### **Extending Your Response**

##### **Literature Groups**

Imagine that the boy decides to share with his mother his reaction to his father’s arrest and his concerns about his father’s future. With your group, examine the passages on pages 13, 14–17, and 19 that describe the boy’s thoughts. Then discuss the following questions: What questions might the boy ask his mother if given the opportunity? How might she respond? Compare your answer with that of other groups to see if there is any consensus.

##### **Performing**

What do you think will happen to the father? If he appears before a judge, will he receive a fair trial? Stage your own trial and act out what you imagine the father, a prosecuting attorney, a defense attorney, the sheriff, and his deputies might say. Have the class act as a jury. After pronouncing the defendant guilty or not guilty, a member of the jury should explain why the jury reached the verdict that it did.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## *Souder* Chapters 4–6

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

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What chores and responsibilities do you have at home? How have they changed as you have grown older?

#### List It

List your chores and responsibilities. Then circle the responsibilities you most recently took on.

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how the boy's responsibilities change after his father's arrest.

### BACKGROUND

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#### Did You Know?

The practice of putting convicts to work while chained together started in the South shortly after the Civil War. Convicts were chained together at the ankles so they could not escape and were forced to labor from dawn to dusk in coal mines, turpentine plantations, brickyards, sawmills and phosphate pits. Later they were used to construct roads. Convicts lived in road camps overseen by guards who were authorized to shoot to kill. Often they lived in unsanitary conditions and consumed rotten food. The practice of putting convicts to work ended in the 1960s, but it was reinstated later in a few states, including Arizona and Alabama.

#### Allusion

In both fiction and nonfiction, authors make references, or **allusions**, to persons, places, or events from literary works, history, or religion. Allusions enrich the reading experience by adding additional layers of meaning. *Souder* contains many allusions to biblical stories. For example, on page 39 the boy takes comfort in the Old Testament stories of David and Joseph. These characters ultimately triumphed over powerful enemies because they had right on their sides.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

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**chute** [shōōt] *n.* passage through which things may pass (p. 29)

**glancing** [glans'ing] *adj.* turned aside and moved off at an angle (p. 24)

**poultice** [pōl'tis] *n.* soft, moist mass of absorbent material applied as a medicine (p. 24)

**quarry** [kwōr'ē] *n.* deep hole from which stone is obtained (p. 33)

**remote** [ri mōt'] *adj.* far removed in distance or time (p. 35)

**slacken** [slak'ən] *v.* to make less tight (p. 29)

**socket** [sok'it] *n.* hollow part into which something fits (p. 34)

**vaccinate** [vak'sə nāt'] *v.* to inject with dead virus or bacteria as prevention against disease (p. 29)

# Active Reading

## ***Souder* Chapters 4–6**

Chapter 4 begins on the same day as chapter 3. By the end of chapter 6, many years have passed. Complete the time line to keep track of the events covered in these chapters, as well as events from earlier chapters.

Boy discusses Souder with Mother:

Next day: Boy searches for Souder:

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Day before Christmas: Mother bakes cakes.

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# Responding

## **Sounder Chapters 4–6**

### **Personal Response**

In what ways does the boy change from chapter 1 to chapter 6? Is he someone you would like to have as a friend? Why or why not?

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### **Analyzing Literature**

#### **Recall and Interpret**

1. Where does the mother tell the boy Sounder has gone and why? What do the mother's words reveal about her relationship to the natural world?

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2. What does the boy remember about going to town? Who is the boy afraid of in town? Why does he fear these people?

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3. In what ways has Sounder changed? Why does Sounder act differently now? How does the boy respond when he first sees Sounder?

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4. How does the family find out what happened to the father? Why do you think the family learns about the father's fate in this way?

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5. Why does the boy prefer the Bible stories his mother tells to the stories he reads in the newspaper? How do these kinds of stories differ?

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# Responding

## **Souder Chapters 4–6**

### **Analyzing Literature (continued)**

#### **Evaluate and Connect**

6. What does the mother mean when she tells the boy that he must “learn to lose?” Do you agree with the mother’s opinion that the family is “born to lose” rather than “born to keep?” Why or why not?

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7. When the jailer ruins the cake, the boy doesn’t say a word in response. Do you think the boy was right to respond in this way? Why or why not? How might you have reacted in the same situation?

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### **Literature and Writing**

#### **Summarizing**

Write a paragraph-long summary describing the boy’s journeys in search of his father. In your summary, respond to the following questions: Approximately how old is the boy when he first sets out? What people does he meet? Where does he sleep? How does he comfort himself when he is afraid?

#### **Extending Your Response**

##### **Literature Groups**

In your group, find the allusions to biblical stories in chapters 4 through 6. Then discuss the following questions: What are these biblical stories about? How do they contribute to the reader’s understanding of the novel and its characters? When you are finished, share your views with the class.

##### **Internet Connection**

Although illiterate, the mother is knowledgeable about folk medicine, the use of plants and herbs in healing. Folk medicine was once popular in the United States and remains popular in many countries. Some folk remedies, such as the application of bread mold or soil fungi to an infected wound, have proven quite effective. Conduct a search on the Internet to learn more about folk remedies for a particular disease or problem. Try to find out success rates for these remedies. Then share your findings with the class.

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# Before You Read

## ***Souder* Chapters 7–8**

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

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Have you ever had a teacher who changed your life in a significant way? What qualities did this teacher possess? How did he or she affect your life?

#### **Journal**

Write a brief journal entry in which you respond to these questions.

#### **Setting a Purpose**

Read to find out how one teacher makes an important difference in a boy's life.

### **BACKGROUND**

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#### **Did You Know?**

The “dog days” of summer were named for Sirius, the major star in the constellation Canis Major (meaning “big dog”). This star is approximately twenty-three times more brilliant than the Sun. In late summer Sirius rises just before dawn and follows the Sun throughout the day. The ancient Greeks, Romans, and Chinese believed Sirius caused the extra heat at the end of summer and that this heat could drive dogs mad. The ancient Romans sacrificed fawn-colored dogs to appease Sirius and thereby saved crops from its withering heat.

#### **Symbols**

In both fiction and poetry, authors use symbols to convey meaning. A **symbol** is an object, place, person, or event that stands for something else in addition to itself. The elderly teacher talks to a plant that is smaller than his other plants and that was reset after its roots were torn up. As a result of the teacher's care, the plant sprouts new leaves. The plant is a symbol for the boy. Just as the teacher heals the wounded plant, so too does he heal the wounded boy and help him to sprout “new leaves.”

### **VOCABULARY PREVIEW**

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**animosity** [an' ə mɒs' ə tē] *n.* open hostility; hatred (p. 43)

**askew** [ə skū'] *adj.* to one side; out of proper position (p. 50)

**cistern** [sis' tərŋ] *n.* a tank in which rain water is collected (p. 43)

**compulsion** [kəm pul' shən] *n.* an irresistible impulse to do a particular thing (p. 40)

**gyrations** [jī rā' shənz] *n.* circular movements; whirl (p. 41)

**malicious** [mə lish' əs] *adj.* taking pleasure in others' misfortunes; evil (p. 43)

**sultry** [sul' trē] *adj.* hot and humid (p. 50)

# Active Reading

## **Souder Chapters 7–8**

In chapter 7, the boy meets a man who will profoundly affect his life. In the chart below, jot down the advice the boy receives from this man and from his parents. Then note how he responds to each piece of advice.

Influences	Advice	Effects of Advice on Boy
<p>Mother</p>	<p>p. 40 Advises patience</p>	<p>He ignores her advice.</p>

# Responding

## ***Souder* Chapters 7–8**

### **Personal Response**

Were you surprised by the novel's ending? Why or why not?

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### **Analyzing Literature**

#### **Recall and Interpret**

1. How does the mother feel about the boy's searching for his father? Why do you think she lets him go?

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2. How is the boy's reaction to the brutal guard similar to his reaction to the red-faced jailer? Is it different in any way? Explain.

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3. For what reason does the boy think that the elderly teacher is "conjured," or crazy? Why does he change his mind?

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4. What advice does the teacher give the boy about finding his father? Why does he give the advice he does?

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5. How does Souder behave when his master returns? How do other family members behave? In what ways are Souder and his master now alike?

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# Responding

## **Souder Chapters 7–8**

### **Analyzing Literature (*continued*)**

#### **Evaluate and Connect**

6. The wounding of Souder foreshadows the wounding of the father in a dynamite blast. How does the foreshadowing contribute to the novel's impact?

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7. If Armstrong were writing a novel today involving racial discrimination, where might he set it? What subjects might he explore?

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### **Literature and Writing**

#### **Discussing Plot**

The **plot**, or sequence of events in a story, often deals with a problem and develops around a **conflict**, or struggle between opposing forces. The **climax** is the point of highest emotional pitch. What do you think is the central conflict in the novel? the climax? Respond to these questions in a brief essay. Use examples from the novel to support your ideas.

#### **Extending Your Response**

##### **Literature Groups**

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was a French philosopher and writer who lived from 1533 to 1592. With your group, read the excerpt from his essay "Cruelty" on page 43 and discuss its meaning. Then debate the following questions: How does this excerpt relate to the prison guard's behavior (see page 41)? to the behavior of other characters in the novel? Compare your answers with those of other groups to see if there is any consensus.

##### **Performing**

When the boy's father is buried, a preacher reads Psalm 23, which begins "The Lord is my shepherd." During the service, the preacher might also have spoken about the father's life and character. A speech made in honor of a person who has died is called an eulogy. A good eulogy describes a person's important personality traits, achievements, and impact on others. Imagine that you have been asked to give the eulogy for the father or Souder. Write a brief eulogy and then deliver it before the class.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

**Francisco  
Jiménez**

# The Circuit

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Have you ever moved to a new neighborhood or started at a new school? If so, how long did it take you to feel at home?

### Background

Migrant workers travel from place to place to pick crops. A migrant family may move several times during a single season, making it difficult for children to attend school. As a result, migrant children attend twenty-four schools on average by the time they reach the fifth grade. Until recently, few of these children graduated from high school.

## Responding to the Reading

1. How does Panchito feel about moving in comparison to how his siblings feel? What does the mother's and father's attitude toward their possessions reveal about their personalities?

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2. How does Panchito feel his first day of picking grapes? How does he feel the next day? What conclusions can you draw about this type of work?

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3. What problems does Panchito have in school? How does he respond to these problems?

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4. Why does Mr. Lema take a special interest in Panchito? How does he help him?

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5. **Making Connections** Compare the reasons why Panchito and the boy in *Souder* fail to attend school at first. Do you think the parents could change the situation in either case? Why or why not?

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## Write a Description

Write a paragraph describing the garage near Fresno, California, that Panchito and his family inhabit. Then tell what you would like best about living in such a place and what you would like least. Use imagery and factual details to make your description as vivid as possible. Share your description with the class.

April J. Miller

# The White Dog

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Do most young people desire to take on more responsibility? Why or why not?

### Background

The Great Depression began in 1929 and lasted until 1941. During this period, banks and businesses closed down, and people lost their jobs and savings. In the early 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began to push through Congress a group of programs that provided people with unemployment relief, jobs, and other kinds of help.

## Responding to the Reading

1. Who is the narrator? What does she say is her greatest wish?

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2. What attitude does each family member have toward the white dog. What does each family member's attitude reveal about his or her personality?

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3. Why is Mary asked to take charge of her brother the next day? How does she react to this new responsibility?

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4. What tests do the narrator and the white dog pass?

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5. **Making Connections** Compare the setting of the story to that of *Souder*. How are they similar? How are they different?

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## Write a Newspaper Ad

Imagine that a dog followed you home one day. In order to find its owner, you decide to write an ad for your local newspaper. In the ad, describe the dog's appearance and the place where the dog was found and provide your address and phone number.

**James Herriot**

# Frisk: the Cat with Many Lives

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

In what ways can a pet enrich its owner's life?

### Background

The Scottish veterinarian James Alfred Wight was born in 1916. Using the pseudonym James Herriot, he wrote humorous stories about his early years as a country veterinarian in Yorkshire, England. By the time he died in 1995, he had written eighteen very popular books while continuing to practice veterinary medicine.

### Responding to the Reading

1. Why is the narrator so puzzled by Frisk's symptoms? What is making Frisk sick?

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2. Do you think the narrator is a good veterinarian? Why or why not?

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3. What is Dick's medical problem? What is Dick's attitude toward his medical problem?

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4. How does Dick feel about his pet? Why do you think he feels the way he does?

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5. **Making Connections** Compare the relationship between Dick Fawcett and his cat Frisk to the relationship between the father and Sounder. How is it similar? How is it different?

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### Literary Group

This story is told by a first-person narrator and *Sounder* by a third-person narrator. In your group, choose a page from this story and a page from *Sounder* to rewrite using the narrative technique of the other work. When this task is completed, discuss the following questions: How does the story change when the point of view from which it is told changes? How effective is the narrative technique used in each story?

**Margaret  
Danner**

# I'll Walk the Tightrope

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your race, gender, or religion? If so, how did it make you feel?

### Background

Margaret Danner celebrates African American culture in her poetry. "As a contributor to Afro-American literature," noted June M. Aldrige, "and especially to the black arts movement, and as a poet who clearly understood the ties of African heritage, Danner will be remembered not only as a writer, but as a guardian of culture."

## Responding to the Reading

1. What does the tightrope symbolize? Do you think it is an effective symbol?

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2. What is the speaker's attitude toward walking on the tightrope?

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3. What example of **parallelism** can you find in the poem? How does it contribute to the poem's meaning?

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4. How do you interpret the following line: "For if I stop to sight at the earth-propped stride of others, I will fall."

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5. **Making Connections** How is the theme of this poem similar to the theme of *Sunder*?

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## Creative Writing

Write a poem from the perspective of a person who is discriminated against because of his or her race. Try to incorporate in your poem rhyme, parallelism, and other poetic devices used by Danner. Share your poem with the class.

**Langston  
Hughes**

# Words Like Freedom, Question and Answer, *and* History

## **Before You Read**

### **Focus Question**

Think of a poem that moves you and try to determine why the poem is effective.

### **Background**

Langston Hughes wrote poems celebrating the wisdom, humor, and strength of African American people. Critic David Littlejohn said of Hughes: “By molding his verse always on the sounds of Negro talk, the rhythms of Negro music, by retaining his own keen honesty and directness, his poetic sense and ironic intelligence, he maintained through four decades a readable newness distinctly his own.”

## **Responding to the Reading**

1. How do you interpret the final two lines of “Words Like Freedom?”

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2. What places does Hughes mention in “Question and Answer?” In what two countries are these places located? Why does he mention these particular places?

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3. How might the speaker of “Question and Answer” respond to the following question: Why should oppressed people struggle to gain political power?

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4. What does the speaker of “History” wish for the future?

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5. **Making Connections** In your opinion, would the boy in *Souder* agree or disagree with the ideas expressed in each of these poems? Explain.

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## **Present a Choral Reading**

With a group of classmates, perform a choral reading of “Question and Answer.” Decide beforehand who will read each stanza: a student, a pair of students, or the entire group. Also decide when a line should be read loudly or softly, fast or slowly. Perform your reading before the class.

## TEST: *Sounder*

### Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 5 points each)

#### A. Write the letter of the best answer.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. On the October evening when his father leaves without Sounder, the boy feels
- a. disappointed because he doesn't hear a story.
  - b. angry that his father has not taken him hunting.
  - c. afraid because his father is not there.
  - d. hungry because he doesn't have enough corn mush to eat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Following the father's arrest, the mother tells the boy that
- a. no harm will come to his father.
  - b. Sounder is dying.
  - c. she will need his help in caring for the younger children.
  - d. Sounder may come back eventually.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When the jailer destroys the Christmas cake, the boy
- a. cries and then is ashamed.
  - b. refuses to pick up the crumbs.
  - c. is afraid the other prisoners will laugh at the cake.
  - d. imagines punching out the man.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The mother lets the boy search for his father because
- a. she understands his compulsion to do so.
  - b. she is desperate to learn news of the father.
  - c. she hopes that the boy will learn about the world this way.
  - d. she believes he is doing the right thing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The boy is glad when Sounder dies because
- a. he wants a younger dog.
  - b. people make better friends than dogs.
  - c. he knows Sounder will live on in his memory.
  - d. the younger children do not take good care of him.

#### B. Write a short answer for each question below.

6. Why does the boy wish that his family had books and that he could read?

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7. Explain the meaning of the African American spirituals "You gotta walk that lonesome valley" and "Look down that lonesome road" in the context of the novel.

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8. How might the opening quote by Antoine de Saint Exupéry, "A man keeps, like his love, his courage dark" apply to the character of the boy?

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9. What does the Author's Note tell the reader about the kind of adult the boy becomes?

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10. Explain how the following quote by Montaigne contributes to the meaning of the novel: "I have often heard it said that cowardice is the mother of cruelty, and I have found by experience that malicious and inhuman animosity and fierceness are usually accompanied by weakness."

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## TEST: *Sounder* (continued)

### Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

#### C. Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Armstrong ends his book with the following paragraphs:

*Years later, walking the earth as a man, it would all sweep back over him, again and again, like an echo on the wind.*

*The pine trees would look down forever on a lantern burning out of oil but not going out. A harvest moon would cast shadows forever of a man walking upright, his dog bouncing after him. And the quiet of the night would fill and echo again with the deep voice of Sounder, the great coon dog.*

How do you interpret this excerpt?

2. In what ways is the boy similar to the biblical characters he admires? How is their story similar to his own?
3. Twice when the boy is mocked by abusive guards he fantasizes about revenge, but says nothing. Why do you think he reacts this way? What does his reaction reveal about the society in which he lives?
4. How does each family member respond to the responsibilities they have? What does their response reveal about their personalities?
5. Do you agree with the following statement made by June Meyer Jordan?

*[Sounder] journeys among lonely and vicious events of a tragic, terrifying nature. There are no lies. But I am not sure children should read this book. If so, perhaps parents should loiter nearby, ready to enforce their child's revulsion from violence so truly and so well described.*