

The Glass Castle

FULL UNIT – Teacher Facilitation Guide
English, Humanities, Grades 11-12



ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Part 1: How can you better understand homelessness?

Part 2: What is home?

Part 3: Is home a place you can ever truly leave?

Part 4: How can you represent your feelings about home?

LEARNING GOALS

Students will be able to:

- conduct close reading and annotation.
- connect with characters in a memoir and analyze how they develop over the course of the text.
- identify, understand, and analyze themes in a memoir.

LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

This unit is divided into four parts.

Ideally, students will need a hard copy of *The Glass Castle*. They can buy a copy or borrow one from the library. If students can buy the memoir for their personal use, they will be able to annotate in the text.

HOW TO PREPARE

1. Make a copy of the *ALA: The Glass Castle: Unit Guide for Students* [Digital Version \(Google Doc\)](#) or [Printable Version \(Google Doc\)](#)
2. Preview the activities, including all resources.
3. Take note of any changes you would like to make and edit as needed to accommodate your students' needs. Consider which activities lend themselves best to teacher facilitation, group **collaboration**, and/or independent practice and edit the slide deck as needed.
4. Review the learning artifact options.
5. Make a list of must-dos before students begin this unit, **including deciding how students will access/obtain copies of the novel.**
6. The facilitation notes that follow offer suggestions for how to best implement each activity, with active learning in mind.

LEARNING ARTIFACT OPTIONS

Part 1:

Answers to reflection questions

Part 2:

A short, persuasive paragraph

Creative writing

A series of tweets

Part 3:

A bar graph or pie chart

A Venn diagram

A visual to represent contrast

A social media post

Part 4:

A creative symbol representing feelings about home, paired with a statement of intent

ACTIVITIES

JUMP TO:

[Part 1: Seeing Mom](#)

- [Activity 1](#)
- [Activity 2](#)
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[Part 2: Cardboard Beds](#)

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[Part 4: Park Avenue Address](#)

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PART 1: SEEING MOM

Essential Question: How can you better understand homelessness?

ACTIVITY 1: HOMELESSNESS

Learning Goal

Reflect on how you view homelessness.

Supporting Resources

[Page 2 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

NOTE: Students begin reading the novel in Activity 3, and they begin with only the first chapter. Give them advance notice of this to make sure they don't dive into the memoir before completing Activities 1 and 2.

SAY: If you were driving through a big city and saw a woman on the side of the road sifting through a dumpster, what would you think? Would you think she was a person experiencing homelessness? Would you think she didn't have a family?

*In Part 1 of this unit, you'll read about this exact situation in the first chapter of *The Glass Castle*, a memoir by Jeannette Walls. As the book opens, Walls tells us how she saw her mother rooting through a dumpster. We will begin exploring the complex topic of homelessness as we discover Jeannette's story.*



DIFFERENTIATE

Students are asked to agree or disagree with this statement in this activity: **Homelessness is often brought on by circumstances beyond a person's control.**

Try one of these simpler statements if students struggle with the original: "Homelessness happens because of things or events that people cannot control," or "People choose homelessness."

You may need to give students some examples of causes of homelessness that are outside a person's control (e.g., natural disasters like tornadoes or hurricanes or an economic downturn). The goal is that students think about the causes of homelessness and whether they are things people have control over. You may wish to preview [Understanding Homelessness](#) at this point; students will read this resource in Activity 4.



ACTIVE LEARNING

Hold a standing debate with the statement. Mark one side of the room *agree* and the other side *disagree*. Then, have students move to a side of the room and debate their opinions with their peers.

ACTIVITY 2: LIFE ON THE STREETS

Learning Goal

Investigate the stories of those experiencing homelessness.

Supporting Resources

[Page 2 of Unit Guide for Students](#)



DIFFERENTIATE

The resource may help students see individuals experiencing homelessness for diverse reasons rather than people defined by their housing insecurity. If students seem to be struggling with seeing the people in the story individually, you may ask them these questions:

- What is the person's name?
- Are they the same age as anyone you know?
- What is one surprising thing you learned about this person?

ACTIVITY 3: THE FIRST CHAPTER

Learning Goal

Deepen your understanding of homelessness through a close reading of a chapter of a memoir.

Supporting Resources

[Page 3 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

If students have not read a memoir before or are not familiar with the term, let them know that a memoir is an account of one's personal life and experiences. It is similar to an autobiography.

Students should borrow the memoir from the library or purchase their own copy. If they would like to listen along, the audiobook can be found on [Audible](#) or [Amazon](#) (with an Audible membership).

Ideally, refrain from giving students any background on the author or memoir before they complete this activity or the rest of this unit. Reading the first chapter in isolation without context or background will allow them to make authentic predictions about why her parents are homeless.

Students conduct a close reading in this activity. Close reading means looking carefully at the how and what of a text (paying attention to tone, diction, style, etc.) and often includes annotating or taking notes as one reads. For more on close reading, explore [this resource](#).

If you would like a brief background on author Jeannette Walls, explore these resources:

- [Jeannette Walls](#)
- [How Jeannette Walls Spins Good Stories Out of Bad Memories](#)

ACTIVITY 4: WHY DOES SOMEONE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS?

Learning Goal

Investigate the causes and challenges of homelessness.

Supporting Resources

[Page 5 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Students have read the first chapter of *The Glass Castle*. Now, they will take a step back and connect the first chapter to their perspectives of homelessness. Thinking about their perceptions of homelessness will prepare them for reading the rest of *The Glass Castle*.



DIFFERENTIATE

If you would like students to explore more resources on homelessness, here are two more options:

- [Global Data and Statistics](#)
- [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#)

Students should save and keep these notes; they will revisit the idea of homelessness in the next three parts of this unit on *The Glass Castle* as they read the book and learn more about Jeannette and her parents.

PART 2: CARDBOARD BEDS

Essential Question: What is home?

ACTIVITY 1: BEFORE READING (PART 1)

Learning Goal

Consider how you view your own home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 7 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

This is the second part in this four-part unit on *The Glass Castle*. Students will read the section of the novel called "The Desert" in Activity 3.

SAY: *How do you feel about your current home? Are you happy there? Is there anything about it that you would change?*

In Part 2, you'll see whether your own view of home changes as you read about the life of Jeannette Walls and her experiences of moving from home to home. You'll think about how others view home and continue to consider the topic of homelessness.



ACTIVE LEARNING

Students will be doing a lot of writing (i.e., filling in tracking charts) in Activity 3. If you have reluctant writers, you could give them the option to draw a visual or express their ideas in a different way for this activity.

ACTIVITY 2: BEFORE READING (PART 2)

Learning Goal

Predict how reading this memoir might make you feel differently about your own home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 8 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Students don't know the characters intimately yet. The point of this activity is to get them thinking about how the characters' thoughts about their new home compare to the thoughts they recorded about their own homes in the previous activity. If the family in this clip seems happy about this home, how does that make students feel differently about the things they want to change about their own homes?

They may say that some family members seem happier than others about the new home—Jeannette and her mom are very positive, while Lori and Brian (Jeannette's siblings) are more skeptical. Overall, though, there is excitement in the air about the possibility of making this new home a great place.

You know your students best and can gauge whether they need to process their thoughts through writing. If you are short on time or are completing this activity as a class, you may want to consider having them just think about their answers instead of writing them down.

ACTIVITY 3: THE DESERT

Learning Goal

Read a section of a memoir and track important topics related to home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 9 of Unit Guide for Students](#)



ACTIVE LEARNING

Students can explore this interactive [map](#) to see all of the places the Walls family lived.



DIFFERENTIATE

Students may complete the reading in class, outside of class as homework, or a mixture of the two. If you choose to have students complete all of the reading outside of class, you will want to review the tracking journal with them beforehand so they are clear on the type of information they should record. You could also have groups of students complete different parts of the tracking journal and share their information (a jigsaw).

The tracking journal spans parts 2–4 of *The Glass Castle* unit. Students will read 116 pages.

ACTIVITY 4: AFTER READING: OPTIONS

Learning Goal

Choose an option to share your understanding of what you've read.

Supporting Resources

[Page 11 of Unit Guide for Students](#)



DIFFERENTIATE

As you check in with students, make sure they are comprehending the memoir. If you haven't already, now would be a good time to assess whether they need further tracking tools, such as a character chart or a plot chart.

If students are unsure of what to do for the second option, you could start them off with a simple Venn diagram.

Encourage students to brainstorm in the space provided in the document.

ACTIVITY 5: LEAVING HOME

Learning Goal

Reflect on reasons why someone might want to leave home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 12 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

In Part 3 of this unit, students will explore the idea of leaving home. This activity allows them to practice drawing conclusions about what they've read to make predictions about what's to come in the text.

For the last question ("As you've gotten older, have you ever felt a desire to leave home? Why or why not?"), students can think back to Activity 1, where they described what they would change about their homes. Do the things they want to change influence their feelings about wanting—or not wanting—to leave home?

PART 3: YOU CAN ALWAYS COME HOME

Essential Question: Is home a place you can ever truly leave?

NOTE: Students will read the "Welch" section of the novel in Activity 2. In this section, readers learn about the sexual abuse that Rex and Brian experience. You may choose to include supplemental activities or resources to prepare students for this, or to have students skip over those pages if you wish; it won't affect their ability to complete all the activities.

ACTIVITY 1: BEFORE READING: IMAGE SEARCH

Learning Goal

Make predictions about the family's life in Welch.

Supporting Resources

[Page 14 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Students will read the "Welch" section of the novel in Activity 2.

SAY: Home should be a place you can always return to, right? And even though you may leave home someday, it will always be your home, won't it?

Or will it?

In Activity 2, you will read about what happens when Rex and his family return to his childhood home in Welch, West Virginia. You'll consider if it's ever truly possible to leave home. Before we read, let's learn a little about Welch.



ACTIVE LEARNING

After conducting the image search, students write predictions. Instead of writing predictions individually, students could post their predictions in the classroom or in a shared space.



DIFFERENTIATE

If you'd like to explore Welch more with students, this is an interesting article: [Fifty Years into the War on Poverty, Hardship Hits Back](#).

ACTIVITY 2: DURING READING: TRACKING JOURNAL

Learning Goal

Read a section of a memoir and track important topics related to home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 15 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

The tracking journal spans parts 2–4 of *The Glass Castle* unit. Students will read 92 pages.

DIFFERENTIATE

As always, check in with students to make sure they are comprehending the memoir. If you haven't already, now would be a good time to assess whether they need further tracking tools, such as a character chart or a plot chart.

ACTIVITY 3: AFTER READING: WHAT IS CHANGING?

Learning Goal

Investigate and share how each family member's view of home is changing.

Supporting Resources

[Page 17 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

DIFFERENTIATE

Students can use any tool they want to create these visuals. They can create them on the computer; print, cut, and paste pictures; or, draw them by hand. For the Venn diagram, students should choose one character. They should put "Welch" on one side and "The Desert" on the other. Feel free to provide a [Venn Diagram](#) template.

Students should make sure to have a quote from the memoir that backs up their thinking and helps explain why they created the visual the way they did.

ACTIVITY 4: WILL SHE MAKE IT OUT FOR GOOD?

Learning Goal

Conduct a close reading of quotations from the memoir.

Supporting Resources

[Page 18 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

If you are pressed for time, have students answer these questions in a conversation with you or with other students.

ACTIVITY 5: AFTER READING: HOME THAT OUR FEET MAY LEAVE

Learning Goal

Consider whether one can ever truly leave home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 19 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Stop to make sure that students understand the meaning of the quotation. It means that, while you may physically leave home, it will always be in your heart, or your heart will always stay with the home.



DIFFERENTIATE

This would be a great place for a mini debate. Students should use evidence from the memoir to back up their opinions.

To extend this activity, have students think about more than one character or respond to the quotation with their own feelings. Do they agree or disagree? Why? Is this quotation suggesting that you can never really leave home? Or that home will always be with you, wherever you go?

PART 4: PARK AVENUE ADDRESS

Essential Question: How can you represent your feelings about home?

ACTIVITY 1: BEFORE READING: WHERE WILL THEY END UP?

Learning Goal

Make predictions.

Supporting Resources

[Page 20 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Students will read the "New York City" and "Thanksgiving" sections (pages 245–288) of the memoir in Activity 2.

SAY: By this point, you're probably wondering what life in New York will be like for Jeannette. How is she going to rebuild her life in a new place? Perhaps you've asked yourself a similar question as you've gotten older and started to think about moving out of your own home someday.

*In Part 4 we will read the last section of *The Glass Castle* to find out what happens to Jeannette and her family members. Where will they all end up? And what is the point of the Glass Castle? Will it ever be built?*



DIFFERENTIATE

Students can make their predictions verbally if they are struggling to keep up with all of the writing and tracking. They can choose just one family member to focus on if time is tight. They can also hold mini debates with other classmates.

They should be sure to think seriously and realistically about their predictions. They should take the personalities and life experiences of the family members into account. For instance, it's unlikely that Brian will join the circus or that Maureen will become president, so steer students away from unfounded predictions.

ACTIVITY 2: DURING READING

Learning Goal

Read the last two sections of the memoir and track important topics related to home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 20 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Students will read and track “New York City” and “Thanksgiving,” pages 245–288. They are reading 43 pages.

Students can look back to the first activity in the series and revisit the definitions of homelessness to help them decide whether the places that Rex and Rose Mary live can be considered home. Even if students don't consider these places to be home, they can still track Rex and Rose Mary's feelings about where they are squatting.

ACTIVITY 3: AFTER READING: FEELINGS ABOUT HOME

Learning Goal

Consider how each family member feels about home and create a social media post to capture those feelings.

Supporting Resources

[Page 22 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

The goal of this activity is to get students thinking about the ways in which people represent home. This will help prepare them to analyze a symbol (the Glass Castle) in the next activity. Students can consider the idea of the Glass Castle as they create their posts. Do the characters' feelings about the Glass Castle influence how they feel about their current homes?

Encourage students to find a quote from the memoir to caption their posts. For example, if they are creating a post about Jeannette's small apartment in New York, they could use this quote as their caption: “Park Avenue was not where I belonged. I took a small apartment on the West Side. It had neither a doorman nor a fireplace, but there were large windows that flooded the rooms with light, and parquet floors and a small foyer, just like that first apartment Lori and I had found in the Bronx. It felt right.” (280–281).

They could add hashtags that are relevant to Jeannette's feelings about this home (or even her other homes growing up).

If students are unable to find a quote, they can certainly create their own caption. They should be careful, though, that their captions, comments, and hashtags accurately reflect their chosen character's feelings about this new home.

If students choose to post for Rex or Rose Mary, encourage them to be sensitive regarding the topic of homelessness. They should be careful not to make jokes or create tension over this topic.

This activity is designed to be quick. You may want to encourage students not to spend more than 30 minutes on it. You could also group students together if you have several students working on this activity at the same time.

ACTIVITY 4: AFTER READING: IT IS WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO MAKE OF IT

Learning Goal

Analyze an important symbol in the memoir.

Supporting Resources

[Page 23 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

SAY: This activity takes you through several steps to analyze the major symbol of the book: the Glass Castle. There is no right or wrong answer here. Symbols are often confusing because we want to nail down a meaning when, really, symbols can have multiple meanings and mean different things to different people. What is important here is that you use your reading of the memoir, the two quotes in the document, and the videos in Step 3 to help inform your explanations of what the symbol means. Use evidence from what you have read and watched to back up your opinions about what the symbol means.

Students should focus on Jeannette for this activity, but they can certainly tie in other characters for their explanation.

Remind students to keep their Google document open as they watch the videos in Step 3 of Activity 4 of the Unit Guide for Students so they can take notes.

If students need a refresher on what a symbol is, you could point them to this [resource](#).

You may want to make sure students write down this line from the book video in Step 3 of Activity 4 in the Unit Guide for Students: “You could look at the Glass Castle as another drunken promise, or as hope for the future. It is whatever you choose to make of it.”

ACTIVITY 5: YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT HOME

Learning Goal

Create a symbol to represent your feelings about home.

Supporting Resources

[Page 25 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

Encourage students to think in the abstract here. Many students will likely want to bring objects from home as their symbols, but encourage them to create something. The Glass Castle is an abstract idea that represents a feeling of home for Jeannette Walls. Remind students of this and encourage them to think of an abstract symbol that can represent a multitude of feelings about home.



DIFFERENTIATE

Students can create their symbols with materials from the classroom or materials from home. You can structure the activity in a way that works best for your students. They can paint, draw, or use any other medium they are comfortable with to create their symbols.

Students will write a "statement of intent," in which they will share what they intended to create, why they created it, and what they intended to represent with this symbol.



ACTIVE LEARNING

This is a great opportunity for a showcase or gallery walk in order for students to share their symbols.

Get more resources like this at www.opportunityeducation.org/resources