

A Curriculum Guide to

The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp

By Kathi Appelt

About the Book

Raccoon brothers Bingo and J'miah are the newest recruits of the Official Sugar Man Swamp Scouts. The opportunity to serve the Sugar Man—the massive creature who delights in delicious sugar cane and magnanimously rules over the swamp—is an honor, and also a big responsibility, since the rest of the swamp critters rely heavily on the intel of these hardworking Scouts.

Twelve-year-old Chap Brayburn is not a member of any such organization. But he loves the swamp something fierce, and he'll do anything to help protect it.

And help is surely needed, because world-class alligator wrestler Jaeger Stitch wants to turn Sugar Man Swamp into Alligator World Wrestling Arena and Theme Park, and the troubles don't end there. There is also a gang of wild feral hogs on the march, headed straight toward them all.

The Scouts are ready. All they have to do is wake up the Sugar Man. Problem is, no one's been able to wake that fellow up in a decade . . . or four . . .

Classroom Connections: Reading, Writing, and Researching

The activity below correlates to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (SL.4.1, 2, 3).

Please see the prereading reproducible at the end of this guide.

Exploring *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* through Writing and Research

The questions and activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-5.1, 2, 3) (RL.6.1, 3).

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. At the beginning of Chapter 1, as the raccoon brothers watch their parents depart from Information Headquarters, Daddy-O calls out to Bingo and J'miah and says, "Make us proud, boys!" Consider their jobs as Official Scouts of the Sugar Man Swamp. Why is this duty, ordained by the Sugar Man himself, so important? In your opinion, does this pair do a good job fulfilling their duties? Cite textual evidence to support your position.

2. Consider the novel's title: In what ways does it capture the themes of the book?
3. Describe Chap. What makes him a dynamic character? Is he the type of person you'd want to befriend? Why or why not?
4. Why is Chap's loss of his grandpa Audie such a profound one? What do you learn about their relationship over the course of the novel? What are the most important life lessons that Chap learns from his grandpa?
5. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by Chap, Bingo, and J'miah in *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*?
6. Based on what you learn about him from the novel, describe Sonny Boy Beaucoup, the man who owns the Sugar Man Swamp. In your opinion, is he a good person?
7. Why is Chap's discovery of his grandpa Audie's lost DeSoto such a monumental event?
8. In what ways are Bingo and J'miah typical brothers? Is there anything about their bond that reminds you of the relationship you have with any of your siblings? If so, in what ways?
9. If you could select one character in the novel to learn more about, who would it be? What is it about this particular character you found interesting or intriguing?
10. Consider the novel's cover. In what ways is the image portrayed there symbolic of the events that transpire throughout the course of the book?
11. In the opening of Chapter 24, Appelt tells readers, "It's true that pigs can't fly, but we're here to talk about hogs." What is it about the Farrow Gang that strikes such fear in those that know of their hunt for the canebrake?
12. Consider the variety of settings for *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
13. Why is Chap so determined to attract more customers to Paradise Pies? Beyond the financial support the restaurant provides to him and his mother, what does Paradise Pies symbolize for him?
14. Using the phrase, "This is a story about . . .," supply five words to describe *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*. Explain your choices.

Considering *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* through Literary Elements Analysis

The activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-5.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.6.7, 9).

Use the following activities to allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in the novel.

Create a Character T-shirt: One of the strengths of *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* is the number of fully realized characters. Have students select a favorite character and create a character analysis T-shirt. Have them identify the literary elements used by the author to describe the character, and then create a visual representation of the character traits. Use the worksheet found at:

<http://printables.scholastic.com/printables/detail/?id=38948>

Character “To Do” List: Remind students that, like us, literary characters have tasks they need to complete. Selecting a character of their choice from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*, have students create a list of the most important tasks at hand for that character with explanations as to why those tasks are so necessary.

Making Thematic Connections: Allow students to consider the following themes: loyalty, courage, ingenuity, and perseverance. Have them select one of the themes and find examples from the book that help support this theme. Create a sample Life Lesson Chart using the model at:

http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson826/chart.pdf.

Haiku of Love: Play matchmaker! Write three valentine haikus from one character to another, from you to a character or from one book’s character to another book’s character.

Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables

Line 3: 5 syllables

Advice Column: Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character and write advice to him/her. Students may choose to be serious or humorous. Use the letter format common to newspaper advice columns, where the person with the problem writes for advice and the advisor writes back. Often the person seeking advice “disguises” his or her name with a descriptive name associated with the problem.

Fortune Cookies: Have students imagine they are dining with three characters from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, making sure they tell you which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.

Gift Giving: Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the main characters; while these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that he/she would really want or need. Be sure to include an explanation for the gift and why it is appropriate.

If These Walls Could Talk: Ask students to create a conversation between one of the main characters and some intangible thing (justice, love, goodness, greed, etc.) or his/her conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue, making sure they use appropriate punctuation.

Essential Quotes Analysis: The language that an author uses in his work is essential to getting across the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* that signify key ideas that the author hopes readers will take from the text. These might be quotes spoken by characters or might be from the narration, and page numbers should be included with the quotes. Have students develop a chart with the following four columns:

- Quote
- Page Number
- Relevance to the Novel
- Intended Meaning for Readers

The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters in the text, but to the lives of anyone who reads the book.

Character Report Card: Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character's actions and choices in *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*. Have them set up a "report card" using a chart and include the following eight categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. In addition, include a teacher's comments section. In each category, give the character a letter grade that you believe he/she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In your comments section, use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain/support the grade.

Exploring *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Map Swamp* through Writing

The activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (W.4-6.7, 8, 9).

In *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*, the complexities of the characters, their relationships, and the situations in which they find themselves provide students an opportunity to dig deep into the text as they examine and answer one of the following prompts:

1. Readers are offered great insight about Chap's, Bingo's and J'miah's points of views through the events of the book. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters in *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*, and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what,

when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.).

2. Journal Response: Throughout the novel, many characters exhibit acts of bravery. Consider the individual actions of these characters. Who do you believe to be the most courageous? Write a letter to that character explaining why you believe his or her actions are brave.

3. Select a character of your choice from the novel and create a faux Facebook page for that character, being sure to complete all the pertinent information, like education, relationships, groups to follow, pages to like, as well as two to three status updates.

Create Original Inspired Art from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*

1. One of Appelt's greatest strengths as a writer is her ability to offer richly descriptive scenes. In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/> or <http://infinitecomic.com/> for example), have students begin by using the strips to create storyboards for their scene. Have students select original art, images, and graphics. Alternatively, students could assume the roles of two of the characters, using each one's personality and voice, and have them interact with one another by creating an extension of a scene from one of the novels. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

2. Previews of coming attractions in the movie industry are known as trailers. Design an original book trailer for *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp*. Begin by creating a storyboard, detailing which scenes you intend to incorporate in your trailer. Use a moviemaker program of choice such as www.animoto.com. Post your finished trailers to www.youtube.com.

3. Music is often used to connect people to each other and the world at large. Select a favorite character from *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* and create a CD with an original playlist that is representative of the experiences that characters undergo throughout the novel. Create original art for the jewel case and on the interior, and after including appropriate artist information, offer an explanation for the selection of each song.

Postreading Activity

Please see the postreading reproducible at the end of this guide.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a teacher and school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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Prereading Activity

Note to Teachers: As a prereading activity, have students complete this anticipation guide before they begin reading the book.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Educators, feel free to add additional statements below in order to extend the activity.

Once students have had the opportunity to complete the guide, you should read each statement aloud and have students who agree, show it by standing or raising their hands. Each student should be permitted to provide their rationale for agreeing if they wish.

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		It is important to fight for what you believe in, regardless of the risk involved.
		Animals are simple creatures.
		No matter the situation, you should always be able to count on your loved ones.
		You should always put others before yourself.

Reproducible

Postreading Activity

Note to Teachers: Students will make connections between characters or events in *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* with people and events in their lives. After reading the novel, ask students to complete the following chart considering the ways in which the story relates to their life and the world at large.

<p>As I read <i>The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp</i>, I observed . . .</p>	<p>As I read <i>The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp</i>, I wondered . . .</p>
<p>Sensory Descriptions Included in <i>The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp</i> (smell, hear, touch, sight, taste):</p>	<p>Some of the things I realized in reading <i>The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp</i> were . . .</p>