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## "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)**

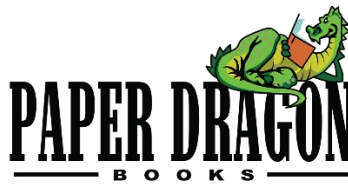
**1. Pattern Analysis (20 minutes)**

- 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)**

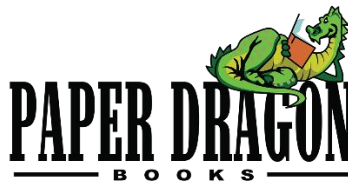
- Discuss: "What responsibilities is Marius neglecting?"

#### **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

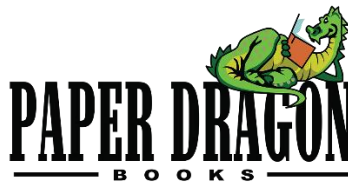
**Materials:** Theme analysis worksheet, text evidence collection

**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

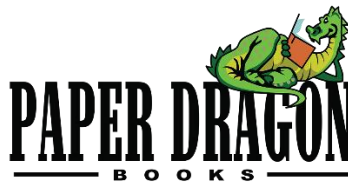
**Materials:** Grief resources, healthy coping strategies materials

**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**

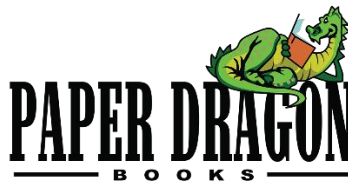
**Objective:** Develop projects with teacher and peer support

**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