

# ***The Bean Trees*** by Barbara Kingsolver (Published by Harper Perennial)

Approved for use in Communication Arts II

## **Summary**

After her high school graduation, Taylor Greer decides to leave home and drive until her VW runs out of gas. This journey first takes her through the Cherokee Nation where she is presented with a small child who has been abused and now abandoned. Not knowing what else to do, Taylor takes the child, who she names Turtle, with her on the rest of her journey. When Taylor's tires blow out in Tucson, Arizona, she decides to make her home there. As Taylor is faced with sudden motherhood, she grows from an adolescent who seems focused on herself, to an adult who helps Turtle overcome a tortuous past, battles to adopt her, and learns to put others before herself.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

This novel provides students an opportunity to explore symbol, motif, and characterization. Kingsolver explores and celebrates both cultural and gender differences from multiple viewpoints. The novel examines the topic of gender through the ensemble of women who find themselves thrown together by happenstance. Kingsolver creates women who develop positive relationships with each other, and work to be positive role models for their children. The novel also posits the idea of gender inequality as a product of society and not individual differences. This provides the reader, through various assignments, opportunities to reflect on how we develop our own sense of gender roles and stereotypes. Kingsolver also explores the treatment of both Native Americans and immigrants in the United States. By seeing these cultures through the strong female protagonist, Taylor, the reader learns tolerance and empathy for others. From a literary perspective, the novel presents multiple teaching moments to strengthen a student's understanding of symbols in literature. The symbol of *The Bean Trees* (rhizobia), for one, is created and stated in a way that is cognitively appropriate for the emerging adult reader. Because the text is told from several characters' perspectives, the reader is called upon to read inferentially. This is one of the most important reading skills a high school student must master.

## **Standards**

### **Course Objectives (Benchmarks)**

**Reading:** 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text. 2.2- The students understand the significance of literature and its contributions to various cultures.

**Writing:** 3.2- The students use a writing process that includes preparing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing to produce a written text.

### **Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)**

#### **Reading:**

1.3.2- The student determines meaning of words or phrases using context clues from sentences or paragraphs.

1.4.11- The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions.

1.4.12- The student analyzes and evaluates how authors use text structures to help achieve their purposes.

1.4.13- The student compares and contrasts varying aspects such as characters' traits and motives, ideas, themes, problem-solution, cause-effect relationships, persuasive techniques, etc.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.2- The student analyzes the historical, social, and cultural contextual aspects of the setting and its influence on characters and events in the story.

2.2.6- The student recognizes ways that literature from different cultures presents similar themes differently across various texts/genres.

#### **Writing:**

3.1.5 and 3.2.1- The student will produce personal writing, technical writing, poetry writing, and character analyses.

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

*The journey of Taylor Greer contains events involving conquering the effects of child abuse (including references to child molestation), sexual references, and mild profanity. One of the minor characters considers suicide, and the text makes reference to these thoughts. After Taylor becomes responsible for an abused child, she meets another single mother and the two experience both the struggles and the joys of motherhood. These events are used by Kingsolver to further develop the conflict and characters.*

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities