



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Big Wander

Will Hobbs

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Big Wander

Will Hobbs

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

[novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Research, visualization,  
brainstorming

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/  
contrast, inference

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story  
elements, alliteration, simile

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interviewing

### Writing

Descriptive, reporting,  
poetry, advertisements,  
letters

### Vocabulary

Antonyms/Synonyms,  
word mapping

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## Summary of *The Big Wander*

It is 1962. Clay and Mike Lancaster's mother is in Guatemala with a church group for the summer, and the boys are on their dream trip, the "Big Wander". Mike has just graduated from high school and has purchased a 1948 Studebaker truck for the trip. Mike and Clay have left their home in Seattle, Washington, and are planning to drive across the southwestern United States. While on the Big Wander, the boys also hope to re-establish contact with their uncle, Clay Jenkins, a former rodeo star. No one has heard from Clay Jenkins in two years. While the boys are in Arizona, Mike decides to go back to Seattle. However, Clay is determined to find his uncle and stays on at a Navajo trading post. Some clues given by an old Navajo couple give Clay hope and lead him on a perilous, fascinating journey to Escalante, and ultimately to his uncle.

Some suggested topics of interest that could be coordinated with the reading of this novel include: endangered wildlife, land use, Route 66, contemporary life of the Navajo Indians, life in the United States in the 1960s, etc.

## About the Author

Will Hobbs was born August 22, 1947, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He attended Stanford University, B.A., 1969; M.A., 1971. He taught junior high school in Durango, Colorado before teaching high school reading and English in the same community. Hobbs became a full-time writer in 1990. Hobbs' interests include hiking in the mountains and canyons, and he continually uses nature topics when choosing themes for his novels. The southwestern setting of Hobbs' novel *The Big Wander* includes Glen Canyon, one of a hundred canyons which were flooded in 1963 to form Lake Powell on the Colorado River. By including nature, Hobbs hopes that he will be able to increase his readers' awareness so that they will be "more appreciative and to care more about what's happening with wild creatures, wild places, and the diversity of life."

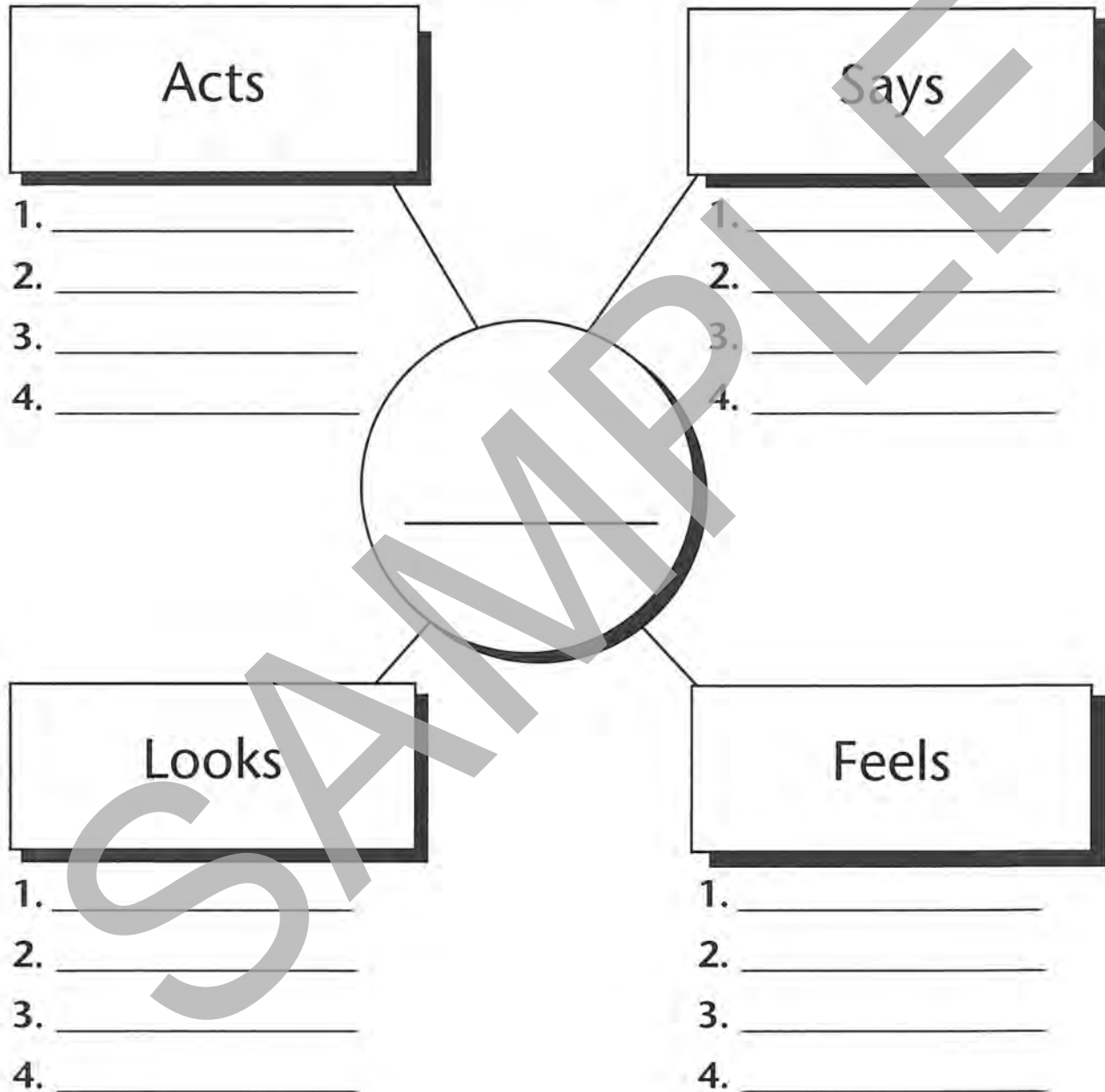
## Initiating Activities

1. Put on display a map of the United States so that the travels of Mike and Clay Lancaster may be traced after they leave their home in Seattle, Washington.
2. Go to the library and take out several books on one or more topics that might be of interest to the students in the group. Collect sound recordings of music that was popular in the United States during the 1960s. (See bibliography.) Play the music when appropriate while reading the novel.
3. Get travel information, brochures, books and pictures that pertain to the southwestern section of the United States. Put these on display. If possible, locate and put on display posters, etc., about old-time western movies.
4. When ready to start the unit, ask students to share their personal experiences and information about the southwestern section of the United States.
5. Cover the bulletin board with plain background paper. Copy the map that precedes Chapter 1 on page 1 of the novel. Reference may be made to the map during the story as Clay Lancaster makes the Big Wander in search of his uncle, Clay Jenkins.

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## Character Attribute Web

**Directions:** The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and feels.



A character attribute web diagram. At the center is a circle with a horizontal line for a character name. Four lines radiate from the circle to four rectangular boxes: 'Acts' (top-left), 'Says' (top-right), 'Looks' (bottom-left), and 'Feels' (bottom-right). Each box has four numbered lines for notes. A large 'SAMPLE' watermark is overlaid diagonally across the diagram.

**Acts**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Says**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Looks**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Feels**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Supplementary Activities

1. As Clay looks at the road map, he sees that some places have unusual names, like Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. (page 32) Get a road map of a state, province or location of your choice. Make a list of the names that you think are unusual. Help to design and make a bulletin board on which the names, listed by class members, could be displayed.
2. Mike does not seem to be having a good day. "A flat tire fit right into the way things were going." (page 33) What is something different that might have happened that would fit into the same situation? Substitute your idea for the flat tire, and write about it for the story.
3. Brainstorm the word *hero* with the group. List students' responses. Ask each student to write about a personal hero. Make a class book of heroes.
4. What will Mike's reaction be to the swap? Will the boys stay at the trading post? What do you think might happen next? Make a prediction.

## Chapter 7, pp. 41–50

### Summary

After spending a few more days at the trading post, Mike goes home. Clay decides to stay there, having convinced Mike that their mother would approve of the decision for the brothers to go their separate ways. In July, Clay is asked to help at the trading post used by the Navajos, which is twelve miles away. Clay purchases some new clothes and takes Pal and their belongings to Oljeto.

### Vocabulary

canteens (43)      badgering (45)      mesa (47)      cinched (47)  
cinches (47)      hogans (49)

### Vocabulary Activity

Use the vocabulary words *cinched* and *cinches* and other words that begin with the same letter/sound in a tongue twister. Try to say the tongue twister three times without making an error. Then try to say it faster and faster. Increase the length of the tongue twister for more of a challenge. For example:

Cindy Cinched Cinches  
Cinnamon Cindy Cinched Cinches

### Discussion Questions

1. What is Mike's reaction to Willie's note? (Page 41, Mike is almost relieved, and suggests that he and Clay go home.) Do you think this is what Clay expected from Mike? Why or why not?
2. How does Mike's suggestion make Clay feel? (Page 42, Clay feels sorry for himself. He thinks that Mike is changing by including Sheila in his life when, previously, there had always just been the two brothers.) Do you think this reaction on Clay's part is unusual? Discuss.



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3. Mike wants to go home and Clay does not. How do the brothers resolve their problem? (Page 44, Clay decides that he must think for himself and find his own way, so he suggests that he stay at the trading post and that Mike go home alone.) What do you think makes Mike agree to Clay's suggestion? Why do you think as you do? Discuss.
  4. When thinking of his uncle, Clay feels that his uncle knew that "life was lived best as an adventure..." (Page 46) What do you think that statement means? Discuss.

### Supplementary Activities

1. To get home to Seattle, Washington, Mike plans to take the train from Flagstaff, Arizona. (page 41) How would you get to your present location from Flagstaff, Arizona? Write detailed instructions for your safe trip. Give alternatives and choices when available.
2. As time goes on, Clay writes to Marilyn more freely of his feelings about the desert, the cliffs, the sunsets, etc. (page 47) Use the poetry form of your choice to express your feelings about something or some place that is important to you.
3. Will Clay like the new trading post? Will someone recognize the picture of Clay Jenkins? Make a prediction.

## Chapter 8, pp. 51–60

### Summary

Clay settles in with Weston, who teaches Clay to ride the horses that are at the trading post. A Navajo couple recognizes the picture of Clay Jenkins that has been posted on the glass countertop. Clay is given enough clues for Weston to determine that Clay Jenkins was seen at Paiute Creek, the summer sheep camp of the family. Weston informs Clay that the son and grandson of this couple are able to speak English. Clay decides that he and Pal will make the thirty mile journey to the rugged country that is "Back of Beyond."

### Vocabulary

prodigiously (51)

notoriously (54)

looming (59)

pawn (52)

erupted (56)

slickest (59)

bartering (52)

incredulously (56)

expectation (54)

exasperated (57)

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## Vocabulary Review–Synonym or Antonym?

Match the synonym or antonym in the comparison with a listed vocabulary word.  
The following vocabulary words are used in this activity:

dispiritedly  
contentment  
notoriously

skeptical  
persistent  
disdain

monotonous  
obscuring  
forlornly

complexity  
sporadically  
momentum

Sample: BETTER is to WORSE as RIGHT is to WRONG.

1. NEW is to THREADBARE as \_\_\_\_\_ is to INERTIA. (*MOMENTUM*)
2. GALLED is to RANKLED as \_\_\_\_\_ is to TENACIOUS. (*PERSISTENT*)
3. CONFUSING is to PERPLEXING as \_\_\_\_\_ is to MISERABLY. (*FORLORNLY*)
4. PLEASE is to RILE as \_\_\_\_\_ is to JOYFULLY. (*DISPIRITEDLY*)
5. TROUBLE is to VEXATION as \_\_\_\_\_ is to DOUBTFUL. (*SKEPTICAL*)
6. WELCOMED is to REBUFFED as \_\_\_\_\_ is to REVEALING. (*OBSCURING*)
7. AVOID is to CONFRONT as \_\_\_\_\_ is to SIMPLICITY. (*COMPLEXITY*)
8. DISTRIBUTE is to ISSUE as \_\_\_\_\_ is to INTERMITTENTLY. (*SPORADICALLY*)
9. COURAGE is to FORTITUDE as \_\_\_\_\_ is to CONTEMPT. (*DISDAIN*)
10. CAUTIOUS is to RASH as \_\_\_\_\_ is to VARIED. (*MONOTONOUS*)
11. COMPLIANT is to DEFIANT as \_\_\_\_\_ is to MISERY. (*CONTENTMENT*)
12. NEFARIOUS is to WICKED as \_\_\_\_\_ is to SHAMELESSLY. (*NOTORIOUSLY*)