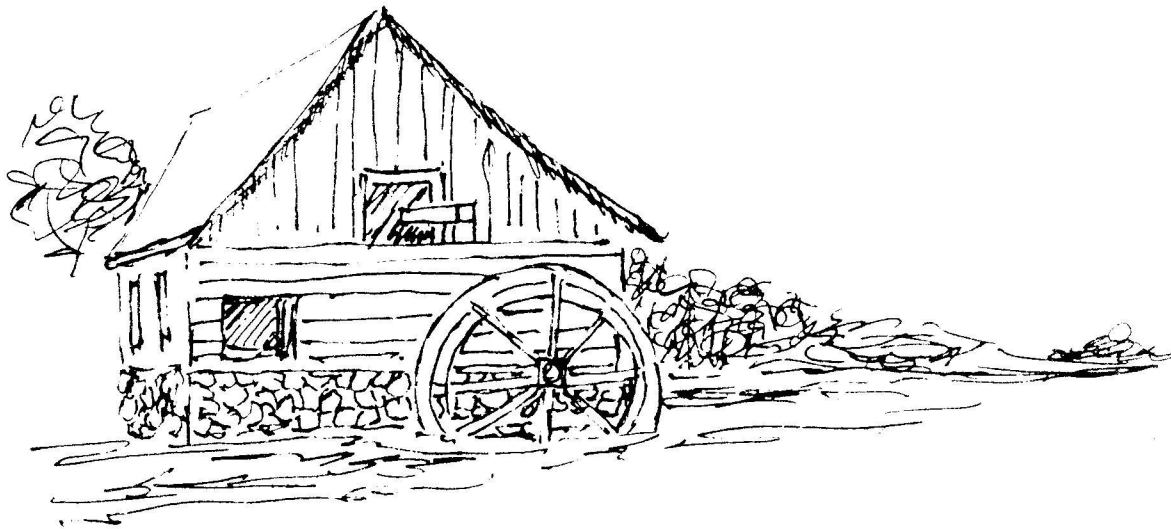


**THREE RIVERS**

*Crossing*  
TEACHER'S GUIDE

A Reading & Writing Connection  
based on the novel by Robert A. Lytle



by Jean Shafer, Ph.D.

# ***Three Rivers Crossing*** **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

---

**A Reading & Writing Connection  
based on the novel by Robert A. Lytle**

by  
Jean Shafer, Ph.D.

### **About the Author**

Jean Shafer combines her years of teaching experience and teacher education to produce this thoughtful guide for students and teachers. Dr. Shafer obtained her degrees from Ohio State University and the University of Connecticut and is presently an administrator in the Grand Haven, Michigan, school system where she heads a language arts program. She often can be found working with students and testing her ideas in the classroom. She is active in various reading and curriculum associations and has served on the National Study Committee, Literature-based Language Arts, of the National Council of Teachers of English.

ISBN: 0-938682-61-X

Copyright © 2000 by River Road Publications, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by River Road Publications, Inc.  
Spring Lake, Michigan 49456-1961  
Printed in the United States of America



**RIVER ROAD PUBLICATIONS, INC.**

## **A Reading & Writing Connection based on the novel by Robert A. Lytle**

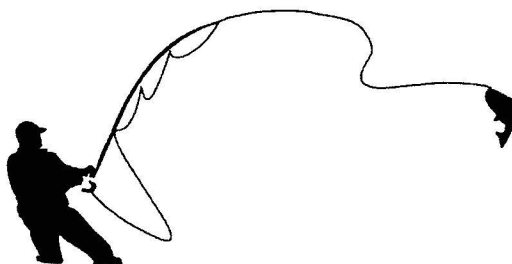
### *Three Rivers Crossing* in the classroom

There are many reasons and ways to read *Three Rivers Crossing* to or with students. One is for enjoyment. Robert A. Lytle's novel is an engaging story that provides suspense, while it makes us both laugh and cry. It is also a novel with history lessons. For instance, readers find out what life was like in a pioneer settlement in the Michigan Territory (or any settlement in the region), and how each individual was important to its survival. The story will also help readers appreciate our connections to the past – how people and their work had an impact on our communities today. Readers can use the novel for their personal growth as they “walk beside” the main character who is learning to value meaningful work and good friendships.

Still another and quite different way to read this novel is to examine it from a writer's point of view. Although writers read a book for the same reasons

as everyone else, they also take note on how it was written. How did the author make the setting and characters come to life? How did he or she build suspense or keep the reader interested? Writers strive to improve their own writing, often learning from others' work.

*Three Rivers Crossing* teaches us much about what a good writer does to engage us in a story. Thus, this guide is designed to accomplish two purposes. One is to lead students to a better understanding of the novel. Another is to help them use the book to inform their own writing.



## The story

Thirteen-year-old Walker Morrison is an ordinary seventh-grader in a small community north of Detroit. He's affluent and bright—but views his up-scale existence as something of a yawn. What interests Walker is some trout fishing he has planned for after school.

A fishing accident later that afternoon changes Walker's life. He is saved from drowning by Reverend Lemuel Taylor, a man who founded his community in 1824, and ironically, one of Walker's own ancestors. Walker soon realizes he has somehow been sent back in time.

Believing Walker has become separated from his family and is lost, the Taylor's welcome him into their pioneer home. Walker meets the Taylor children, Eunice and Daniel. Afraid to reveal his identity to Lemuel Taylor, Walker decides he must trust his story to Daniel. Fortunately, Daniel believes Walker and helps him adjust to his new life.

Like everyone in the settlement, Walker works hard to ensure their sur-

vival during the coming winter. Through his experiences he learns that every person in the community has an important part in its success. He finds a new sense of belonging and of pride in his contributions.

As the days pass Walker thinks about how he can return to the future. He believes he has been brought to the past to do some good deed or service and that he will be whisked home when this task is completed. He helps build a mill, corrects an error on a map which will affect Rochester's future, and saves one of the pioneers from an attack by an angry Native American. Yet Walker continues to wake up each morning in the past.

Walker's return home occurs dramatically the day the new mill is dedicated. Walker rescues Eunice from drowning but is himself sucked under the black waters of the creek. He nearly drowns and is pulled from the water into the twenty-first century. But there are more ironies. Walker learns that an old letter from Eunice has been found that validates his trip into the past.

**Elements of the novel**

Before you begin, make sure that students understand the common elements of all stories, from the *Three Little Pigs* to the plays of Shakespeare. Each has a setting, which is the time and place in which they happen. All stories have characters, the people in the story. The characters have goals that they are trying to reach, or problems they are trying to solve. In every story there is also a sequence of events that lead to a conclusion or ending. As you read this book, help students become aware of how Robert Lytle creates a realistic setting or settings and believable characters — how he engages readers in the characters' struggles and lead us to the conclusion.

**Chapter 1**

**Reading**

- In the first chapter the author gives a number of clues to the setting of the story. Have students find at least two quotations from the book that tell where the story happened. Have them find two more that give readers an idea when the story happened.
- Ask students why Mr. McKay is stunned to find Walker is related to the Taylors? Why doesn't Walker take it seriously?

**Writing**

- Read the description of Walker in the second and third paragraphs on page 4. Point out to students how Lytle shows us that Walker is tall without ever using the word, "tall". Then

**TEACHER'S NOTES**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

have them write a description of someone they know that is very tall or very short without using the words, "tall" or "short."

- The author leaves the reader with a definite impression of Renee St. Jean. Have students write a description of Renee, imagining they had met her that day at school. Ask them questions to spark their thinking. How does she sound? What clothes does she wear? How does she walk and talk?

### Chapter 2

#### **Reading**

- Ask students what happens when Walker goes fishing to be sure that they understand this important event in the story.

#### **Writing**

- Read students the description of Walker's nightmare on page 13 and have students write a description of a nightmare they have had.
- Have students make a list of the strong, active verbs the author uses to describe fish on page 15 (shooting, exploding, twisted, splashing, etc.). Have them list other verbs that might be used to describe the fish's behavior.

### Chapter 3

#### **Reading**

- Have students find three quotations in this chapter that informs the reader that there has been a change in the story's setting. Ask them where the story is now set.

#### TEACHER'S NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Question students about Walker's feelings about this new setting. How does the author show them that Walker is upset? Re-read the final paragraph if necessary.
- Point out that dialogue and conversations in novels helps us to understand the characters in the book. Read the words spoken by Sally in the fourth paragraph on page 21. Ask students to point out the words that are strange or unfamiliar. Ask them what this says about Sally, and then have them rewrite the paragraph using modern language.

**Writing**

- Explain how writers often use hyperbole or exaggeration to make their point. As a class make a list of exaggerations from the first page of Chapter 3. (Barfing his guts out, buckets of water exploded from his stomach, etc.) Then add other exaggerations that the author might have used. Ask students to write about a time they were sick using exaggerations.

**Chapters 4 & 5**

**Reading**

- Ask students to describe Walker's impression of the Taylors, using at least three descriptive phrases from the text to support their answers.

TEACHER'S NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Using a U.S. map, have students trace the Taylor's trip from Aurelius, New York to Stony Creek (Rochester, Michigan).
- Ask students what Daniel's greatest concern is? What does he advise Walker to do?

**Writing**

- Good descriptions can almost make you see, feel, hear, touch, or smell something. Read the paragraph about the Taylor house on page 29 several times. Then ask students to describe it in their own words without using the text.

**Chapter 6**

**Reading**

- Question students about Walker's feelings after he has helped put the grinding stone in place. Have them compare his response to the response of the other men. Why is Walker surprised at the others' reaction?

**Writing**

- The use of comparisons can help make ideas clear and vivid. Read the first two paragraphs on page 41 that describe Walker's new clothes. Ask students how these clothes are different from the ones Walker is accustomed to wearing (drawstring waist, no zipper, coarse and scratchy, etc.). Have students imagine Daniel putting on clothes that we wear today, rewriting these two paragraphs from Daniel's point of view.

**TEACHER'S NOTES**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Chapters 7 & 8**

**Reading**

- Ask students who is the daring one in the family, Daniel or Eunice? Discuss with students why Daniel is irritated by Eunice's actions.
- Ask students why each boy is apprehensive about the trip to Rochester. What does each have to fear?

**Writing**

- The author describes a dinner at the Taylor's as well as a dinner at the Morrison's on pages 52 and 53. Reread the dinner descriptions and ask students to write a descriptive paragraph about dinner at their home.

**Chapter 9**

**Reading**

- After reading the chapter have students discuss the following questions: What is Walker beginning to discover about the Taylors? How are his own feelings changing?
- Sometimes authors give clues or hints as to what might happen next in a story. Have students identify the clue or hint in Chapter 9 that Walker might get back to his own time and place.

**Writing**

- Walker thinks about himself and his place in time and then describes himself as a "Man born after his time." Have students write their own descriptive phrases of Walker at this time in the story.

TEACHER'S NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Chapter 10**

**Reading**

- Discuss why the men go to Rochester.
- Ask students what problem keeps troubling Walker. Help them to see how this is the main thread, or plot, that runs through the story.

**Writing**

- One way to describe something is through the use of metaphors and similes which describe things in terms of another (e.g. as red as a beet, as cold as ice).

In the last paragraph on page 67 Walker compares all the whirling and noise of the gristmill to the inside of a Pentium processor. Have students keep a list of metaphors and similes found in the book.

**Chapters 11 & 12**

**Reading**

- Again, on pages 74 and 75 the author gives us a clue as to what is going to happen. What is the clue? Have students record their predictions as to what they think will happen and have them look back at it when the book is finished.

**Writing**

- To help students understand the historical significance of Lewis Cass, have them do research on his life and work (particularly in Michigan), writing a brief biography.

**Chapters 13 & 14**

**Reading**

- Have students explain why the mill was important to the settlement's existence and its future.

**TEACHER'S NOTES**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Ask students why Walker believed the incident with Wa-se-gah would get him back to his own time.

**Writing**

- Eunice has not been engaged in much dialogue at this point in the story. Still, we know much about her. Have students write a paragraph as if they were describing her to one of their friends who did not know her.

**Chapters 15 & 16**

**Reading**

- Throughout the book the author tries to help readers understand the differences between Daniel's time and Walker's time. In the first three pages of Chapter 15 the author writes about swimming, a detail that reflects these differences. Have students make a list of ways that

Daniel's life is different from Walker's. Read the ideas aloud and have students add the new ones to their lists.

- After students have read about catching the grayling, have them turn back to pages 15 and 16, re-reading the paragraphs about the fish Walker is trying to land. Ask students to compare the fish in each chapter. Point out how the grayling has provided a link between the two time periods.
- Ask students what Walker does that is important to Rochester's future.

**Chapters 17 & 18**

**Reading**

- People tend to think of history as something in the past. But students need to be reminded that things that

TEACHER'S NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

happen in the present become part of history. As a class make a list of events in recent years that they think students will be learning about fifty years from now.

**Writing**

- Humor helps make writing interesting. Have students discuss how the author uses exaggeration on pages 107 and 112 to make the story humorous.
- After reading Walker's description of golf on page 112, have students write an explanation of one of their activities as if they were explaining it to someone who lived 200 years ago.

**Chapters 19 & 20**

**Reading**

- Have students explain why Eunice's character is so important to the story.

- Ask students if Daniel believes Walker is dead. What do they think has happened to Walker? Why?

**Writing**

- Ask students how the author shows Daniel's grief at the drowning of his friend. Discuss how powerful the use of understatement can be.

**Chapter 21**

**Reading**

- Have students discuss what parts of this chapter make the reader believe that Walker may really have gone back in time.

**Chapters 22 & 23**

**Reading**

- Ask students why Mr. McKay changes his attitude toward Walker and his story.

**TEACHER'S NOTES**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Ask students what clues we are given that assure us that Walker will be able to adjust to his old way of life. What clues do we have that make us believe that Walker was touched by the people at Stony Creek and will not forget them?

**Writing**

- For the first time in the book readers hear Eunice's point of view. Ask students to explain why the letter device used by the author is such a good way to bring the book to a close.



**Overview**

- Every story has a beginning, middle, and an end. Ask students to describe a major event from each of these parts.
- Have students select Walker, Daniel, or Eunice and write a paragraph describing their characters. Ask students to make sure they include information that gives you the sense of what kind of person this is.
- Talk with students about the symbols in the book. Ask them to think about the baseball cap, the grayling, and the claw necklace. Which of these do they think would be the best symbol to use for the story? Have them tell why in a brief paragraph that supports their decision. They may want to make a drawing or painting of the symbol they chose.

TEACHER'S NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



RIVER ROAD PUBLICATIONS, INC.

ISBN: 0-938682-61-X