

# Who's Coming to Dinner?

## A Unit Overview

**Language Arts:** *The Weirdo* by Theodore Taylor

### Book Summary

The book is set in the “Powhatan Swamp” region of North Carolina, which is actually a part of the Great Dismal Swamp. The story is quite suspenseful. Two teenagers stand up for what they believe in—even though it means risking personal danger and defying the entire town. Samantha Sanders is nine years old at the beginning of the book when she discovers a dead man at the edge of the swamp. Seven years later, Samantha witnesses the dumping of another body in the swamp as she hides in a tree stump. Samantha befriends Chip, seventeen years old and severely disfigured in a fiery plane crash that killed his mother and sister. Chip, the son of an artist who supplements his income as a spillwayman, helps Tom Telford of NC State University as he tags and tracks black bears in the swamp. Chip and Tom hope to extend the moratorium on bear hunting in the National Wildlife Refuge. Samantha’s father, like most men in the area, is a hunter. Samantha finds herself caught between her desire to help Chip and her reluctance to anger her father.

### Themes

- Loyalty to family and friends
- Overcoming obstacles
- Standing up for one’s principles
- Self-esteem/body image issues
- Personal transformation
- Caring for the environment
- Belief in one’s ability to “make a difference”
- Personal courage
- Sacrificing in order to serve others

### Visual Art

- *Empty Bowls* Project, The Second Harvest Food Bank, 2003 (see flier)
- *The Dinner Party*, Judy Chicago, 1979
- *The Object*, Meret Oppenheim, 1936
- *Origins and Ascensions*, James and John Biggers, 1992

### Focus

- Surrealism
- Symbolism
- Themes aligned with language arts

## Unit Guideline

**Grade:** 8<sup>th</sup>

**Description:** An interdisciplinary unit that focuses on the characters from a novel.

### Possible Interdisciplinary Connections

Character education

Language arts

Life skills

Math

Science

Technology

Visual Art

### Time Frame

8-9 weeks (February-March)

## Learning Goals

### Language Arts

- Analyze and evaluate informational materials.
- Determine the importance of information that is read.
- Make connections to real-life situations.
- Draw inferences.
- Analyze literary elements.
- Judge/critique author's techniques.
- Use symbolism as a means of showing an understanding of the book's themes.
- Identify how the author develops characters in the novel.

### Visual Art

- Communicate understanding of a character in literature through creating a place setting.
- Evaluate and select a range of materials for its effectiveness in communicating ideas.

## Materials

- Novel: *The Weirdo* by Theodore Taylor
- Art Prints and Transparencies: *The Dinner Party*, Judy Chicago, 1979; *The Object*, Meret Oppenheim, 1936; *Origins and Ascension*, James and John Biggers, 1992
- A variety of drawings, painting, and sculptural materials
- 50lbs. White earthenware clay donated by Highwater Clays

## Process/Activities

Students will read the novel and hold class discussions on the book in Language arts class during the months of February and March. Written work will include research on the author, endangered species, treatment of burn victims, and black bears. Students will complete a variety of writing assignments designed to encourage analysis and interpretation of the novel and the author's purposes.

## Culminating Activity: The Place Setting

The final product for the study of the novel will include the creation of a place setting that exhibits the student's knowledge of a particular character from the novel.

Students may choose from the following:

Chip Clewt.....	"The Weirdo" (terribly disfigured in a fire)
Samantha Sanders.....	Young woman who befriends Chip
John Clewt.....	The spillwayman (Chip's father)
Tom Telford.....	Biologist who tags and tracks bears
Delilah Sanders.....	Samantha's mother
Stuart Sanders.....	Samantha's father

Students will exhibit their understanding of the character's physical characteristics, personality, self-concept, motivation, values, and relationships. The most significant aspect of the project will involve the student's portrayal of personal transformation undergone by the character.

## National Standards

### Language Arts

1. Show competence in the general skills and strategies of writing.
2. Demonstrate proficiency in rhetoric and composition.
3. Gather and use information for research.
4. Show competence in the general skills and strategies of reading.

### Visual Art

- 1b. Students will intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their ideas.
- 3b. Students will use subjects, themes, and symbols to communicate intended meaning in their artwork.
5. Students will reflect upon and assess the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.