

**Novel·Ties**

**Black Boy**  
**Richard Wright**



**A Study Guide**

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**LEARNING LINKS**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Synopsis . . . . .	1 - 2
Background Information . . . . .	3
Pre-Reading Questions and Activities . . . . .	4
Social Studies Connection . . . . .	5
Part I: Chapter 1 . . . . .	6
Chapter 2 . . . . .	8 - 10
Chapter 3 . . . . .	11 - 13
Chapters 4, 5 . . . . .	14 - 16
Chapters 6 - 8 . . . . .	17 - 18
Chapters 9, 10 . . . . .	19 - 20
Chapters 11 - 14 . . . . .	21 - 22
Part II: Chapters 15, 16 . . . . .	23 - 24
Chapters 17, 18 . . . . .	25 - 26
Chapters 19, 20 . . . . .	27 - 28
Cloze Activity . . . . .	29
Post-Reading Questions and Activities . . . . .	30
Suggestions For Further Reading . . . . .	31
Answer Key . . . . .	32 - 34

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## **For the Teacher**

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with *Black Boy*. 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.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel on its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for guided reading by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter or group of chapters; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

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 will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As a young black man growing up in the South in the early 1900s, Richard Wright experienced racial discrimination. His young life was also affected by such historical events as World War I, the Depression, and Prohibition, and by the active recruitment of Americans by the Communist International Organization.

### **Jim Crowism**

This was a system of long-standing ordinances and conventions fostering segregation between blacks and whites. For example, it required Negroes to sit in the rear of a public bus or train. [Note that the term Negro was commonly used up until the 1960s to refer to an African American .] The Supreme Court decision of 1896 in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* institutionalized the concept of “separate but equal” facilities in public transportation and paved the way for the development of the “Jim Crow” system throughout the South. The term “Jim Crow” comes from the name used by an early nineteenth-century Negro impersonator who performed a stereotyped version of a black song and dance act, an early form of a minstrel show.

### **World War I (1914–1918)**

This war was fought mainly in Europe among most of the world’s great powers over territorial and economic disputes. The Allies (chiefly France, Britain, Russia, and the U.S.) were on one side. The Central Powers (Germany, Austria- Hungary, and Turkey) were on the other side. The German emperor surrendered in 1918, effectively ending the war. During this war, U.S. black soldiers fought overseas in segregated troops.

### **Bonus Marchers**

In the spring of 1932, between fifteen and twenty thousand unemployed World War I veterans gathered in Washington, D.C. They wanted Congress to allow them to cash in bonus certificates at full value. The United States at this time was caught in the grip of the Great Depression, in which millions of Americans who were jobless suffered from the lack of the basic necessities of life. The bill was passed in the House of Representatives but defeated in the Senate. President Herbert Hoover, who opposed the veterans’ cash redemption demands, accused the leader of the “Bonus Marchers” of being a Communist. Then, in July of 1932, President Hoover ordered federal troops to disburse the remaining marchers.

### **John Reed Club**

In the 1930s, there was political and social unrest in the United States, caused by the Depression. Some Americans turned to the Communist Party for a solution to the ills of society. The John Reed Club was started in 1929 with the aim of broadening the cultural appeal of radical socialism. By 1934, about thirty chapters of the club were active across the country. It attracted some leading progressive young writers, including African Americans such as Richard Wright.

### SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION

As you read *Black Boy*, consider the events that took place in the author's youth in the context of their historical settings. In the time line below, fill in the important events in Richard's life that took place during the historical times shown.

World War I (1914-1918)



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Ku Klux Klan (1915)

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Prohibition (1919)

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Stock Market Crash (1929)

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Depression (1930s)

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