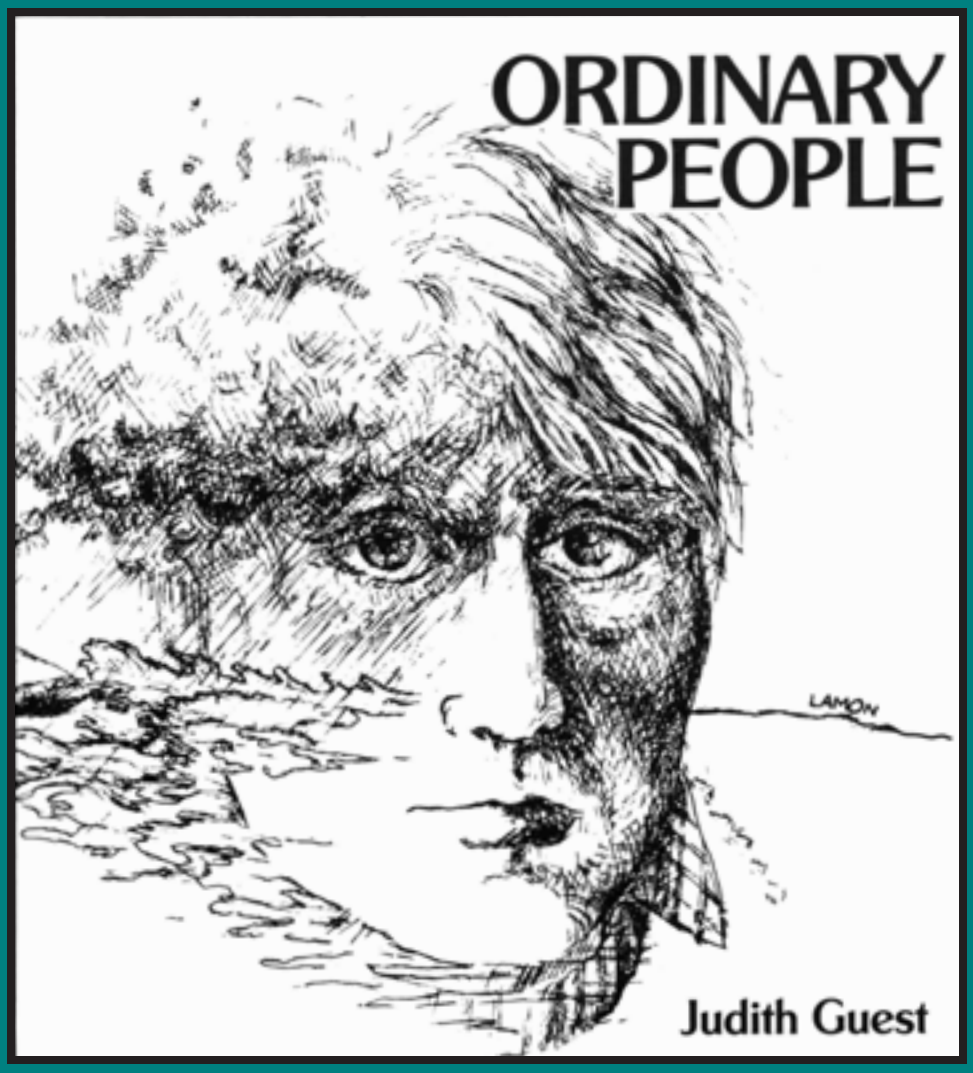
Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of instructional material to use in conjunction with the novel *Ordinary People*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

NOVEL-TIES are either for whole class instruction using a single title or for group instruction where each group uses a different novel appropriate to its reading level. Depending upon the amount of time allotted to it in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in two to four weeks.

The first step in using NOVEL-TIES is to distribute to each student a copy of the novel and a folder containing all of the duplicated worksheets. Begin instruction by selecting several pre-reading activities in order to set the stage for the reading ahead. Vocabulary exercises for each chapter always precede the reading so that new words will be reinforced in the context of the book. Use the questions on the chapter worksheets for class discussion or as written exercises.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think this novel will be about? Do you think it will be serious or humorous? Have you read anything else by the same author?

2. Family members may sometimes try to avoid or hide from the issues that concern them most as a family. What might some of these issues be? Why do you think it might be difficult for parents and children to discuss such issues? How important is it for you to communicate your feelings and ideas to your family? What would you like to be able to talk about with your parent or guardian?

3. Role-playing family situations would serve as a good introduction to this novel. Act out a scene in which a family is involved in a situation such as the following:
    - a teenager disclosing to parents that he or she is failing major subjects and is in danger of flunking out or dropping out of school
    - parents informing their child of their imminent divorce
    - a teenager explaining to parents why he or she needs to take time off for a year after high school before starting college or a career

4. Consider the incidence of teenage suicide, its causes, and its warning signs. How can young people deal with feelings of depression? What can you do if you suspect that someone you know is suicidal?

5. Find out what different kinds of professionals, such as the following, can do to help people with emotional problems: psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, school guidance counselors, and clergy. Whom would you consider talking to about a problem you or someone close to you might have?

6. Statistics show that there is a high incidence of divorce among parents who have experienced the tragedy of the death of a child. What are the stresses that might cause a family to break apart after such a loss? To what extent does the feeling of guilt affect the surviving members of the family? What might such a family do to cope with their grief?

7. Some adults refer to their adolescent years as the best time of their lives. Do you think that being a teenager is fun and carefree? If not, what are the stresses and strains that can make these years particularly difficult? Do you think your generation has an easier time or a more difficult time than your parents' generation?

8. **Literary Device: Point of View**
   The "point of view" in literature refers to the voice that is telling the story. It might be the author who is the narrator, one of the story characters, or a combination of the two. As you read the novel, look for the point of view that Judith Guest employs. Is she consistent throughout the novel? Does her technique help you understand the characters better?

Chapters 1 – 5 (cont.)

4. Who was Jordan? What was his relationship to Conrad?
5. How did Conrad react to Dr. Berger on their first meeting?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Where do you think Conrad had been before his homecoming? What led you to this conclusion?
2. At the end of Chapter Three, there is a brief but revealing interaction between Conrad and his mother: Conrad told her that he swam well at practice that day, and Beth replied, "Good." Conrad trembled and doubled over. Why do you think Conrad reacted the way he did?
3. Salan, the swim coach, wanted to know whether Conrad was having fun at swim practice. According to Salan: "The point is lost, if it's not fun any more." What importance do you place on having fun?
4. Do you think Conrad should have feelings of guilt over his brother's death?

Literary Element: Point of View

In literature the "point of view" refers to the voice who is telling the story. In *Ordinary People*, the story is purposely told from two different points of view. Whose are they?

_____

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this form of presentation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Writing Activity:

Write about an incident that occurred in the past that continues to affect your life today. Describe that incident and tell what its influence has been.