

A Learning Guide for



The Healing Spell by Kimberley Griffiths Little



Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Livie is living with a secret and it's crushing her. She knows she is responsible for her mother's coma, but she can't tell anyone. It's up to her to find a way to wake her momma up.

Stuck in the middle of three sisters, hiding a forbidden pet alligator, and afraid to disappoint her daddy, whom she loves more than anyone else, Livie struggles to find her place within her own family as she learns about the powers of faith and redemption. Livie's powerful, emotional, and sometimes humorous story will stay with readers long after the last line is read.

Set in the lush bayou of Louisiana, Kimberley Griffiths Little brings Livie's story to life with power and grace.

Pre-Reading/Prediction Questions

- ◆ Look at the cover. Describe the setting of this story. (If necessary, define it for the students as a bayou.)
- ◆ Show some other pictures of bayous. Locate areas in the United States where you might find this type of water landform (along the Mississippi River) and point them out on a map. Tell the students that the state of Louisiana is most famous for them. As a class, begin a 3-column KWL Chart (What I Know, What I Want to Know and What I Learned) about bayous filling out the “K” and “W” columns. Then, add to the “L” column of the chart as you read the book and learn more about bayous.
- ◆ What can you tell about the main character whose picture is on the cover? How old is she? What do you think she’s thinking about?
- ◆ Start a character web for the main character, Livie. As you read the book and learn about her, add characteristics to the web that describe her.
- ◆ This story involves someone who is in a coma. What do you know about this medical condition? How long does a coma last? Can someone recover from a coma? Students should feel free to share personal experiences.
- ◆ What do you think a “healing spell” might be? Are there other ways to be healed from a sickness other than seeing a doctor and taking medicine? (Share ideas as a class and/or have students write down their prediction.)

Book Reviews

- “An incantational tale of Cajun magic and gators in the bayou and of the love and silence between mother and daughter.” RICHARD PECK, Newbery Award-winning author
- “An atmospheric, affecting story of hope and devotion, as elegant and mysterious as bayou country itself.” CYNTHIA LEITCH SMITH, acclaimed author of *Tantalize* and *Eternal*

Kimberley Griffiths Little's beautiful writing brings the lush world of the bayou to vivid life.



Group Discussion/Journal Questions

Chapter 1: Is this story told in third or first person? How do you know? Why do you think the author chose this point of view?

Give at least two examples from the story that tell you something about the kind of person Livie is. Add these characteristics to your character web.

What are the risks of Mamma being at home rather than the hospital? What are the benefits? How does Livie react to Mamma?

Chapter 2: Tell me something that you can tell about Faye and Crickett's personalities by citing at least two examples from the book.

Why do you think Livie would rather clean the bathroom and do the dishes than help with her mamma?

What is a "piroque" (pee-row) and a "skiff?"

Why does Livie lie to her daddy about where her paddle is?

Who does Livie have a better relationship with—her mamma or her daddy? How can you tell?

Chapter 3: Who is Livie's best friend? What is Livie interested in doing more than school?

Do you think it's okay for an 11-year-old girl to own a gun? Why or why not?

Who is Travis?

What is a *traiteur* (tray-tur)? What do *traiteurs* do?

Chapter 4: Why are Aunt Colleen and Thibodaux here from Montana?

Give at least 5 details about Aunt Colleen and Thibodaux.

Why doesn't Aunt Livie want Aunt Colleen asking questions or talking about Mamma? Be specific.

Chapter 5: How do you think Livie and T-Jacques feel about each other? Give at least 3 clues from the book that tell you.

What are the dangers of having a baby alligator for a pet? Why do you think Livie ignores those dangers?

Name three more things that you learned about *traiteurs* from this chapter.

Chapter 6: From reading the beginning of this chapter, what can you tell about what Livie thinks of her appearance?

What did Daddy do in this chapter with T-Boy? Why do you suppose he wanted to do that?

Chapter 7: Livie doesn't like T-Boy. Why not? (Give at least three reasons cited in the book.)

In this chapter, Livie remembers a day of shopping with Mamma. Briefly recount what happens that causes a conflict between the two of them.

Why does Daddy wake Livie up in the middle of the night?

Teaching Tip

"Have the students keep an ongoing journal where they can respond to the discussion questions or just write their thoughts as they read."

Chapter 8: Where does Livie go in this chapter and why? Who does she see there from school?

Livie has often said that she feels responsible for her Mamma's coma. Thinking about the clues given so far, what do you think happened?

Why is Livie willing to go see the *traiteur* even though she is frightened?

Chapter 9: Using the descriptive language of the author, draw and color a picture of the outside of the *traiteur*'s house and the bayou surrounding it.

Name at least three things about the *traiteur* that makes her seem peculiar or mysterious. Name three things that make her not so scary.

In your own words, briefly list the steps of the healing spell that the *traiteur* tells Livie to follow.

Chapter 10: Livie seems relieved after seeing the *traiteur*. Why?

What does Livie see in Mamma's art studio that surprises her? How does it make her feel?

What are the first two items Livie puts on the string? Why?

Chapter 11: Where did everyone in the house go so that Livie is home alone to take care of her mother?

Why do you think Livie is afraid to touch Mamma?

Chapter 12: What is the first memory of Mamma Livie writes in her notebook?

What are the other seven items she puts on the string?

Chapter 13: What seemed strange to Livie about what Daddy was doing to the stump?

Why is Faye considering postponing her wedding to Travis?

Chapter 14: How does Faye and Livie's relationship change in this chapter?

Livie realizes that "the knotted string was helping me mend all the broken pieces of my heart back together." What do you think this means?

Chapter 15: What is different about Livie at the wedding?

What do you think happened at the end of the chapter with T-Boy and the gun?

Chapter 16: Why is Livie surprised when Crickett asks her why she hates everybody?

After Livie and Daddy finally talk about Mamma's accident, Livie says she "felt as if my daddy had just taken my transgression, put it onto himself and redeemed me." What does she mean by this?

What is similar about what happened to T-Baby and Mamma? Name at least two things.

Chapter 17: Livie finally talks to Mamma. How do you think this will help the healing spell to work?

Do you think Mamma moved on purpose, or was it just an involuntary muscle spasm like coma patients sometimes have?

Chapter 18: What were the three things that prove Mamma woke up from the coma?

How did the healing spell help Livie as much as it did Mamma?

Curriculum Connections

Teaching Tip

“Have the students pick a curriculum connection idea that appeals to them as a culminating project after reading the book.”

Art

Tying knots is both a useful skill and an art form that many people do for a hobby. Research different types of knots using books and/or the internet. Pick out five different types of knots that you want to learn how to tie. Using rope, yarn, or string, tie the knots then display and label them on a board. In an oral presentation, share the knots with your classmates and demonstrate and/or teach how to tie one of the knots.

Language Arts

http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/cajun_wed.html

Go to the website above and read the article “Cajun Wedding Traditions” by Jane Vidrine. Compare Faye’s wedding in the book with the description of a Cajun wedding in this article. What was the same and what was different? Write a compare/contrast essay about your findings.

Music

<http://npmusic.org/artists.html>

Check out the website listed above to read about the history of and hear Cajun music that is native to Louisiana. Write a brief reaction to the music and history of how this music came to be. Lastly, compare the rhythm, instrumentation, and beat of this music to another genre of music that you like and write about it.

Geography

Bayou is a specific name used in the Mississippi River region for the type of wetland called a swamp. There are other types of wetlands, but they all of different vegetation and animals. Some other names of wetlands are bogs, marshes, and fens. Using books and/or the internet, make a comparison chart of at least three of the major types of wetlands located in the United States. Find a photograph of each type to put on your chart. List the major characteristics of each type of wetland including climate, animals, and plant life. For extra credit, show where these wetlands are located on a map of the United States. Be sure to cite your sources.

Science

Alligators are at the top of the food chain in a bayou. Research these interesting animals and write an animal report with at least five paragraphs. Include a description of the animal, a description of their habitat and where it is located in the United States, food they eat, how their babies are born, and any other interesting facts. Include at least two photographs and a colored diagram of the alligator’s body parts. Be sure to cite your sources.

Physical Education

Livie used her pirogue to go through the bayou. Although she used a pole, usually a paddle is used to push the pirogue through water. Rowing a pirogue, canoe, or kayak is great physical exercise. There are even rowing machines people can use out of the water for exercise.

Either on a real boat or on a rowing machine, work to build on your own endurance at rowing. Fill out the chart on the right as you row and row a little longer each day! Write a short journal on the back about the results and your experience with this type of exercise.

Activity:	Time:
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Weekly Total:	

FINAL PROJECT

My Healing Spell

- * Read the Recipe for a Healing Spell at the end of the book.
- * Think about someone you love and know personally.
- * Then, above each knot in the string below, write or draw a picture of nine items that you think best represent that person.
- * Lastly, write down nine memories of that person that you



Teaching Tip

"Have the student cut out the picture of the string (or use a real knotted string) along with the pictures of the items for each knot and mount it together with the final draft of their memories. These could be displayed in the classroom or given as a gift to that person. If it is near Mother's or Father's Day, it could be used as a gift for that holiday."

About the Author

Kimberly Griffiths Little is the recipient of the Southwest Book Award and the author of three children's novels which have received many accolades. She grew up reading a book a day and scribbling stories while dreaming of seeing her name in the card catalog one day. A native of San Francisco, Kimberley now lives in a solar adobe house along the banks of the Rio Grande with her husband, a robotics engineer, and their three sons.

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Book News, Author Visits, Activity Pages

Books by Kimberley Griffiths Little

Breakaway, Avon Books
Enchanted Runner, Avon Books
The Last Snake Runner, Knopf Books
The Healing Spell, July, 2010 Scholastic
Circle of Secrets, July 2011, Scholastic
Secret Rites of the Goddess, Fall 2011, Scholastic

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