

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Dark Is Rising

by

### Susan Cooper

### Book Information

Susan Cooper, The Dark Is Rising  
Quiz Number: 109  
Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1999  
ISBN 0-689-82983-3; LCCN  
244 Pages  
Book Level: 6.2  
Interest Level: MG

On his eleventh birthday, Will Stanton discovers that he is the last of the Old Ones, destined to seek the six magical Signs that will enable the Old Ones to triumph over the evil forces of the Dark. Book #2

**Award:** Australian Children's Book of the Year Award/Honor; Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Carnegie Medal/Honors; Newbery Honor; Pen/Faulkner Award; SLJ Best Book

**Topics:** Countries/Regions, England; Fantasy/Imagination, Fantasy; Power Lessons AR, Grade 7; Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 7 & Up; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; Series, Dark Is Rising

### Main Characters

Hawkin, the Walker a man sentenced to walk the earth for as long as the Light required

Herne the Hunter the figure who received the mask from Will and chased the Dark

Merriman Lyon an Old One who helps guide Will through his quest for the Signs

Mr Dawson, Miss Greythorne, John Smith, The Old Lady fellow Old Ones

The Rider a representative of the Dark who continually tries to get the Signs from Will

Will Stanton an English boy who wakes on his eleventh birthday to find that he is the last of the Old Ones and must find the six magical Signs

### Vocabulary

**auspicious** of good omen; boding well for the future

**ominous** having the character of an evil omen; threatening

**quarry** anything that is being hunted down, especially with dogs or hawks

**telepathy** communication between minds by some means other than the normal sensory channels

### Synopsis

Will Stanton, a young boy from a town in England, wakes on his eleventh birthday to find that he is in fact the last born of a group of Old Ones. He learns that the Old Ones come from all ages to save the world from the forces of evil, the Dark. Will spends the days around his birthday traveling between centuries as the Old Ones attempt to teach him about his powers and train him to use them.

Along the way, Will gathers the Signs, circular medals of various materials, and celebrates Christmas with his family. During these days, his town is gripped by a snowstorm unlike anything it has ever experienced. After finding three of the six Signs and fighting off the Dark at his church, Will is led to the Walker lying in the snow. Though Will knows the Walker should not be in his home, he helps the man out of the storm and into his home. Will's only chance to get the man out of his house comes when Miss Greythorne invites all the neighbors to join her in the warmth and safety of her home, the Manor. Will convinces his father the old man should be taken there to be cared for by the doctor.

Once at the Manor, Will finds the Sign that breaks the snowstorm and starts the rain. He returns home to help his injured mother, but finds that his sister has gone out in the rain. Will and his brother, Paul, go out to find her. They become separated, at which time the Rider attempts to trick Will into giving him the Signs in exchange for his sister. Will manages to resist the Rider and eventually he finds the last Sign. A white horse then takes him to the Hunter who, with the help of Will's carnival head (a gift from his brother), chases the Dark away. Will at last finds himself in a cross between times where the smith joins the Signs.

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### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

When Merriman returned Will to his home after the quest was completed, he gave Paul the ancient flute that had been at the Greythorne Manor. Miss Greythorne gave it to Paul as a "permanent loan." Why did she give it to Paul and what did she mean by a "permanent loan"?

*She probably gave it to Paul because she noticed how he treasured its beauty, and she felt that rather than having it sit in a box on a shelf forever it should be played. She enjoyed the beautiful music and probably felt it wasn't fair to keep it from being shared by others. A permanent loan is a gift to someone that should be treasured dearly because it still belongs to the giver, yet it is never expected to be returned to the owner.*

#### Literary Analysis

As the story progressed, Will learned more about what his village was like in the centuries before he was born and came to understand how different places and streets were named. What were some of the things he learned about his hometown?

*Huntercombe Lane was known as the Old Way. The smithy was at the back of the Manor's garden. The forests were dark and deep and crossed by narrow paths.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

After James and Will witnessed the rooks savagely attack the tramp, Will noticed that the incident was completely wiped from James's memory, as though it had never happened. This type of "memory loss" is common among people who are either victims or witnesses of brutal or life-threatening events. Why do you suppose people seem to "forget" that these things happened? Have you ever experienced something like this?

*Though there is no scientific proof of why this happens, most doctors believe it is the body's way of protecting itself from the emotional damage of such an experience. Emotional damage of this sort could cripple the victims if it isn't forgotten.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Compare Will to yourself. What would you do if you awoke one day to find yourself in Will's situation?

*Answers will vary but should include the idea that Will enjoys and does the same things most young boys do: he enjoyed Christmas celebrations; he had responsibility for chores; he didn't always get along with his siblings; he sometimes did foolish things.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** In this story, the main character, Will Stanton, learned a great deal about the history of the area he lived in from his fellow Old Ones. He was told such things as where buildings stood and how streets were named. Research your own city, town, village, or neighborhood and find out some of these same things. Information like this can be found by interviewing elderly residents and searching old newspapers. Create a display to share this information with your class, school or even your neighborhood.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** Throughout the story, the author used a "haunting, bell-like phrase" to signal the opening of the Doors to other times or any great change to an Old One's life. Music was used throughout the book to evoke a lighter or darker mood. Review or recall

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some movies you have seen, and take note of how the directors used music and/or noise to affect the storylines. Using this same tool, record an audio or video tape of one of your own stories or someone else's story. Play the tape for other people and note their reactions to your use of music. Remember that music can affect a story in many ways, not just negatively.

**Making Predictions** The titles of the other books in *The Dark Is Rising* sequence are listed in the book. Information is also given to the reader about the nature of what the Old Ones must yet do. Based on this information, write and/or enact what you believe will happen in the next books in the series. Keep in mind that areas such as setting, characters, and plot do not necessarily remain the same from book to book in a series.

**Recognizing Feelings** When Will was being trained to recognize and use his powers as an Old One, the Dark was continuously testing him. The area of Will's personality that the Dark targeted was his emotions. The Dark repeatedly tried to get Will to react by letting his emotions control his actions. Though it was difficult for Will to resist being drawn into this type of reaction, he did manage to resist the "bait." Emotions are often used to influence reactions in people. People such as advertisers, movie makers, authors, religious groups, cults and politicians take advantage of the fact that humans have emotions, and they try to influence others by tapping these emotions. Make a list of people or groups who use emotion to sway action. Discuss how they do this and how you can resist them.