

Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

"Brick Dust and Bones" Lesson Plan Guide

by M.R. Fournet

Unit Overview

Duration: 3-4 weeks

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Integration: ELA, Social Studies, Philosophy/Ethics, Psychology

Essential Question: How do grief and love influence our choices, and when does fighting against loss become more harmful than healing?

Content Advisory: This novel deals with death, grief, parental loss, and increasingly dangerous choices by a desperate child. Teachers should consider students' emotional readiness and provide support resources for those dealing with loss.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze complex character motivation driven by grief and desperation
- Examine themes of loss, acceptance, and the morality of resurrection
- Understand how setting (New Orleans) enhances atmosphere and themes
- Explore ethical questions about death, resurrection, and consequences
- Evaluate character choices and their escalating risks
- Make connections between fictional grief and real emotional experiences
- Express understanding through analytical and creative projects

WEEK 1: World-Building and Character Introduction

Day 1: Introduction to Grief and Loss in Literature

Objective: Prepare students emotionally and intellectually for the novel's themes

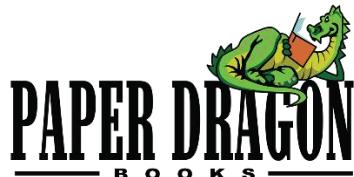
Materials: Grief literature examples, discussion guidelines, support resources

Opening (10 minutes)

- Discussion: "How does literature help us process difficult emotions?"
- Acknowledge that this novel deals with heavy themes and provide support resources

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Grief in Literature Exploration** (15 minutes)
 - Examine how different books handle death and loss
 - Discuss why these stories are important despite being difficult
 - Establish safe discussion guidelines for sensitive topics
2. **New Orleans as Setting** (15 minutes)



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- Research New Orleans's unique relationship with death (above-ground cemeteries, spiritual traditions)
- Explore the city's supernatural reputation in literature
- Discuss how setting can enhance themes

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What questions do you have about stories that deal with death?"
- Assign reading: Opening chapters introducing Marius and his world

Assessment: Understanding of thematic preparation, respectful engagement

Day 2: Meeting Marius and His World

Objective: Analyze protagonist's situation and the supernatural world-building

Materials: Character analysis worksheet, world-building chart

Opening (10 minutes)

- Think-pair-share: "What did you learn about Marius's job and his world?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Character Foundation** (20 minutes)
 - Analyze Marius as Cemetery Boy: duties, abilities, responsibilities
 - Explore concept of "living between worlds"
 - Discuss what we learn about his mother and his loss
2. **World-Building Analysis** (10 minutes)
 - Map the supernatural elements: ghosts, monsters, mystic coins
 - Identify rules and systems in this world
 - Discuss how this world differs from mundane reality

Closing (5 minutes)

- Quick poll: "What's most interesting about Marius's world?"

Homework: Read chapters about Marius beginning his monster hunting

Assessment: Character understanding, world-building comprehension

Day 3: The Economics of Resurrection

Objective: Analyze the mystic coin system and Marius's goal

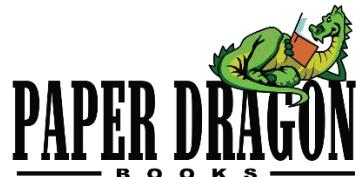
Materials: Economic system analysis chart, goal motivation worksheet

Opening (5 minutes)

- Quick discussion: "What does Marius need to bring his mother back?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **System Analysis** (25 minutes)
 - Explore the mystic coin economy and monster bounty system
 - Discuss why resurrection is expensive (thematically and practically)



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- Analyze the "gritty monster bounty-hunting market"

2. Motivation Discussion (10 minutes)

- Examine Marius's desperate goal and its emotional origins
- Discuss the concept of a closing "window" for resurrection
- Explore how the ticking clock affects Marius's choices

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What concerns do you have about Marius's plan?"

Assessment: System understanding, motivation analysis quality

Days 4-5: Grief, Desperation, and Dangerous Choices

Objective: Track Marius's escalating risks and analyze grief responses

Materials: Risk escalation chart, grief stages information

Structure for Each Day:

- **Opening** (10 min): Journal responses about Marius's choices and emotional state
- **Main Activity** (25 min): Literature circles focusing on character decisions and consequences
- **Closing** (10 min): Discussion of grief as motivation for behavior

Reading Assignments: Continue through middle chapters tracking escalation **Assessment:**

Journal quality, understanding of grief-driven behavior

WEEK 2: Escalation, Ethics, and Consequences

Day 6: The Escalation Pattern

Objective: Analyze how desperation leads to increasingly dangerous choices

Materials: Escalation tracking worksheet, risk analysis chart

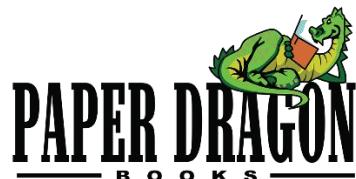
Opening (10 minutes)

- Partner discussion: "How has Marius's monster hunting changed?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Pattern Analysis** (20 minutes)
 - Track progression from regular monsters to "bigger and meaner" ones
 - Identify the reasoning behind each escalation
 - Discuss how desperation affects judgment
2. **Consequence Discussion** (10 minutes)
 - Explore risks Marius faces beyond physical danger
 - Consider what he's neglecting (school, duties, safety)
 - Discuss parallels to real-world risk-taking behavior

Closing (5 minutes)



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- Quick-write: "When does fighting for something become self-destructive?"

Assessment: Pattern recognition, consequence understanding

Day 7: Ethical Questions About Death and Resurrection

Objective: Explore philosophical and moral dimensions of the story

Materials: Ethics discussion prompts, philosophical framework materials

Opening (5 minutes)

- Poll: "If you could bring someone back from the dead, should you?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. Ethics Exploration (25 minutes)

- Discuss: What are the moral implications of reversing death?
- Explore different philosophical/religious views on death and afterlife
- Analyze: Does Marius have the right to pursue resurrection?

2. Debate Preparation (10 minutes)

- Divide into positions: supporting vs. questioning Marius's quest
- Gather evidence from text and ethical reasoning
- Consider: What would Marius's mother want?

Closing (5 minutes)

- Structured mini-debate using evidence and reasoning

Assessment: Ethical reasoning quality, evidence-based argumentation

Day 8: Duty vs. Desire

Objective: Analyze conflict between responsibilities and personal goals

Materials: Duty/desire conflict chart, responsibility analysis worksheet

Opening (10 minutes)

- Discuss: "What responsibilities is Marius neglecting?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. Responsibility Analysis (20 minutes)

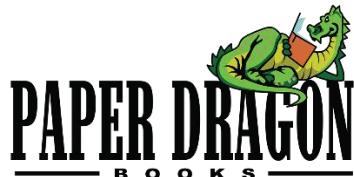
- Identify Marius's duties as Cemetery Boy
- Explore what happens when duties are abandoned
- Discuss the ghosts Marius is supposed to tend

2. Conflict Discussion (10 minutes)

- Examine tension between personal grief and community obligations
- Consider: Do the other ghosts matter less than his mother?
- Explore how personal crisis affects our obligations to others

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What balance should Marius find between his goal and his duties?"



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Assessment: Responsibility understanding, ethical balance reasoning

Days 9-10: The Gritty Underworld and Its Dangers

Objective: Analyze the monster bounty-hunting world and its exploitation

Follow similar structure with focus on:

- How the market works and who benefits
- Whether the system exploits Marius's grief
- What makes creatures "monsters" vs. just different
- The darker side of the supernatural economy

WEEK 3: Resolution, Acceptance, and Meaning

Day 11: The Climax and Critical Choice

Objective: Analyze story's climactic moments and Marius's ultimate decision

Materials: Climax analysis worksheet, decision evaluation chart

Opening (10 minutes)

- Complete reading of climax chapters
- Initial reactions to events

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Climax Analysis (20 minutes)**
 - Examine Marius's most dangerous hunt
 - Analyze the moment of critical choice
 - Discuss: What factors influence his final decision?
2. **Resolution Discussion (10 minutes)**
 - Explore how the conflict resolves (success, failure, or something between)
 - Consider whether Marius gets what he wanted vs. what he needed
 - Discuss the cost of his quest regardless of outcome

Closing (5 minutes)

- Quick-write: "What do you think about how the story ended?"

Assessment: Climax understanding, resolution analysis quality

Day 12: Themes of Grief, Love, and Letting Go

Objective: Synthesize major themes and their development

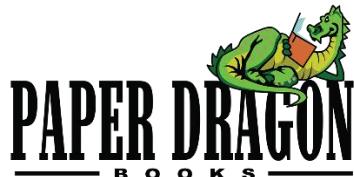
Materials: Theme analysis worksheet, text evidence collection

Opening (10 minutes)

- Small group discussion: "What are the main messages of this story?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Theme Synthesis (20 minutes)**



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- Identify and analyze major themes with text evidence
- Focus on: grief and acceptance, dangerous love, cost of goals, living between worlds
- Discuss how themes developed throughout the story

2. Character Transformation (10 minutes)

- Analyze how Marius changes (or doesn't) through his journey
- Explore what he learns about loss, love, and letting go
- Consider: Is this a hopeful or cautionary tale?

Closing (5 minutes)

- Share one important lesson from Marius's story

Assessment: Theme identification with evidence, transformation analysis

Day 13: Setting as Character

Objective: Analyze how New Orleans setting enhances the story

Materials: Setting analysis worksheet, New Orleans research materials

Opening (5 minutes)

- Review role of New Orleans in the story

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. Setting Analysis (25 minutes)

- Examine how New Orleans's unique characteristics support the story
- Explore symbolism of cemeteries, "cities of the dead," liminal spaces
- Discuss how atmosphere and setting affect mood and themes

2. Comparative Discussion (10 minutes)

- Consider: How would the story differ in another setting?
- Explore why New Orleans is particularly suited to this narrative
- Connect setting to themes of living between worlds

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What makes New Orleans essential to this story?"

Assessment: Setting analysis depth, symbolic understanding

Day 14: Grief, Loss, and Healthy Coping

Objective: Connect story themes to real emotional experiences

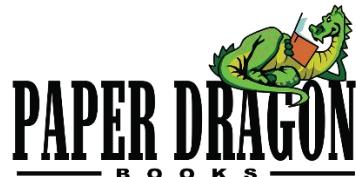
Materials: Grief resources, healthy coping strategies materials

Opening (10 minutes)

- Sensitive discussion: "How do people cope with loss in real life?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. Grief Education (15 minutes)



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- Age-appropriate information about stages of grief
- Discuss healthy vs. unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Connect Marius's choices to grief responses

2. **Real-World Application** (15 minutes)

- Explore how fiction helps us process difficult emotions
- Discuss resources available for those dealing with loss
- Emphasize: Marius's fictional choices shouldn't be emulated

Closing (5 minutes)

- Provide support resource information
- Validate that grief is difficult and help is available

Assessment: Understanding of grief concepts, healthy coping recognition

Day 15: Creative and Analytical Project Introduction

Objective: Apply understanding to creative or analytical projects

Materials: Project guidelines, various resources

Project Options:

1. **Alternative Ending:** Rewrite story's conclusion with different choice
2. **Ethics Essay:** Analyze moral questions about resurrection and grief
3. **Character Study:** Deep analysis of Marius's psychology and choices
4. **World-Building Expansion:** Develop the supernatural New Orleans setting further
5. **Comparative Analysis:** Compare this story's handling of grief to another text

Structure:

- **Opening** (10 min): Project explanation and selection
- **Work Time** (30 min): Planning and research
- **Closing** (5 min): Project plan sharing

Assessment: Project plan quality, thematic connection

WEEK 4: Projects, Presentations, and Reflection

Days 16-17: Project Development

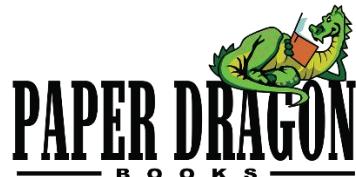
Objective: Develop projects with teacher and peer support

Materials: Various supplies, research resources

Structure for Each Day:

- **Opening** (5 min): Review progress and goals
- **Main Activity** (35 min): Independent work with conferences
- **Closing** (5 min): Progress sharing and problem-solving

Assessment: Project development progress, depth of analysis



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Day 18: Project Presentations Part 1

Objective: Share analytical and creative work

Materials: Presentation equipment, evaluation materials

Opening (5 minutes)**

- Presentation guidelines and supportive audience expectations

Main Activity (35 minutes)**

- Student presentations (approximately 5-6 minutes each)
- Audience provides thoughtful questions and feedback

Closing (5 minutes)**

- Reflection on presentations and themes explored

Assessment: Presentation quality, analytical depth

Day 19: Project Presentations Part 2

Objective: Complete presentations and begin synthesis

Materials: Remaining presentation needs, synthesis materials

Structure:

- **Opening** (5 min): Final presentation preparation
- **Main Activity** (30 min): Remaining presentations
- **Closing** (10 min): Whole class discussion of themes across projects

Assessment: Presentation completion, thematic synthesis

Day 20: Unit Reflection and Personal Meaning

Objective: Synthesize learning and connect to personal growth

Materials: Reflection prompts, discussion guidelines

Opening (10 minutes)**

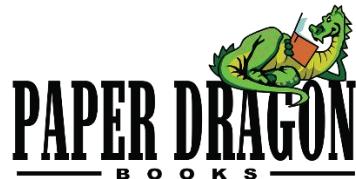
- Think-pair-share: "What's the most important thing this book taught you?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)**

1. **Unit Synthesis** (15 minutes)
 - Discuss how the novel explores universal experiences of loss
 - Connect fictional extremes to real emotional truths
 - Explore why difficult stories matter
2. **Personal Reflection** (15 minutes)
 - Students write about what they'll take away from Marius's story
 - Consider: How might this change how they think about grief and loss?
 - Share insights voluntarily in supportive environment

Closing (5 minutes)**

- Unit celebration and acknowledgment of emotional work



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- Reminder of support resources available

Assessment: Reflection depth, personal meaning-making

Assessment Rubric

Reading Comprehension (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of complex plot, character, and world-building
- **Meets:** Shows solid comprehension with adequate evidence
- **Approaching:** Basic understanding with support needed
- **Below:** Limited comprehension

Theme and Ethical Analysis (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Sophisticated analysis of themes with nuanced ethical reasoning
- **Meets:** Recognizes major themes with appropriate analysis
- **Approaching:** Identifies basic themes and ethics
- **Below:** Minimal thematic or ethical understanding

Character Psychology (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Deep understanding of grief-driven motivation and character complexity
- **Meets:** Clear grasp of character psychology with examples
- **Approaching:** Basic character motivation understanding
- **Below:** Limited psychological analysis

Critical and Creative Thinking (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Exceptional analysis or creativity while maintaining thematic depth
- **Meets:** Good analytical or creative work with thematic grounding
- **Approaching:** Basic engagement with themes
- **Below:** Limited critical or creative engagement

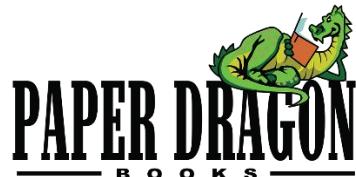
Differentiation Strategies

For Students Dealing with Loss:

- Provide advance content warnings
- Offer alternative assignments if needed
- Check in privately about emotional readiness
- Connect with counseling resources
- Allow processing time and space

For Mature Readers:

- Extend philosophical and ethical discussions



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- Independent research on death customs across cultures
- Leadership in sensitive discussions
- Connections to classical literature about grief

For Students Needing Additional Support:

- Graphic organizers for complex world-building
- Audio support for challenging sections
- Simplified analytical frameworks
- Flexible project options

For English Language Learners:

- Visual supports for supernatural concepts
- Cultural connections to different death customs
- Collaborative discussion opportunities
- Key vocabulary pre-teaching

Materials List

- Class set of "Brick Dust and Bones"
- Grief and loss resource materials
- New Orleans history and culture resources
- Chart paper and markers
- Support service information
- Project supplies

Extension Activities

Home Connections:

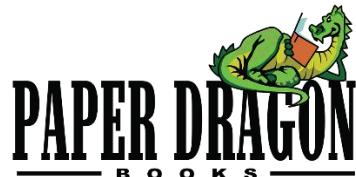
- Family discussions about grief and remembrance (if appropriate)
- Research family approaches to death and memory
- Create family memory projects
- Discuss cultural and religious beliefs about afterlife

Community Connections:

- Guest speakers about grief counseling or support services
- Virtual tours of New Orleans cemeteries
- Research local death customs and memorial practices
- Connect with grief support organizations

Cross-Curricular Connections

Social Studies:



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- New Orleans history and culture
- Death customs across cultures and time periods
- Cemetery design and funeral practices
- Spiritual traditions in different societies

Psychology:

- Stages of grief and loss
- How trauma affects decision-making
- Healthy vs. unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Support systems and healing

Philosophy/Ethics:

- Death and mortality in philosophy
- Ethics of resurrection hypotheticals
- Duty vs. personal desire
- Cost-benefit analysis in moral choices

Real-World Applications

Emotional Intelligence:

- Recognizing grief responses in self and others
- Understanding how emotions affect decisions
- Knowing when to seek help
- Supporting friends and family through loss

Critical Thinking:

- Evaluating consequences of desperate choices
- Understanding escalating risk patterns
- Recognizing when emotions override judgment
- Making ethical decisions under pressure

Support and Resources:

- Information about grief counseling
- School support services
- Community resources for families dealing with loss
- Crisis hotlines and mental health support