

LESSON 1:

7th Grade English Cultural Identity & Independence: Homeless Bird

OBJECTIVE: Students will understand how the author uses **character development** and **cultural context** to explore themes of tradition versus independence in modern India.

READINGS AND MATERIALS

- Book: *Homeless Bird* by Gloria Whelan (Chapters 1-3)
- Student Handout: [Hindu Marriage Rituals](#) (teacher-provided handout)
- Lesson 1 Homework

A NOTE FOR TEACHERS: This novel addresses challenging topics, including arranged marriage, widow discrimination, and poverty in India. To help students understand these complex social issues with sensitivity, it's essential to create a respectful classroom environment for discussing different cultural practices. This will foster effective learning and understanding.

Students active participation in reading and discussing the text is key to this lesson. Due to differences in scheduling, this lesson assumes you will read and discuss the text in class. However, teachers may assign the reading as homework to allow for deeper in-class analysis and discussion.

TARGET TASK

Discussion and Writing Prompt:

After reading *Homeless Bird* (Chapters 1-3), engage students in a discussion and/or writing prompt in order to explore and answer this question:

How does Koly's character change in response to **cultural expectations** and challenges in the opening chapters. Use specific evidence from the text to support your analysis.

Sample Response:

Koly's character develops into a complex young woman caught between **tradition** and her desire for **independence**. When first introduced, Koly shows deep respect for her culture's marriage traditions, noting how she "had always known that [she] would have an arranged marriage" and accepting this as a natural and obvious next step in her young life.

However, her love of embroidery and education reveals her yearning for **self-expression** and **growth**. The intricate patterns she sews become a metaphor for her inner life, showing how she "could make [her] own designs" even within strict cultural boundaries. As she faces the reality of **marriage at thirteen**, her quiet observations and questions demonstrate a growing awareness of her situation. Her mother notices Koly's "questions never end," suggesting an inquiring mind

that will eventually challenge traditional limitations. Through these early chapters, Whelan carefully builds Koly's character as both a **dutiful daughter and an individual** seeking her own path.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How does the author introduce and develop Indian cultural traditions in the opening chapters?
- What role does symbolism (particularly birds and embroidery) play in revealing Koly's character?
- How does Koly's relationship with her family reflect both love and tension?

VOCABULARY

- **dowry** - money or property brought by a bride to her husband at marriage
- **arranged marriage** - a marriage planned by families rather than the couple
- **tradition** - customs or beliefs passed down through generations

HOMEWORK

Read Chapters 4-6 and answer the following questions:

1. Track the bird imagery throughout these chapters. What might it symbolize?
2. How does Koly's perspective on marriage change?
3. Choose one passage that reveals an internal conflict Koly faces.
4. Describe how the author uses sensory details to bring India to life.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

- RL.7.3 - Analyze how particular elements of a story interact
- RL.7.6 - Analyze how an author develops different points of view
- RL.7.2 - Determine a theme and analyze its development

SUPPORTING STANDARDS RL.7.1, RL.7.4, W.7.1, W.7.9, SL.7.1

SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

For Advanced Learners:

- Provide supplementary readings about contemporary arranged marriages in India
- Assign comparative analysis between Koly's experience and modern Indian teenagers
- Create discussion groups to debate tradition versus modernity

For Developing Readers:

- Provide chapter summaries with key vocabulary highlighted
- Create character maps with visual representations
- Offer audio version of the text for reading support
- Pre-teach essential vocabulary with visual aids

PROCESS DIFFERENTIATION

Flexible Grouping Options:

- Mixed-ability pairs for initial reading
- Interest-based groups for discussing cultural traditions
- Skill-based groups for writing activities

Tiered Activities:

- **Level 1:** Identify and describe Koly's basic character traits
- **Level 2:** Compare Koly's actions and thoughts about marriage
- **Level 3:** Analyze how cultural expectations influence Koly's decisions

PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION

Multiple Assessment Options:

- Written analysis
- Visual presentation of character development
- Dramatic monologue from Koly's perspective
- Digital story map

Support Tools:

- Writing frames for analytical responses
- Graphic organizers for character development
- Word banks for literary analysis
- Sample responses at different levels

LESSON 2:

7th Grade English Cultural Identity & Independence: Homeless Bird

OBJECTIVE

Students will analyze how the author uses **symbolism and imagery** to develop **themes of loss** and resilience in Chapters 4-6.

READINGS AND MATERIALS

- Book: Homeless Bird by Gloria Whelan (Chapters 4-6)
- Student Handout: [The widows who can't return home](#) (teacher-provided with guided discussion)

A NOTE FOR TEACHERS

These chapters deal with death and widow discrimination. The resource provided explores modern-day widow discrimination in India and the stories of real women creating community in **Vrindavan** (a pilgrimage city home to over 20,000 widows).

These personal stories are powerful and can be upsetting. Create space for students to process these events while maintaining focus on Koly's developing resilience and strength.

This background knowledge will expand student understanding and empathy as Koly later makes her own pilgrimage to Vrindavan.

TARGET TASK

Discussion and Writing Prompt:

Discussion:

Read together and discuss the BBC article, "The widows who can't return home". Explore the experiences of widows from conservative Hindu cultures and how it relates to Koly's predicament.

Writing Prompt:

How does the author use **bird imagery and symbolism** to reveal Koly's emotional journey in these chapters? Use specific textual evidence to support your analysis.

Sample Response:

The bird imagery changes dramatically as Koly faces profound loss. Initially, birds represented freedom and hope through her embroidery. Now, as she becomes a young widow, she relates to "birds pushed from their nests before they could fly", reflecting her own feelings of vulnerability

and displacement. However, the author also shows Koly beginning to find her inner strength, like "a bird testing its wings" when she insists on continuing her education despite opposition.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How does Koly's perspective on tradition change after becoming a widow?
- What do the different bird references symbolize throughout these chapters?
- How does the author use sensory details to convey Koly's emotional state?

VOCABULARY

- **widow** - a woman who has lost her spouse
- **discrimination** - unfair treatment based on a person's status or characteristics
- **resilience** - the ability to recover from difficulties

HOMEWORK

Read Chapters 7-9 and answer these questions:

1. Track how Koly's relationship with reading/education develops
2. Find examples of how tradition both helps and hurts Koly
3. Identify moments where Koly shows growing independence
4. Note any new symbols or motifs (dominant ideas) that emerge

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

- RL.7.4 - Analyze the impact of figurative language
- RL.7.3 - Analyze how elements of a story interact
- RL.7.2 - Determine theme development

SUPPORTING STANDARDS

RL.7.1, RL.7.6, W.7.1, W.7.9, SL.7.1

SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

For Advanced Learners:

- Research contemporary widow rights movements in India
- Analyze multiple symbols beyond bird imagery
- Compare treatment of widows across different cultures

For Developing Readers:

- Provide symbol tracking sheets
- Create simplified versions of key passages

- Use visual representations of bird imagery
- Include vocabulary cards with contextual examples

Process Differentiation

Learning Centers:

- Symbolism Station: Analyze different symbols
- Writing Station: Guided response development
- Research Station: Modern widow experiences
- Art Station: Visual interpretation of imagery

Scaffolded Discussion:

- Structured discussion guides
- Role-specific participation cards
- Think-Pair-Share variations
- Visual discussion maps

Product Differentiation

Choice Board Options:

- Create a symbolic collage with analysis
- Write a comparative essay
- Develop a digital presentation
- Record a podcast-style discussion

Assessment Tools:

- Rubrics adjusted for learning goals
- Self-assessment checklists
- Peer review guides
- Progress monitoring tools