

# Trade Books Teaching Ideas

## *Jim the Boy* by Tony Earley.

Boston: Little Brown,  
2000. ISBN (hardback)  
0-316-19895-1.

### Summary:

In a coming-of-age story set in Appalachia, Jim grows up as a town boy with his mother and uncles but finally makes friends with a mountain boy and meets his mountain grandfather.

### Introductory Notes:

As an introduction to family history, the charming stories of Jim's boyhood will certainly stimulate readers to recall and write about events and people from the past. Invite students to keep journal entries as they read. They may want to make note of events from their own lives that the stories remind them of. Or to make notes about what Jim learns from the uncles. Another idea may be to keep track of Jim's growing awareness of the "mountain life."

The book is written at a 5-6 grade level, so students at/above Level 4 should be able to read it independently. You can provide more support for students by reading some portions aloud. Students should follow along as you read, however, as this practice (listening while reading) supports students' reading growth.

Many more activities are provided below than you will probably want to use. Feel free to select the activities that your students will enjoy and find beneficial.

### Teaching Ideas:

"Prologue": read this aloud to students. Then invite pairs of students to reread the Prologue looking for clues to setting (time and place) and characters. Ask students to speculate about why an author would begin a book in this way.

"Breakfast": After students have read or listened, divide them into 3 groups: Mama Cissy, the uncles, Jim. Ask each group to talk about their character(s) and to jot down descriptive words and phrases. These may be selected from the text, or students may generate them. Ask groups to share with each other.

"A Day of Work": After students have read or listened, ask them to return to the text (alone or with a partner) to develop lists of a) what Jim learned, b) how, and c) the role of the uncles in his learning. You may want to suggest that

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students develop 3-columned charts: what/ how/ role of uncles. After students have completed these charts, invite group discussion that focuses on similarities and differences among the charts.

“An Unexpected Gift”: Read this to students while they follow along silently. Use the Sketch to Stretch strategy ([http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/sketch\\_stretch.pdf](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/sketch_stretch.pdf)). Ask students to stop for sketching and discussing after the gap on p. 29 and again at the end of the chapter.

“Baptism”: After students have read or listened, ask them to work with a partner or individually to complete Herringbone charts (<http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/herringbone.pdf>). Then invite discussion or writing about why the uncles may have chosen to tell Jim this story at this time.

“After Supper” and “Jim At Bat”: As students read or listen, ask them to make notes about Jim’s feelings for his family. Students may select words or phrases from the text or develop their own. Then ask students to look at the journal entries and notes they have made during Book I of the story. They should draw conclusions by writing the 2 or 3 most important descriptors of the family’s relationship. Share these as a whole group.

Book II: Do a think-pair-share activity ([http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/think\\_pair\\_share.pdf](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/think_pair_share.pdf)). Stop at the extra space on pp. 59 and 65 and again at the end. At each stop ask students to make notes about a) what Jim learned and b) how. Then they share these ideas with a partner, and finally the whole group discusses students’ thoughts.

“Big Day”: Ask pairs of students to make notes on a story map as you read the “Alice story” from this section to them (and they follow along silently). Stops for note-making: end of the partial paragraph on the top of p. 90; end of first full paragraph on p. 91 (“... Alice”); page 93, line 3 (“... substitute man”); and the end of the story. The story maps should have spaces for students to make notes about characters, setting, problem, and solution.

“Unexpected Guest”: After students have read or listened, ask them to make notes about what is happening with Whitey Whiteside. Then invite discussion about this same

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issue. As students offer predictions, ask them to justify their ideas with reference to the text.

“News From the Mountain”: Ask students to make a 2-column chart labeled ‘father’ and ‘grandfather.’ As they read or listen, ask them to make notes about what Jim is learning about these men. After the lists are complete, ask students to share and, if they wish, to add to these charts. Invite discussion or writing about how this new knowledge affects Jim.

“A Victory of Sorts”: After students have read or listened to this chapter, ask them to add to the chart they developed during “News From the Mountain” by noting additional things Jim learned about his father and grandfather and by considering how this new information affects Jim.

Ask students to describe Penn. Facilitate this conversation by recording notes on the chalkboard, chart paper, or an overhead transparency. Then ask pairs of students to complete Venn diagrams ([http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/venn\\_diagrams.pdf](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/venn_diagrams.pdf)) that compare Jim and Penn. These can be compared and discussed.

“King”: Invite discussion or writing about the two times in this chapter when Uncle Zeno tells Jim to do things but says “We won’t tell your mother”: dropping him down the post hole and letting him explore New Carpenter by himself. Ask students whether these decisions seem authentic and if so, why. Also ask students to consider why Uncle Zeno might have chosen to say this to Jim.

Do an Agree? Disagree? Why? activity ([http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/agree\\_disagree\\_why.pdf](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/agree_disagree_why.pdf)) with these statements:

- Penn and Jim will become friends.
- It was good of Uncle Zeno to let Jim take off on his own.
- The boys were in danger.

Book IV: Read Cissy’s letter to students. Afterwards, invite discussion. Why did the uncles do this? Did Cissy make the right decision? Ask students to make notes.

“Christmas Eve”: After students have read or listened, invite conversation about how electricity will change the town. Also invite conversation of Jim’s reaction to the electricity and why

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he may have reacted in this way.

Read Cissy's letter to Jim's father. Then ask students to add to the notes they made after reading/ listening to the letter she wrote to Whitey.

"At the Tenant House": After reading/ listening, ask students what Cissy decided, whether this was a wise decision, and why they think so.

Book V: "A Game of Catch": After reading or listening, divide students into two groups. One should focus on Jim and the other on Penn. Ask each group to make notes about their boy's feelings. When groups have finished, invite sharing. Ask students why the baseball episode deteriorated into a shouting match. Ask them whether Jim's and Penn's friendship is ruined and why they think so.

"An Afternoon in the Sun": After reading or listening, divide students into three groups: Abe, Pete, and Whitey. Each group should summarize a) what this person did for Jim and b) why.

Book VI: "Our Boy": After reading or listening, invite conversation about "coming of age" stories. Then divide students into three groups: the talking panther, visiting Penn, and seeing grandfather. Each group should reread that portion of the chapter and make notes about the extent to which this episode represents "coming of age." Then invite groups to share with each other.

#### **Concluding/ Culminating Activities:**

- Ask students to revisit their notes from the book and to decide on 2 or 3 of the most important lessons Jim learned. They should also be prepared to justify their choices, i.e., to tell why these were such important decisions.
- Learners may want to focus on the cultural/racial/ethnic differences in the book and in their own families.
- Ask students to review the book again (good opportunity to teach a mini-lesson about skimming). Ask them to try to determine why the author wrote the book in "books" and what individual "books" have in common.
- Ask students to select one item from the following and to make a Venn diagram comparing the item as portrayed in the book with the item as it exists in today's world. Pro-

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vide large sheets of manila paper for students to make copies of their diagrams. Invite sharing.

- o Family
- o Family stories
- o Growing up
- o Friendship

.Students can research online for more information about the following topics. Pairs of learners may want to seek additional information. Students could complete I-Charts (see below) to summarize what they learn.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Site	WWW address	Summary	Interesting Facts

### **Polio epidemic of the late 40's:**

- [http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial\\_viral/polio.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial_viral/polio.html)
- [http://www.unicef.org/immunization/index\\_polio.html](http://www.unicef.org/immunization/index_polio.html)
- <http://americanhistory.si.edu/polio>

### **Ty Cobb**

- <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/bbhtml/bbhome.html>
- <http://www.cmgworldwide.com/baseball/cobb/index.html>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ty\\_Cobb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ty_Cobb)

### **Appalachia in the 1930s and 1940s**

- <http://www.mountaintimes.com/history/1930s/depression.php3>
- <http://www.bland.k12.va.us/bland/rocky/gap.html>
- <http://www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/specialcollections/saarchives.asp>