

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Turtle on a Fence Post

by  
June Rae Wood

### Book Information

June Rae Wood, Turtle on a Fence Post  
Quiz Number: 18842  
Putnam & Grosset Group, 1997  
ISBN 0-399-23184-6; LCCN  
264 Pages  
Book Level: 4.9  
Interest Level: UG

A grumpy old veteran with his own history of grief helps fourteen-year-old Delrita release the pent-up emotions she holds following the death of her parents.

**Topics:** Community Life, Child Abuse; Family Life, Daughters; Family Life, Mothers; Family Life, Sisters; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies

### Main Characters

Aunt Queenie Delrita's aunt who is extremely organized and spends much of her time volunteering

Avanelle Shackelford Delrita's best friend who comes from a family with seven children and has a father who was recently released from prison

Delrita Jensen a fourteen-year-old girl who is learning to accept living with an aunt and uncle after her parents are killed in a car accident

Heidi Grissom a new girl in Delrita's class who lives with her grandparents who bought Delrita's old house and her father's antique shop

Joey Marcum a twenty-three-year-old man with disabilities who lives with his mother in a nursing home and who reminds Delrita of her Uncle Punky who died shortly after her parents died

Mr. Shackelford Avanelle and Tree's father who spent time in prison, but has turned his life around

Mrs. Bagby Delrita's history teacher who gives the class an assignment to interview a World War II veteran

Mrs. Marcum Joey's mother who, although she is only fifty-eight, lives in a nursing home because of rheumatoid arthritis

Mrs. Shackelford and the other Shackelford children Avanelle's mother and brothers and sisters

Orvis Roebuck Aunt Queenie's father who is a World War II veteran; a gruff, old man with a softer side

Sophie Breech Tangle Nook's biggest gossip who implies that Aunt Queenie is only taking care of Delrita out of a sense of obligation

Trezane "Tree" Shackelford Avanelle's older brother who works as a clown to make extra money

Uncle Bert Delrita's uncle, her mother's brother, who took her in after her parents died

### Vocabulary

**amends** something done to make up for wrongdoing

**gait** a way of moving on foot

**ironic** showing a difference between what is expected and what actually occurs

**paradox** something that seems to contradict itself

**pixie** a fairy-like or elfin being

**precocious** characterized by unusually early maturity, particularly in mental aptitude

### Synopsis

Delrita is a fourteen-year-old girl who has recently lost her parents and her beloved uncle Punky. She is having a difficult time adjusting to her new life with her Uncle Bert and super-organized Aunt Queenie. When Aunt Queenie's father, Sergeant Roebuck, moves in with them, things threaten to get even more out of hand. He doesn't get along with his daughter and seems to resent Delrita.

Delrita finds refuge with her friends, Tree and Avanelle Shackelford and their big, loving family. Delrita discovers that even this happy family has its share of problems. She also volunteers as a Teen Buddy for Joey, a young man with disabilities, who reminds her of her uncle Punky.

When a class project forces her to spend time with Sergeant Roebuck, she learns that people are a lot like turtles on a fence post. They need help from

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other people once in awhile. She also learns that people aren't always what they seem to be.

The story reaches a climax when Delrita returns to the home she lived in with her parents to search for her mother's teddy bear. She begins to face the fact that her life has changed and accepts the love that Aunt Queenie has been showing her all along.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

When Joey finished his artwork for Delrita, he printed MRJOEYMARCU at the bottom of the page. Delrita found the "mister" in front of his name disturbing. Why do you think it bothered her?

*Joey was a man in age, but looked and acted like a little boy. She felt the awesome responsibility of caring for him when they were together.*

#### Literary Analysis

This story is a work of realistic fiction. What in the story makes it seem real?

*Many answers are possible, but could include any of the following: Delrita's parents died in a car accident; Sergeant Roebuck fought in World War II; Delrita went to McDonald's with her friends; Joey has a disability; Some children made fun of Joey and didn't accept him at first; and Delrita has trouble dealing with the death of her parents and her Uncle Punky.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Contrast the relationship Delrita had with her Aunt Queenie throughout the story to the relationship they would probably have if the story continued?

*During the story Delrita is unable to give love to her aunt. She worries that Aunt Queenie sees her as a responsibility and a misfit. Aunt Queenie is hurt by Delrita's reaction to her. In a continuation of the story, Delrita and Aunt Queenie would probably be able to openly show affection for one another. The lines of communication would be open, and they would understand one another better.*

#### Constructing Meaning

After Tree kisses Delrita on the mouth, Delrita thinks, "Could he hear my heart pounding like a loose board in a hurricane? The storm of blood cells rushing to my face? I smiled into his emerald eyes and read the long-range forecast. Blue skies, fluffy clouds, mostly sunny weather." Why do you think the author used descriptions of the weather in this situation?

*Tree called Delrita his all-weather friend because she stuck by him through the good and the bad. He even complimented the way she looked by telling her "the weather is awesome." The author was just continuing Tree's use of weather terms.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Literary Features** An important theme in the story is how Delrita deals with her grief over the loss of her parents and her uncle Punky. Students could read a book with a similar theme called *Baby*. They could compare and contrast the two books. Both are about adolescent girls dealing with grief. Both begin the story with the time following the death of loved ones. Students may wish to discuss times of grief in their own lives and how they or other family members coped with their losses.

**Understanding Characterization** Students who enjoyed reading *Turtle on a Fence Post* would probably enjoy reading the book that came before it, *The Man Who Loved Clowns*. Those students

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could prepare a synopsis of the book. They would learn more about Delrita's parents and her relationship to them. They would also meet Delrita's uncle Punky. In *Turtle on a Fence Post*, Delrita does not like Mr. Roebuck at first. Later as she comes to know him, they become friends. As a class discussion, have the students describe a similar situation in their own lives. Perhaps they met a new student who they didn't think they would like. What happened to cause them to become friends?

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Delrita's teacher has her students interview a World War II veteran. If possible, have the students interview a veteran, also. Perhaps a veteran could be invited to speak to the entire class. If this isn't possible, students could do library research on the war or conflict of their choice.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** The story was told in the first person by Delrita, therefore, the reader sees everything from Delrita's point of view. What might the reader not know because of this? Discuss the story from Aunt Queenie's point of view. How did Mr. Roebuck really feel? What went on at Tree's house when Delrita wasn't there?