

# The House of Dies Drear

by Virginia Hamilton



## ***THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD***

***LEVI COFFIN RECEIVING A COMPANY OF FUGITIVES IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF CINCINNATI, OHIO***

***(From a painting by C. T. Webber, Cincinnati, Ohio)***

## **A Teaching Guide**

by Margaret Whisnant

***Objective Tests***  
with  
***Thinking and Writing Prompts***  
  
***for***  
***The House of Dies Drear***  
By Virginia Hamilton



HOUSE OF THE REV. JOHN RANKIN, RIPLEY, OHIO.  
Situated on the top of a high hill, this initial station was readily found by runaways  
from the Kentucky shore opposite.  
(Image Public Domain)

**A Teaching Guide**  
by Margaret Whisnant

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# The House of Dies Drear

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## Chapter 1

Pages 1-14



Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When he had the nightmare about the giant trees and the man with white hair and red eyes, Thomas was (A) in a camping tent, (B) riding in his father's car, (C) in his own bed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The man in the dream warned Thomas to (A) stay back, (B) forget what he had seen, (C) keep his thoughts to himself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Thomas Small was (A) thirteen, (B) fifteen, (C) sixteen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Thomas and his family were leaving (A) a new home they had just bought, (B) the town where Papa had worked for ten years, (C) an old house and folks who were mostly relatives.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When Thomas's father asked her to move with them, Great-grandmother Jeffers (A) cried, (B) said she would consider it, (C) laughed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Great-grandmother planned to roast chicory because she believed it would (A) ward off calamity for the family on their journey, (B) bring great riches to Thomas and his family, (C) make Thomas's dreams come true.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Thomas and his family were moving from (A) Atlanta, Georgia, (B) the mountains of North Carolina, (C) a Virginia mining town.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Thomas and his family were moving to (A) Ohio, (B) Michigan, (C) Illinois.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Since morning, Mr. Small had been driving in (A) snow, (B) fog, (C) rain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The family was making its move in the month of (A) June, (B) December, (C) March.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The house where Thomas's family would be living had been (A) an important station on the Underground Railroad, (B) an army headquarters in the Civil War, (C) owned by the nation's first black college president.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. The old house where the family would live was located (A) in a small town, (B) on a rise in a kind of wilderness near a small town, (C) on the edge of a large town.

# The House of Dies Drear

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## Chapter 2

Pages 15-28

Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

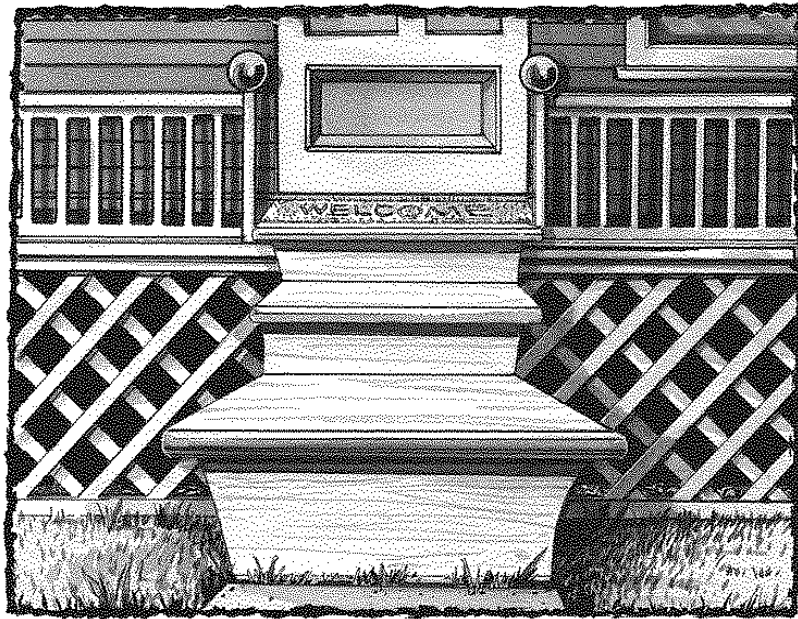
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When he saw the sign that indicated they had left North Carolina and had entered Virginia, Thomas thought to himself, "That's done with."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Thomas's father hadn't been interested in the story of the Underground Railroad until he read about the house for rent in Ohio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Dies Drear was a poor Canadian farmer who dedicated his life to helping slaves who has escaped into freedom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. It was Dies Drear who conceived the idea of sending escaped slaves back into the South with large sums of money to help other slaves escape.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When Dies Drear had lived in it, the Ohio house had overflowed with fine antiques, but it had been plundered after its owner's death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. People had disliked Dies Drear so much they had refused to call his name.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Dies Drear was murdered the same week three slaves he had hidden for a time were captured by bounty hunters on their way south.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Thomas's father had allowed him to read the report about the house from the local historical foundation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The foundation report made light of the legend that the house was haunted by two slave ghosts and the ghost of Dies Drear.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Thomas was terrified at the thought of moving into the Ohio house because, deep down, he believed in ghosts, and he was certain he would not be able to avoid the ones that haunted the house.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Mr. Small was not aware that Thomas knew about the ghosts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. During the last one hundred years, no one had lived in the house for more than three months at a time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Mr. Small had rented the house of Dies Drear during the first trip he made to Ohio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Mr. Small said all old houses had ghost legends, and they were all poppycock.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Mr. Small hoped some day to buy the Dies Drear house.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Thomas thought his father was hiding information about the two slaves who were killed by the bounty hunters and about the murder of Dies Drear.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Thomas's mother had never seen the house of Dies Drear, but Thomas knew she didn't like it at all.

# The House of Dies Drear

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## Chapter 4

Pages 47-60



Write either **Yes** or **No** in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Were there two children, a small girl and an older boy, riding on the huge black horse that came around the corner of the house?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Was the girl wearing a raggedy dress and old tennis shoes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Did the boy and girl wave and talk to Thomas as they circled the lawn with the horse?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Did the boy and Pesty talk about the hole under the steps and Mr. Pluto and his tunnels as if Thomas wasn't there?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When Pesty said that Mr. Pluto had let her walk in the hole under the steps, did the boy warn her not to get too close to Mr. Pluto or he might make her disappear?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Were Pesty and the boy brother and sister?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Were the children visibly frightened when Thomas told them his family would be living in the house and Mr. Pluto would be working for them?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Did Thomas tell the children to get off his father's property, and then refuse the boy's offer to help him explore the hole under the steps?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Did the boy say Mr. Pluto was the keeper of the fire and that Pesty was the keeper's helper?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Did the boy tell Thomas his name?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Did Mac Darrow push Thomas into the hole?

# The House of Dies Drear

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**Whole Book Test**

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Thomas's father was (A) an engineer, (B) a teacher, (C) a writer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The house of Dies Drear was located in (A) the mountains of Virginia, (B) Tennessee, (C) Ohio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Thomas's family moved from the mountains of (A) North Carolina, (B) Virginia, (C) Tennessee.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Thomas knew that the house of Dies Drear had a reputation for being (A) the oldest house in town, (B) a showplace of history, (C) haunted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which member of the family was invited but refused to move with the family? (A) Thomas's grandmother, (B) Thomas's older brother, (C) Mr. Small's father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What was special about the day the family moved? (A) It was snowing. (B) It was Thomas's birthday. (C) Thomas had just graduated from elementary school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What time of year was it when the family moved to the new house? (A) Thanksgiving, (B) Easter, (C) July.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The house of Dies Drear had been (A) a prison during the Civil War, (B) owned by freed slaves, (C) a stopping place on the underground railroad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Fleeing slaves sometimes went willingly back into slavery to (A) help others escape, (B) help fight in the Civil War, (C) help organize slave revolts.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What happened to Dies Drear and two slaves he had hidden? (A) They lived in the house like hermits long after the war was over. (B) The two slaves were caught and killed by bounty hunters, and Dies Drear was murdered the same week. (C) They escaped to Canada where they kept the legend of Dies Drear and the house alive.

*Something to Think About. . .*

**The House of Dies Drear**

## **Something to Think About. . .**

## **Something to Write About. . .**

(Chapter-by-Chapter)

### **Chapter 1**

Thomas's father had asked Great-grandmother Jeffers to move with the family, but she had refused.

- What facts prove that Thomas and Great-grandmother Jeffers liked each other?
- Why do you suppose Great-grandmother Jeffers laughed at the idea of moving with Thomas and his family?

The frightening man in Thomas's dream had warned him to stay back.

- Why would Thomas have such a dream? Was he afraid of something?
- Think about how Thomas behaved when he awoke from his nightmare. Which word do you think *best* describes Thomas's reaction to the dream—*logical*, *irrational*, or *terrified*? Explain your choice.

Great-grandmother Jeffers planned to roast chicory to ward off calamity and keep Thomas's family safe on their journey.

- What is chicory? How is it useful to people?
- Great-grandmother's notion that roasting chicory to keep the family safe is an example of a superstition. What are some superstitions that you are familiar with? Explain how you know about them. Have some of them been passed from one generation of your family to another?
- What is your favorite superstition? Explain why you think it's interesting.

The author wrote that the family was traveling in the rain on the *Blue Ridge Mountain Highway*.

- Is there such a highway?
- Research and write five facts about the *Blue Ridge Parkway*

Thomas had been living in the mountains of North Carolina in an old house. He was familiar with the forest and with being alone. Most of the families with boys his age had already moved away North. He tried not to think about his old home, telling himself it would be fun living in a big house in Ohio.

- How do you know that Thomas had an *optimistic* and *adventuresome* outlook?
- Find story clues to prove that Thomas was *imaginative*.
- What things about the old house in Ohio intrigued Thomas? Which bit of information do you find most interesting? Explain.

Thomas's father had taught Civil War history in North Carolina, and he would be teaching it in Ohio in the town where they were going to live.

- Which member(s) of Thomas's family seemed to be the most excited and pleased about the move to Ohio? Add details to support your choice.
- Which family member was the least enthusiastic? Explain your choice.
- Predict how Thomas's father, Thomas's mother, and Thomas will react when they finally see the house.



## **Something to Think About . . . Something to Write About . . .** (Whole Book)

Use the following questions and facts to identify the general location and a possible name for the town where Thomas's family made its new home.

- Find three facts from the story to prove that Thomas's family had moved to a small town that had been around for a long time.
  - Which parts of Ohio meet the geological descriptions of the area around the house of Dies Drear?
  - Mr. Small mentioned that the high school Thomas would be attending was on Highway 68. There is a Highway 68 in Ohio. Where is it?
  - The area where the house of Dies Drear was located was called the Miami Valley. Like Highway 68, the Miami Valley does exist in Ohio. Where is it?
  - Mayhew told Mr. Small and Thomas that they might have to go all the way to Columbus to buy theater supplies. Find Columbus on a map of Ohio.
  - Using the data you have collected, make a list of several small towns that could be the Small family's new home.
  - From your list, choose one as the specific town. Explain your choice. (For example, is there a college in the town?)
- 

Thomas moved with his family from a home that he loved to a new state, a town full of strangers, and an old house said to be haunted. The journey began on his thirteenth birthday.

- Cite evidence from the story to prove that Thomas Small was  
(1) *imaginative* (2) *inquisitive* (3) *analytical* (4) *resilient* (5) *amiable*
  - Add one more word of your own to describe Thomas Small. Find evidence in the story to support your choice.
  - Use Thomas's personality traits to make a list of five possible professions that he might pursue as an adult. Explain how some aspect(s) of his nature and temperament would be appropriate for each one. Do you predict that he will follow in his father's footsteps? Explain your thinking.
  - When he grows into a man, where do you think Thomas will choose to live? Add details to your answer.
- 

Old Pluto thought of the Dies Drear treasure as his *legacy*.

- What is a *legacy*? Does the word's definition apply to Mr. Pluto and the treasure in the cavern? Explain your answer.
  - Does a legacy always come in the form of *valuable things*? What other types of legacies exist?
  - What do you think of as your legacy?
- 

Imagine that Thomas wrote a letter to his great-grandmother after his first week at his new school. What did he say?

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# About Your Novel Teaching Pack

## Objective Tests

The objective tests have multiple functions. In addition to their obvious application, they also serve as tools that can *improve **comprehension skills** by providing practice in understanding plot structure and recognizing important story elements.*

### **Rationale:**

#### ***Focus on the Plot. . .***

Whether they are aware of their ability or not, all good readers sense the **rhythm** of the **connected** events that compose the plot of a novel, and consequently **comprehend** the story. They are in tune with cause and effect, behavior and consequence, sequence—the heartbeat of the narrative.

This “plot rhythm” forms the framework for the objective tests. The chain of events that tell the story have been pulled from the novel and reformatted into a series of sequential questions, none of which require **interpretation**. They are intended to **draw student attention to the fact that something happened**, not to what the incident means. That comes later.

In addition to their testing function, teachers may use the pages to strengthen their students’ ability to **Summarize**: With only the questions as a guide, have students write a summary of the chapter. For a set of ten questions, limit the number of sentences they may write to seven or fewer. When they work with twenty or more questions, allow no more than twelve sentences.

**Report the News**: Ask your students to write a newspaper article based on the events identified in a set of questions and the *who, what, when, where, why* elements. Some information needed to complete this assignment may be located in previous chapters.

**Twist the Plot**: Choose one or two questions from each chapter and change its answer—true to false, no to yes, etc.—to demonstrate how changing a single (or several) events would (or would not) change the story. This process can be used to help students become proficient in distinguishing major plot movers from minor story details.

#### ***The Characters. . .***

Too often, when they are asked to describe a story character’s personality, the only answer many students can muster is “nice.” This portion of the Novel Teaching Pack, coupled with related activities from ***Something to Think About, Something to Write About***, is a well of opportunities for those teachers who wish to eradicate “nice” from their students’ vocabularies!

Questions that identify a character’s personality and/or motivation are purposely and carefully included with the plot movers. Again, the questions do not require **interpretation**. They simply establish that someone did something, said something, or behaved in a certain way—knowledge that is invaluable when character analysis is required.

#### ***Implied Meaning and Story Clues. . .***

The objective tests include items that establish the existence of story components carrying **implied meaning**. **Story clues** that tantalize the reader with hints of future events also appear as question. At this point in the novel study, as before, **interpretation** is not the goal. **Awareness** of the **facts** is the target.

#### ***Developing/Improving Listening Skills. . .***

Listening skills are rightfully included on every list of state competency requirements. Rather than always requiring students to answer test questions on a printed page, why not surprise them occasionally by doing the test orally and meeting competency goals at the same time?

#### ***Discussion Guide Capability. . .***

The objective tests are helpful discussion guides. Use individual items on these pages to draw student attention to sequence, cause and effect, story clues (foreshadowing), character traits, recognizing and interpreting implied meanings, etc. These “thinking out loud” sessions are an **important building block** for the next learning phase.

# Something to Think About. . . Something to Write About. . .

In this section, students pack up what they already know about the novel and go exploring into its every nook and cranny. Some activities require the simplest interpretation or application, while others will challenge the most proficient thinkers.

## ***Rationale:***

### ***Guidelines. . .***

Most of the items in this section are based on the skills presented in the ***Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom's Taxonomy)***. There are two reasons for this choice. First, it mirrors the Novel Teaching Pack's primary purpose of building a variety of sophisticated thinking skills on a foundation of basic knowledge. Second, in following the taxonomy guidelines, activities that correlate with many state educational standards emerge automatically.

### ***Organization. . .***

**Chapter-specific** activities are grouped and presented according to their corresponding sets of **Objective Test** page(s). Having led students through the basics for each chapter (or selected section), teachers may shop in this section for activities to optimize student understanding and interest. Armed with a firm grasp of each successive chapter, students are more likely to anticipate, embrace, and enjoy the next section. By repeating the process, students are also mastering concepts and intricacies connected to the **whole** novel

The **Whole Book Activities**, as their name indicates, require a grasp of the theme(s), characters, implications, etc. as they apply to the full novel. These pages are a teacher's smorgasbord of culminating possibilities.

### ***Levels of Difficulty. . .***

A variety of **difficulty levels** are included in this section to accommodate the needs of individual students, including the gifted. However, **all** items from this section are intended to **challenge** and **sharpen** thinking abilities.

Activities in this section challenge students to . . .	
<i>create drawings, diagrams, photos, maps,</i>	<i>make predictions</i>
<i>form opinions and theories</i>	<i>understand point of view</i>
<i>cite "evidence" from the story to support their</i>	<i>imagine</i>
<i>explanations and opinions</i>	<i>categorize</i>
<i>connect personal experience to story situations</i>	<i>engage in research and data gathering</i>
<i>become familiar with and identify literary elements</i>	<i>recognize and perceive story theme(s)</i>
<i>analyze story characters and events</i>	

**Note:** Inclusion of specific types of activities will vary with each novel title.

### ***Options, options, and more options. . .***

<b>Something to Think About, Something to Write About</b> give teachers <b>pick-and-choose options</b> for	
<i>individualizing assignments</i>	<i>homework</i>
<i>group work</i>	<i>short-term and long-term projects</i>
<i>whole class activities</i>	<i>differentiating assignments for two or more classes</i>
<i>capitalizing on student interest</i>	

## **Final Note**

The Novel Teaching Packs are designed for use as supplementary material that supports a total reading program. It is my goal to provide busy teachers with a classroom-ready, practical resource loaded with motivational and learning opportunities for their students. It is my hope that your purchase will prove to be a hard-working instructional component for years to come. Thanks for choosing one of my products for your classroom.



Margaret Whisnant, Author