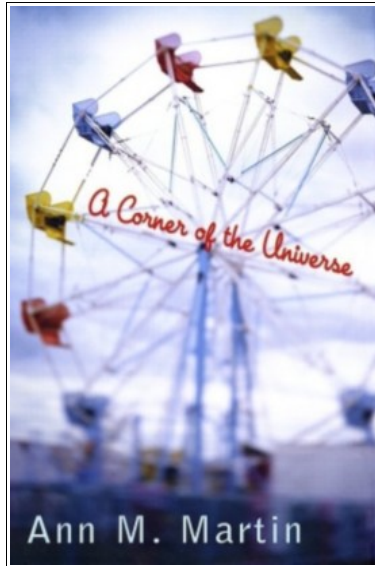


A Corner of the Universe



By

Ann M. Martin

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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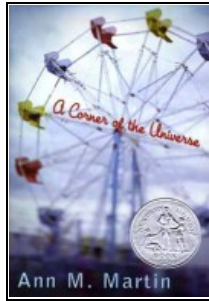


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About the author: Nat Reed has been a member of the teaching profession for more than 30 years. He is presently a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program. For more information on his work and literature, please visit the websites www.reedpublications.org and www.novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit is meant to be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of A Corner of the Universe and is comprised of five different activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language Activities
- Extension Activities

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, in reasoning and critical thinking. Students will also be expected to provide clear answers to questions and well-constructed explanations. It is also critical that students be able to reconstruct events and relate the feelings of characters found in the novel to their own lives and experiences and describe their own interpretation to a particular passage.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters . . . respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

A feature of the unit is that students are able to work on the activities at their own speed, and should not be required to complete every activity. A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) so that students may organize their work and keep it all in one place. A **Student Checklist** is also included in order for a record of completed work to be recorded.

Themes which may be taught in correspondence with the novel include schizophrenia and autism, carnivals and circuses, American society of the late 1950's, television programs of the late 1950's.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Using content clues
2. Locating descriptive words / phrases
3. Listing synonyms, antonyms
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Determining root words
7. Determining alphabetical order
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Developing dictionary skills
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Identify an *analogy*
12. Identifying *personification*
13. Identifying a *simile*
14. Identifying *alliteration*.

Setting Activities

1. Identify the details of a setting
2. Investigating American society as it was in 1960

Plot Activities

1. Identify *conflict* in the story
2. Determine the role of others in one's personal growth
3. Develop a Storyboard
4. Identify a *cliffhanger*
5. Determine the purpose of *foreshadowing*
6. Identify the **climax** of a novel
7. Create a synopsis

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare two characters
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Understand concepts

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Complete an Observation Chart
3. Write a journal entry
4. Conduct an interview
5. Complete the casting of a film
6. Write a description of personal feelings

Art Activities

1. Design a collage
2. Design a cover for the novel
3. Develop a Storyboard

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Synopsis

A Corner of the Universe is the acclaimed novel by Ann M Martin. Set in small-town America in 1960, 12 year-old Hattie learns that an uncle she never knew existed is returning to live with her grandparents. It turns out that her 21 year-old uncle, Adam, has “mental problems” – probably a form of autism.

Hattie is also excited about the arrival of a carnival, which will be spending several weeks in Millerton that summer. It is at this carnival that Hattie makes friend with Leila, a young girl whose mother is one of the sideshow attractions – *the Pretzel Woman*. Meanwhile, Adam is quickly turning the summer into a world-wind of misadventures for his bewildered family. Outspoken, rash, given to temper tantrums, he also develops a fascination for one of the boarders in Hattie’s home – Angel Valentine.

The last few chapters are a series of disasters for Adam – and Hattie. First Adam creates a tremendous disturbance at the carnival when stranded at the top of the Ferris wheel, then he barges into Angel’s room to find her with her boyfriend. In the climax of the novel Adam hangs himself in the family’s shed, causing great anguish and soul-searching amongst all the members of Hattie’s family – most especially Hattie, who has been troubled with the possibility that she is very much like her uncle.

Author Biography

Ann M. Martin

Ann Matthews Martin was born on August 12, 1955, and grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. She graduated from Smith College, became a teacher and then an editor of children's books. She is now a full-time writer of children’s books and books for Young Readers. Ann has written many popular books of these genres including the **Baby-Sitters Club** series. Many of her novels involve contemporary problems (like ***A Corner of the Universe*** – autism / acceptance). L'Engle



Some of Ann’s favorite authors have been Lewis Carroll, P. L. Travers, Astrid Lindgren, and Roald Dahl. It was these writers who inspired her to become a writer herself.

Ann lives in the Hudson Valley in upstate New York. Her hobbies are reading, sewing, and needlework. Her favorite thing to do is to make clothes for children. In 1990, she created the **Ann M. Martin Foundation**, which provides grants to causes benefiting children, education/ literacy programs, and homeless people and animals.

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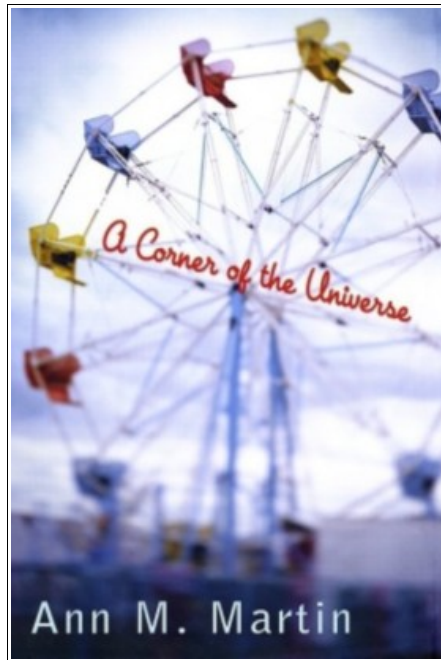


Student Checklist

Student Name: _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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Chapters 1 – 2



Before you read the chapters:

In Chapter One Hattie mentions that she is considered by some people to be too quiet. Do you think that a person can ever be too quiet? Why or why not?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

consumed	intersection	commissioned	humidity	transform
precarious	enigma	ambitious	industrious	erupts

1. We were barely able to stand the _____ during the heat wave.
2. The mountain climber found herself in a most _____ position when the avalanche struck.
3. Charlotte was an _____ to most of her classmates. She seemed so smart, but got such poor grades.
4. “Take my advice,” his mother said. “Don’t be near your uncle when his temper _____.”
5. I’m not sure the witch will be able to _____ the frog into a handsome prince.
6. I think you will find the new blacksmith to be a most _____ person.
7. There was a horrific accident at the _____ of Elm and Water Streets.
8. In order to succeed in politics you have to be quite _____.
9. Freddy _____ four hot dogs before lunch.
10. Alice was _____ to paint a portrait of the school principal.

Questions



1. Match each character listed on the left with the proper description on the right.

Miss Haggerty
Cookie
Mr. Penny
Angel Valentine
Hattie
Dad

<i>Her real name is Raye Bennett</i>
<i>Also called "Dearie"</i>
<i>An artist</i>
<i>Appreciates beauty</i>
<i>Watches her waistline</i>
<i>Is not one for kids</i>

2. The **setting** of a novel includes not only the place where the story occurs, but the approximate time as well. From what you know to this point, describe the setting of the novel. (Note: there are a couple of **hints** as to when the novel takes place. It mentions that *Dobie Gillis* was one of Hattie's favorite television characters. When did *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* run?) (Also – check the novel's Prologue.)

3. From what you know of **Nana** so far, what is your impression of her?
How did you come to form this impression?

4. How was Hattie's house an *enigma*?

b. What was there about the house that caused Nana to *look down her nose at it*?

5. What restrained Hattie from always leaving the house without telling her parents where she was going?

6. What proof do we have from Chapter 2 that Hattie's father was a proud man?

7. Why didn't Hattie like to go on trips?



Language Activities

A. Literary device the author enjoys using is **personification**. Personification is when an inanimate object (non-living object such as a car) is given human characteristics. An example of this is in the first paragraph of Chapter 1 when the author writes, “I can feel the humidity seeping through the window shades and covering me like a blanket”.

a) What object is personified in this sentence, and what human action(s) is it accomplishing?

b) Think of an interesting inanimate object and create a sentence in which this object is personified.

B. Investigate **one** of the following three topics from Chapters 1-2. Research three interesting facts about your choice.

Shirley Temple	
The State of Maine	
The State of Vermont	