

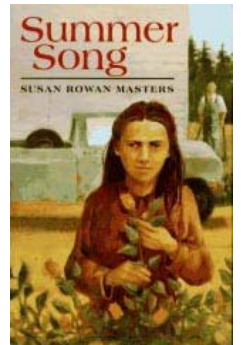
A Teaching Guide for *Summer Song* by Susan Masters

Submitted to [Teachers.Net Lesson Bank](#) by [Susan Rowan Masters](#)

Literature, level: Middle

Materials Required: *SUMMER SONG* by Susan Rowan Masters

Concepts Taught: friendship, family, compromise, separation and loss



SUMMER SONG appeals to a wide audience of young readers, many who may be facing difficult issues themselves. Because the plot deals realistically about a fractured family and a teen's struggle for control, students can better grasp what Etta May herself finally comes to understand: while we cannot control life, we can affect parts of it. Bits of humor lighten what could be a heavy tone as it asks readers to think about family, separation, and loss.

Teaching Ideas - Thematic Links

Friendship -- Ask students to describe Etta May and Quentin's friendship. Etta May calls him her best friend. What are the qualities in Quentin that she says, "made me forget the rough edges?" Both of their mothers have left for different reasons. How might this strengthen their friendship? At first Etta May doesn't trust her neighbor Mrs. Moreles who she thinks is a snoop. How and when does her attitude change?

Family -- Ask students to describe the relationship between Etta May and Gent, and Etta May and her mother Claire. Ask how Etta May deals with the feelings she has for Claire, bringing in during the discussion the word "ambivalence." At what point in the story does Etta May finally gain a sense that the three of them are truly a family? How does this affect what she does next?

Compromise -- Etta May is caught between her promise to Gent who wants to die at home in his "own bed" and her mother who wants to move them to Pittsburgh to live with her. Could Etta May have resolved her dilemma differently? Would it have been better than the path she chose and why?

Separation and Loss -- Etta May and Quentin both experience separation from their mothers. Ask students to compare and contrast the way each one deals with their feelings. Later, Etta May and her mother face the loss of Gent. How do you think they might help support each other after his death? While readers know that Gent will eventually die, still they are left with a sense of hope. Have students explain.

Teaching Ideas - Interdisciplinary Links

Language Arts -- If Etta May were to keep a journal, what might she write after she and Claire return home from the hospital (pages 38-39) and they are starting to get along? What might Etta May write the next day when she finds out about Eddie and the fact that her mother is going back to Pittsburgh for what she calls "an emergency?" Does it remind you of a similar experience you might have had or read about?

Math -- Quentin has his heart set on an electric guitar that he has seen at the mall in Liberty. Have students look up the price of a new instrument verses the cost of renting a similar one. Make a chart showing all the charges and insurance fees. Over a year's time, which would be more economical? What are the advantages/disadvantages of renting verses purchasing an instrument?

Social Science -- Invite a Hospice volunteer to the classroom to share his/her own experiences with the students as well as the philosophy of the program.

Music -- Quentin makes up his own country western songs. Bring in to class a variety of music (country western, jazz, rap, rock/roll, classical, etc.) Ask the students to describe how they are similar and how they are different. Discuss the fact that the various styles do not remain static; they evolve over time (i.e., the number and type of electrical instruments used today verses years ago.)

Art -- Etta May first hears about the "WHUG Jumpin' Jamboree Talent Show" on the radio. Ask each student to design a poster advertising the event.

Closure -- Etta May finally came to understand that while we cannot control life, we can affect parts of it. How did this help Etta May resolve what seemed an insurmountable problem? Ask students how might it help with their own lives.

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