

HOLIDAY HOUSE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



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Leaving Lymon

by **Lesa Cline-Ransome**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Young Lymon, who appeared in the award-winning *Finding Langston*, has a story worth hearing and at least one chance for redemption. It's 1946 and Lymon, uprooted from his life in the Deep South and moved up North, needs that chance.

Lymon has never really known either of his parents. His mother moved to Chicago during the Great Migration, while his father is serving time at Parchman Farm, the Mississippi State Penitentiary. His grandparents provide a good home for him, but things change after Grandpops dies. Lymon and Ma move from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to Milwaukee to be closer to relatives. When Ma becomes ill, Lymon is sent to live with his mother in Chicago. He has dreamed of knowing his mother, but the relationship is strained because Mr. Robert, his mother's husband, is a bully and resents Lymon being there. Lymon's behavior deteriorates: He bullies a classmate at school and steals money from Mr. Robert as he tries to run away. The courts sentence him to six months in a detention home, a place that at first glance reminds him of Parchman. His love of music leads him to the band room at the Arthur J. Audy Home, where Mr. Danforth, the music teacher, recognizes Lymon's talent. And it is music that sets him on a new path in life, one that hopefully includes his father.



PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Leaving Lymon is a companion novel to *Finding Langston*. Discuss the difference between a companion novel and a sequel. Instruct students to consider Lymon's brief appearance in *Finding Langston* and have them write a one-page paper that predicts one possible conflict in *Leaving Lymon*.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Describe Lymon's relationship with Grandpops. How is Grandpops better than Ma at answering Lymon's questions? What does Grandpops give Lymon that Ma can't give him? Discuss the greatest gift that Grandpops gives Lymon. How does this gift see Lymon through some tough times?
- Ma and Grandpops take Lymon to see his father at Parchman Farm. Why don't they explain to Lymon where they are going? Explain Lymon's reaction when he sees his dad in "black-and-white pajamas." Discuss why his dad tells Ma and Grandpops not to bring Lymon back to Parchman.
- No one really explains to Lymon that Grandpops is very ill. At what point does Lymon realize that Grandpops might not live? How could he have been better prepared for his grandfather's death if someone had been honest with him?
- When Grandpops dies, Aunt Shirley explains to Lymon that his daddy can't come to the funeral. She tells him that he needs to be a "little man" today. Debate whether Lymon fully understands this expectation. Cite other times in the novel that "being a man" is mentioned. Who ultimately teaches Lymon what it means to be a man?
- After Grandpops dies, Lymon and Ma move to Milwaukee to be near Aunt Vera and Uncle Clark. Lymon is enrolled in Fourth Street Elementary School. Later he lives with his mother in Chicago and attends Lincoln Elementary School. How does Lymon compare Fourth Street Elementary and Lincoln Elementary to the school he attended in Vicksburg, Mississippi? In which school is he the happiest? How does his reaction to the three schools reflect his home life at the time?
- Explain the following simile: "Milwaukee sounded like a record, playing all kinds of sounds at once" (p. 32). Identify other similes and metaphors related to music.
- Describe Mr. Eugene. How does he sense that Lymon needs a male role model? Why does Lymon think that Mr. Eugene is like the "deacons in Vicksburg"? Discuss the conversation that Mr. Eugene has with Lymon at the end of the novel. How does Mr. Eugene encourage Lymon to learn from his mistakes?
- When Ma gets sick, Aunt Vera calls Lymon's momma to come and get him. Describe Lymon's reaction when he sees his momma for the first time. Lymon had dreamed of knowing his momma. What does he learn about her once he goes to live with her?
- Discuss the following phrase: "When you lie down with dogs, you wake up with fleas" (p. 52). How does this perfectly express Ma's attitude toward Lymon's momma? Who are the "dogs" that Lymon encounters in Chicago? Debate how the "dogs" give Lymon a temporary case of the "fleas." At what point does he rid himself of the "fleas"?



- How does Lymon describe Curtis, Errol, and Clem, his classmates at Lincoln Elementary School? When Curtis, the bully, taunts Lymon, Errol encourages Lymon to walk away. Instead, Lymon hits Curtis. Lymon explains his actions by saying, “If I ran now, I’d always be running” (p. 109). How might Lymon have better handled the situation without “running”? Discuss why Lymon bullies Langston.
- Grandpops always said that “a man has got to demand respect” (p. 110). Why is there no respect in becoming a bully? How might Grandpops have reacted to Lymon’s way of demanding respect?
- Describe Mr. Robert. Why does Lymon’s momma think that he’s a good man? Debate whether

Mr. Robert resents Lymon living with them. How does he bully Lymon? Discuss whether he is partly responsible for Lymon’s bullying behavior.

- Lymon runs away and is picked up by the police. He is sent to the Arthur J. Audy Home. How does this place remind Lymon of Parchman Farm? Explain what he finds there that he never had while living with his momma and Mr. Robert.
- Trace Lymon’s relationship with his dad from the beginning of the novel to the end. How does the author reveal hope at the end of the novel?

Correlates to CCSS in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-5.1, RL.3-5.2, RL. 3-5.3; Craft & Structure RL. 4-5.4, RL. 3-5.5, RL. 3-5.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-5.1, SL. 3-5.2, SL. 3-5.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Explain what Lymon means when he says school is like “playing a game of Mother May I? where I took one baby step while everybody else in class took five” (p. 29). Write a short essay that explains the point in the novel when Lymon finally takes a giant step. Who helps him make the leap? Cite specific scenes and use direct quotes to support your opinion.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

- Write a paper that interprets the title of the book. Consider these questions: Which characters “leave” Lymon? How does Lymon himself leave? Cite specific reference to the story to support your thoughts.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

- Lymon says, “Ma didn’t want anyone knowing our dirty laundry” (p. 39). Think about Lymon’s life in Chicago, and write song lyrics that he might write titled, “Dirty Laundry.”

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

- A shape poem is a poem that is shaped like the thing it describes. Write down words that describe the symbolism of the guitar that Grandpops gives Lymon. Then write a shape poem about the guitar and what it means to Lymon. Include a line about Mr. Robert destroying the guitar.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-5.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.3- 5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3- 5.3.

- Have students read the lyrics of “Home” from *The Wiz* (lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/w/thewiz-lyrics/homelyrics.html). Write a paper that compares the meaning of the song to Lymon’s journey home.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Key Ideas & Purposes W. 5.3; ; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.5.1, L.5.2; Knowledge of Language L.5.3.

- In the Author’s Note, Cline-Ransome poses the question: “Are bullies born, or are they made?” Stage a debate where students argue the question. Instruct them to make specific reference to the book to support their argument.

Correlates to CCSS in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-5.1, SL. 3-5.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-5.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.



VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from context. Such words may include: *truancy* (p. 68), *documentation* (p. 68), *adequate* (p. 69), *dilemma* (p. 77), *dignity* (p. 93), *custody* (p. 168), and *asset* (p. 171).

INTERNET RESOURCES

muddywatersofficial.com/
Official website of Muddy Waters.

nationalbluesmuseum.org/
Official website for the National Blues Museum.

CONNECTING FINDING LANGSTON AND LEAVING LYMON

Compare and contrast Langston's and Lymon's relationships with their fathers. How do both fathers demonstrate love for their sons? Which boy has the longer journey in developing a relationship with his father?

Correlates to CCSS in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-5.1, RL. 3-5.3; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5.9.

Write a paper that discusses the importance of the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library to Langston and the band room of the Arthur J. Audy Home to Lymon. What does each boy discover? How do these places change the course of each boy's life?

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Read about bullies and the bullied on the following website: stopbullying.gov/resources/kids/facts. Which characteristics of the bullied best fit Langston? Which of the reasons for being a bully best apply to Lymon? Role-play a scene where Langston and Lymon sit down and talk about the things they have in common as well as their differences. Langston likes poetry, and Lymon likes music. Work in pairs to write a poem or song lyrics that Langston and Lymon might write together.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-5.4, W. 3-5.5; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-5.7, W. 3-5.9.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: John Halpern

Lesa Cline-Ransome is the author of almost twenty books for young readers. Her work has received a number of honors, including dozens of starred reviews, NAACP Image Award nominations, Coretta Scott King Honors, and a Christopher Award, and have been named to ALA Notable Books and Bank Street Best Children's Books lists. Her debut middle-grade novel, *Finding Langston*, received a Coretta Scott King Honor, the Scott O'Dell Award, and five starred reviews, and its companion, *Leaving Lymon*, is the recipient of three stars to date. She lives in Rhinebeck, NY, with her husband and collaborator James E. Ransome.

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