

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Joy in the Morning by Betty Smith

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## Book Information

Betty Smith, Joy in the Morning  
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294 Pages  
Book Level: 4.9  
Interest Level: UG

An intelligent and truthful story about a young couple who elope in the 1920s and begin a life and family together.

**Topics:** Family Life, Marriage; Family Life,  
Misc./Other

## Main Characters

Annie McGairy an eighteen-year-old woman, who moves from Brooklyn to the Midwest to marry her young boyfriend

Anthony the tender-hearted poetic florist, who is befriended by Annie

Bev Karter a woman of dubious morals for whom Annie briefly works

Carl Brown a twenty-year-old college student, who marries while still a full-time law student

Dean Darwent a university administrator, who sympathizes with the plight of the young married couple

Goldie the woman who runs the grocery store, who becomes Annie's confidante of sorts

Henry the seemingly rude owner of a grocery store, who softens as Annie gets to know him

Mrs. Hansmon the Browns' kind landlady

Against the advice of everyone, Carl and Annie marry as soon as Annie turns eighteen. The odds are against them, as they lack the blessing of their families and the university powers-that-be. Throughout the first year of their marriage, they struggle as Carl tries to complete his first year of law school with little income or outside support. Annie remains optimistic as she looks for work, makes a comfortable home, and meets some interesting people in the university community. Undereducated, she feels like an outsider, but she is far from ignorant. After she begins standing in the hallway listening to the lectures of a writing professor, she is invited to audit the course. Annie finds her outlet in writing, and blossoms, in more than one way. Woven throughout the story is the Browns' constant struggle to make ends meet. They are poor in the monetary sense of the word, but their love for one another carries them through their rocky first year of marriage. As they get to know each other as husband and wife, their love for each other is apparent in their everyday courtesies, compromises, and divulgences.

Annie and Carl deal with the news of Annie's pregnancy as they do everything else—they talk about it. Although it is not the most opportune time to have a baby, they resign themselves to the happiness the baby will bring. Between Carl, the baby, her writing, and her positive attitude, Annie's life is full and complete. When Carl graduates, they know they are on the way to a more financially stable life, and because they made it happily through the bad times, it seems inevitable that their future will include much happiness.

## Vocabulary

**banter** good-natured, witty joking  
**campanile** a bell tower  
**gauche** lacking social experience or grace  
**infinitesimal** immeasurably small  
**teetotaler** one who abstains from alcoholic drinks  
**windfall** an unexpected or sudden gift

## Open-Ended Questions

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

## Synopsis

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## Initial Understanding

Why were Carl's and Annie's families, and just about everyone else, against them getting married?

*They had almost everything going against them: They were young; they had no money, no job skills, no family support, and, in Annie's case, little education. The people at the university thought marriage would interfere with Carl's studies and limit his job opportunities.*

## Literary Analysis

Though Annie is described as small in stature and, at one point, helpless, she is a very strong person. Find examples that illustrate this character trait.

*She effortlessly charmed the Dean, who was prepared to dislike her. She held her own in a writing class of students who had much more formal education than she did. She kept returning to the Lopin grocery store and eventually befriended the proprietress. She insisted on trying one last time to deliver her baby without surgery, and proceeded with success.*

## Inferential Comprehension

Annie seemed to be disliked by no one. Some of the people she met and befriended were introduced as seemingly unsympathetic characters. Why do you think they warmed up to Annie?

*Harry, the recalcitrant grocer, liked her because she took the time to inquire about him. With Anthony, the poetic florist, she shared a love of words and an appreciation for the beauty of nature. Goldie saw that Annie was the kind of person who saw what needed to be done, and did it.*

## Constructing Meaning

The details in the story illustrated how much Carl and Annie cared for each other. What were some of the things they did for one another that showed their devotion?

*Carl: He saved his money so he could buy Annie a gold necklace as a wedding gift. He supported her writing. He had her plays bound as a present. He fixed the vandalized copy of War and Peace. He bought a baby carriage "on time." Annie: She didn't tell Carl she was pregnant right away so he could concentrate on his studies. She retrieved his watch from the pawnshop. She stayed awake to be sure Carl made his rounds at the factory. She chose the name Carlton for the baby.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story takes place in an unnamed university town in the Midwest. Annie felt out of place because of her accent, as well as her clothing. Describe the different kinds of clothing worn by the people in your town or city. What style of clothing is considered appropriate or fashionable for high school students? How does your town or city influence what people wear there? What style of clothing would stand out as unusual or out of place in your town or city?

**Understanding Literary Features** The theme of the story is about the power of love, and how it sustained a couple through adversity. Think of a situation in which love helped someone get through a difficult time. It could be an illness, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, an unexpected hardship, loneliness, or even disappointment about a relatively trivial event. Write about how the power of love helped you or someone else through a time of distress.

**Understanding Characterization** The usual newlywed problems that Carl and Annie faced were compounded by other factors. Carl was attempting to go to school; they were far from their families, and they had little means of support. Write about a couple in a similar

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situation today. What additional problems would they face? Modernize the story by updating the kinds of jobs they might find, the price of groceries and luxuries, and the additional expenses they might incur.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** The author relies heavily on dialogue to develop the characters in the story. The reader learns much about Annie's strength and fortitude through her conversations, letters, and lists. Write a dialogue between Annie and Carl on their twentieth wedding anniversary. Show how they have changed and stayed the same. Do they use the same terms of endearment and the same jokes as they did when they were newlyweds? After twenty years, how do they remember their first year together? Through their conversation, relate what they've accomplished in their lives together.