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Suggested Activities

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the story would be different if it were told from the point of view of one of the other Watsons? How?
2. The characters have definite personality traits, but, sometimes, they are unpredictable. This is the case when Byron fatally hits a bird with a cookie and then compassionately cradles and buries it. What are other examples of the Watson boys acting out of character? (For example, Kenny deciding to disobey his grandmother and go to Collier's pond instead of the public beach or Byron letting his brother cry in his lap until he spills his feelings about what happened in Birmingham.)
3. Do you think the punishments Byron receives for playing with matches and straightening his hair are fair? Why?
4. Most of the tension in the schoolyard is caused by differences in physical appearance (lazy eye, raggedy clothes) or intellectual abilities (Poindexter). Do you think it is okay to tease?
5. Daniel, the dad, spends a lot of time getting the "Brown Bomber" ready to go to Birmingham. He saves money on everything then splurges on the car record player. Why?
6. Do you think the "Wool Pooh" is real? Did it try to drown Kenny? Did it save Joetta by looking like Kenny and luring her away from the church?

Activities:

1. Go to www.amazon.com. Search for *The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963*. As a class, review the book and enter the review into the site.
2. Divide the class into two groups. One side will represent the North and one the South. Compare and contrast each region, perhaps using a civil rights time line, and decide which was the better place for the Watsons to be in 1963. For example:

North (Flint)	South (Birmingham)
Cold	Hot
Gangs	Prejudice
Indoor plumbing	Outhouses
3. Ask students to create an area in the classroom similar to the "Watson's Pet Hospital," and ask students to associate "wonders" with it in the way Byron did for the Watson family animals.
4. Direct students to answer the following questions and then find the words in the word scramble puzzle on the next page. (Note: Answers are in parentheses.)

The city the Watsons live in (Flint).

What Kenny is asked to do in front of his brother's class (read).

Byron turned toilet tissue into this toy (parachute).

What Kenny kept in his pillowcase (dinosaurs).

The surprise that Mr. Watson bought for the trip to Birmingham played these (records).

What Wilona, the mother, hid with her hand when she was happy (mouth).

The name of Byron's best friend (Buphead).



What Kenny pulled from the church that he thought belonged to his sister (shoe).
 Where Kenny first met the "Wool Pooh" (pond).
 What all the Watsons except Daniel did on the drive to Birmingham (sleep).
 Byron was burned so he would never play with these (matches).
 Joey did this a lot (cry).

B S H T M O U T H Y R A D Q S
 U H L A U D I N O S A U R S L
 P O N E R E A D S T O E K N E
 H E Q K E F L I N T M I O Z E
 E L D O N P M A R I Y L V H P
 A T C R Y A L O T B A T Z D S
 D R E C O R D S E H C T A M G
 R K F J A C K E M A K U B R E
 P A R A C H U T E R U K A S D

Bud, Not Buddy

Discussion Questions:

1. What was Bud's namesake and why did he insist on not being called "Buddy?"
2. The picture on the book jacket shows Bud wearing knickers and carrying a tattered suitcase. By the end of the book, both of those possessions are replaced; by whom and with what are they replaced?
3. Bud was fond of the library. Who first took him there and what was he most interested in looking at?
4. While walking from Flint to Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bud meets Lefty Lewis and the Sleet family, who are as nice as the Amoses were mean. Later he is befriended by Miss Thomas and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression. How does he respond to all the nice attention?
5. How did Bud get his nickname Sleepy LaBone? What was the significance of being given a nickname?
6. What was the relationship between Bud and Herman E. Calloway? Did the ending surprise you?

Activities:

1. Go to www.amazon.com. Search for *Bud, Not Buddy*. As a class, write a review of the book and enter it into the site.
2. Ask each student to fill a fictional suitcase with things that the student would want to keep by his or her side, remembering that the suitcase would need to be light enough to carry around. Bud kept the inscribed rocks, the flier, his blanket, and the photograph of his mother in his suitcase.
3. "Rules and Things to Have a Funner Life and Make a Better Liar Out of Yourself" was made up by Bud as a kind of survival tool. Review some of the rules. Direct the class to keep a journal and to write down "rules" from their daily experiences.



4. The library is a refuge for Bud. Ask each student to write a paragraph about his or her favorite type of book (Bud's favorite books were about the Civil War because of the gory pictures) and to share it with the librarian.
5. The author includes an "Afterword" to make it clear that the "privileged" life of the band members was not typical of the depressed 1930s. Hooverville, meals at the mission, and the start-up of a union could be integrated into a social studies lesson about the Depression. Ask students to write a song or poem about this era.