

# ***Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons** (Published by Vintage Books/Random House)

Approved for use in Honors Communication Arts II and Communication Arts II

## **Summary**

*Ellen Foster*, set in a rural Southern community, is a coming-of-age story of a young girl in search of a loving family to replace the abuse and grief with which her life has been filled. Beginning shortly before her mother dies, the novel follows Ellen, the philosophical narrator, as she seeks the family life she has never known – a safe, happy home in which she can be the child. Included in her personal struggles is her growing awareness of racial differences and her own discriminations, which she overcomes as her relationship with her friend Starletta grows. When she is finally welcomed into her new home with “New Mama,” Ellen can finally be a child, although not without the knowledge and maturity that her experiences have brought.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

This novel, like *The Catcher in the Rye* (also offered at the CAII level) is a coming-of-age story that investigates a young person’s tumultuous journey toward adulthood as told from an insightful female perspective. Coupled with *The Catcher in the Rye*, and preceding *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (offered in CAIII), this text provides a different view of adolescence through the eyes of a young girl. Written by a reputable, contemporary, female author, this text requires advanced reading skills unique in the sophomore curriculum. Its style, including limited point of view, shifts in time sequence, and lack of punctuation requires close, analytical reading. As an “open text,” the novel requires active interpretation and adaptation to a style of reader-response criticism, an upper level reading skill necessary to the developing reader and college-bound student.

## **Standards**

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

**Reading:** 1.2- The students read fluently. 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.

**Writing:** 3.1- The students use writing as a tool for learning throughout the curriculum.

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

#### **Reading:**

1.4.7- The student identifies characteristics of narrative texts.

1.4.10- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after reading the text.

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

1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author’s style and use of literary devices works together to achieve his or her purpose for writing text.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.1- The student identifies and describes different types of characters and analyzes the development of characters.

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.

2.1.3- The student analyzes and evaluates plot elements.

2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices in a text.

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

#### **Writing:**

3.1- The student writes effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

3.2.2- The student generates ideas through the writing process.

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

*This sobering journey of Ellen’s includes dealing with racism, family struggles (no one “wants” Ellen following her mother’s death), child abuse (by her father), and death (suicide and other deaths). The context of these topics involves some mild profanity and limited sexual references. Fortunately, the sadness turns to happiness when she gets a new family.*

## **AP Connections**

Analytical reading (referenced in the connections to curriculum) is the type of reading (and responding) that is required on the AP examinations. *Ellen Foster* is a novel that provides practice in this area.

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities