Based on

The Wednesday Wars
By Gary D. Schmidt

About the Book:
The year is 1967. Halfway around the world, the Vietnam War is in full swing. Flower children are clashing with the mainstream. The United States is in political turmoil. To seventh grader Holling Hoodhood, Wednesday afternoon is much more traumatic. Holling is the only Presbyterian in his school made up of Jewish and Catholic kids. So on Wednesday afternoons when they go to their religious schools, he is stuck back in class with Mrs. Baker, his teacher. He thinks that she is totally out to get him. At first, he cleans and does menial chores for her. Then, she truly proves she is out to get him by making him read Shakespeare with her on these weekly afternoons. Holling thinks that this is the ultimate torture until he actually gets into the stories. The world around Holling begins to open up as he understands some of the universal themes in Shakespeare. He redefines his relationship with his father and his sister. He realizes that there is so much more going on in the world than just his corner. He learns more from Mrs. Baker than Shakespeare. He begins to grow up. She points him into the direction of becoming a good and wise man.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

- The story takes place on Long Island, New York. Use a world map to orient students to that location.
- Use the map to point out Vietnam. Discuss with students the basic causes of the Vietnam War. List some of the controversies surrounding the conflict.
- Discuss the basic concepts of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

- Describe Holling’s “Perfect House.” Why does he describe it that way? Give details from the book that support the idea that all was not perfect.
- Why did Holling think that Mrs. Baker was “out to get him” at the beginning of the school year? What do you think she was really thinking?
- Why did Mrs. Baker have Holling begin reading Shakespearean plays? Discuss what he learned from this. What do you think Mrs. Baker gained from the lessons on Shakespeare? Compare and contrast their relationship at the beginning of the book to their relationship at the end of the book.
- Describe how the events of the Vietnam War affected various people in the story such as Mrs. Bigio, Mrs. Baker, Mr. Hoodhood, Holling, and Heather. How are you affected by the current hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan?
- Mickey Mantle refused to sign Holling’s baseball because he was dressed in his fairy costume. Why would he act that way? What was Holling’s reaction? Have you ever had someone you look up to let you down? How did you feel? Describe Holling’s feelings when Danny gave his signed ball back to Mickey Mantle.
- How does Holling’s rescue of his sister begin to change their feelings toward each other? By the end of the book, how do they feel about each other? Discuss the events between the two that created their closeness.
- What was Holling’s relationship with his father? Discuss specific events from the book that show his father’s priorities. How did others in the book fill the role that his father should have had? List five key characteristics of a good father and then evaluate Holling’s father using those characteristics.
• At the end of the story, Danny has his bar mitzvah and becomes a man. Although Holling did not have a religious ceremony, he became a man by the end of the book. Discuss the events throughout the book that support the idea that he had grown up.

• Why is the book called The Wednesday Wars? Choose another title for the book. Why would that title be appropriate?

**Student Activity** *(found on the last pages of this PDF):*
In this activity, the students will examine the strengths and challenges of various characters of the book.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

• **Monthly Events:** Each chapter in the book detailed the events of a month. Divide students into small groups. Have each group take a month from the book and prepare a chart showing the main events from that month of school. Include what Holling learned from the events. Have them draw an illustration to go with the month.

• **Flower Power:** Heather painted a flower on her cheek because she wanted to be a flower child. Discuss with students what she meant by becoming a flower child. Have students research anti-war movements during the Vietnam War. Then have the students prepare a graphic organizer focusing on the main points of protest and related action plans.

• **Shakespeare:** Holling enjoyed the plays of William Shakespeare. They taught him truths about his own life. Have students prepare a chart with the plays that he read and the life lessons he learned as a result. Have students write a short essay on how one of these life lessons applies to their own life.

• **More Shakespeare:** From one of the Shakespearean plays that Holling read, choose one to share with the class. Then from the chosen play, select a scene to read out loud to students. Have students write the scene in a modern setting and act out the scene.

• **Heroes Speak Out:** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated during Holling’s seventh grade year. Have students choose one of the men and write a speech that they might have given today had they not been assassinated.

• **Music:** Play for the class some popular music of the late 1960s. Discuss with students how the music of that era was influenced by events of the times.
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Directions: For each of the individuals below, list a strength that they had, a challenge they faced, and a one-line statement they would make reflective of their view of the 1960s.

Holling Hoodhood
Strength: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Challenge: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Statement: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Betty Baker
Strength: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Challenge: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Statement: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Mr. Hoodhood
Strength: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Challenge: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Statement: ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
Mai Thi
Strength: __________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Challenge: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Statement: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Danny Hupfer
Strength: __________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Challenge: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Statement: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________