

"An unforgettable boy and his  
unforgettable story. I loved it!"

—ROB BUYEA, author of  
*Because of Mr. Terupt* and  
*Mr. Terupt Falls Again*

# Paperboy



Vince Vawter

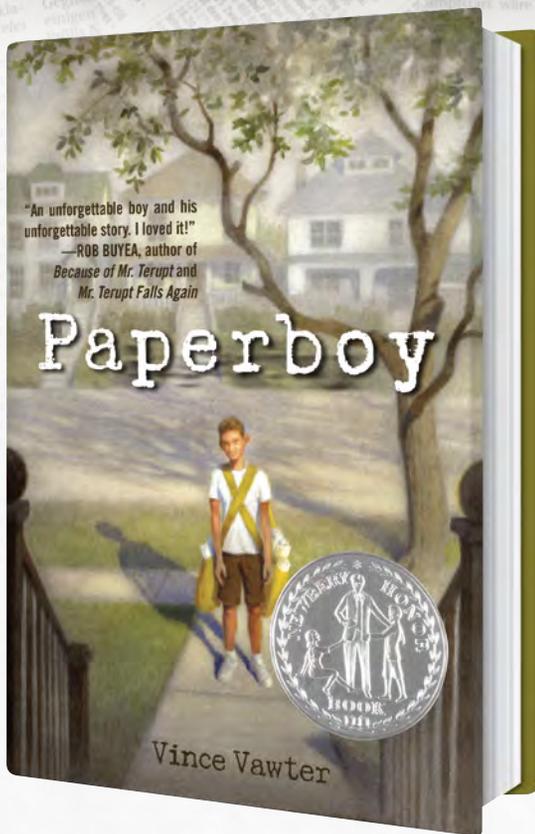


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## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS



Grades 5 and up  
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## About the Book

It's the summer of 1959 in Memphis, Tennessee. An eleven-year-old boy is asked by his friend to be a substitute paperboy for the month of July. The boy is an ace pitcher, so throwing the newspapers isn't difficult—but collecting the money on Fridays is a challenge because he's a stutterer. The customers intrigue him: there's Mrs. Worthington, who drinks too much; Mr. Spiro, a retired merchant marine whose house is filled with books; and a deaf boy who learns to read lips by watching television. There's a lot of drama as well. After a run-in with Ara T, a neighborhood junkman who is also a liar and thief, the boy and Mam, the family housekeeper, set out on a dangerous mission to recover the items Ara T stole from him. As the summer draws to a close, the boy discovers that he has grown in ways he never expected.

## Pre-Reading Activity

Ask students to read and make a brief outline of the information about stuttering on the following website: [kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/stuttering.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/stuttering.html). Then engage the class in a discussion about what they learned about this speech disorder. Finally, have students create a small poster or sign that lists dos and don'ts when talking with someone who stutters.

- **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 4-6.1; Speaking & Listening SL. 4-6.1.**

# Activities

## Reflecting on the Novel

Mr. Spiro tells Little Man about Rosetta Stone. Read about Rosetta Stone on the following website: [AncientEgypt.co.uk/writing/rosetta.html](http://AncientEgypt.co.uk/writing/rosetta.html). Then have students tell the story of Little Man and Mam's life-threatening encounter with Ara T in hieroglyphics. Allow time in class for students to share their writing.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 4-6; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 4-6.4.**

Mr. Spiro gives Little Man a piece of a dollar bill with *Student* written on it in black ink. He tells him that in three weeks he can claim his “golden fleece.” The second word the boy receives is *Servant*, the third is *Seller*, and the fourth is *Seeker*. Read aloud the Greek myth *The Quest for the Golden Fleece*. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss whether the four words relate to the myth. What is Little Man's “golden fleece”? Allow time for the groups to share their thoughts.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.2; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 6.9; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 4-6.4.**

Mr. Spiro encourages Little Man to continue writing poetry. Talk about the elements of an acrostic poem. Instruct students to use one of these words—*Student*, *Servant*, *Seller*, or *Seeker*—as a spine word and write a poem that Little Man might give to Mr. Spiro upon his return.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.4**

Have students write an essay that Little Man might write for a Language Arts class called “Mam: My Best Friend.” Tell them to use specific quotes from the novel to

support their ideas. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.5.**

Review the definitions of metaphor and simile. Ask students to explain the following metaphor: “Mrs. Worthington and her red hair. That was the dessert of my thinking” (p. 156). Explain the following simile: “[Mr. Spiro] sounded official like he was calling a baseball game on the radio” (p. 30). Instruct students to locate and analyze other metaphors and similes in the novel. Then have them write a metaphor that best describes Little Man's relationship with Mam, and a simile that describes Little Man's communication with TV boy.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 4-6.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-6.5.**

Mr. Spiro has an unusual way of expressing himself. Ask students to jot down unfamiliar words he uses and define them by taking clues from the context. Such words may include: *transaction* (p. 27), *apprised* (p. 27), *impediment* (p. 30), *rigidity* (p. 30), *deficits* (p. 31), *ledger* (p. 31), *velocity* (p. 32), *constitutes* (p. 32), *compensation* (p. 33), *proverbial* (p. 58), *sustenance* (p. 100), *imbibe* (p. 100), *pittance* (p. 104), *anchorage* (p. 104), *winnow* (p. 105), *cargo* (p. 109), *excursion* (p. 170), and *forthwith* (p. 172). Then have them use a thesaurus to find more common words to express the same thoughts.

● **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 4-6.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-6.4.**

## Understanding the Era

Setting is often defined as when and where a novel takes place. Make a list of the things and events the author references that establish the setting of the book. If the class or school has a website, instruct students to post their list on a page called “What I Learned about 1959.” Suggest that students find and post additional cultural and political information about the year.

- **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.3; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.6.**

Read about the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* at [PBS.org/wnet/jimcrow/index.html](http://PBS.org/wnet/jimcrow/index.html). This landmark case occurred five years before *Paperboy* is set. Little Man and Art go to an all-white school because the Memphis public schools weren't integrated until 1961. Have students write a guest editorial for the *Press-Scimitar* in Mr. Spiro's voice called “Integration: Supporting Equal Education for All.” Instruct them to make reference to *Brown v. Board of Education* in the editorial.

- **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.1; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.4.**

*Time* magazine named Dwight D. Eisenhower “Man of the Year” in 1959. Ask students to research Eisenhower's career in the military and his contributions as the thirty-fourth president of the United States. Then have them write the “Man of the Year” article for *Time* that explains why he received this distinction.

- **Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-6.7.**



## Questions for Group Discussion

- An internal conflict is a problem or a dilemma that a character faces within him or herself. What is the internal conflict within the boy? At what point is this conflict revealed? An external conflict is a thing or event that a character encounters as an obstacle. Identify the external conflicts in the novel. Explain how both internal and external conflicts change Little Man by the end of the summer.
- The novel is told in first person from the main character's point of view. The reader does not know the boy's name until the end of the novel. How is this symbolic of the boy's journey? Explain the significance of the scene when he stands up in class and says, "My name is Victor Vollmer the Third" (p. 222). How is this a step toward resolving his internal conflict?
- Discuss the boy's relationship with Mam, the housekeeper his parents hired to help take care of him. Mam's real name is Miss Nellie Avent. How is Mam a term of endearment? Why does she call the boy Little Man? The boy says, "I wouldn't have made it this far without her" (p. 3). How does Mam understand him in ways his mother doesn't? What life lessons does she teach him? Why does he call her his best friend?
- Discuss the boy's relationship with his parents. Why does he like to be around his father more than his mother? Why does he feel sorry for his mother?
- The boy is puzzled and surprised when he discovers his birth certificate and sees that his father is "Unknown." Why do you think his parents have never told him the circumstances of his birth? At first he is curious about his "real" father. What makes him realize that the man's identity doesn't matter? At the end of the novel, the boy shouts each of Mr. Spiro's four words as he throws a baseball to his father. Explain the symbolism of this moment.
- Define *friendship* from Little Man's point of view. How did he and Rat become friends? Explain how Rat is his front man when other kids tease him about his speech. Discuss how their friendship changes when they enter seventh grade. How are these changes related to each boy's growth over the summer? How does Rat express his loyalty to Little Man at the end of the novel?
- Explain the friendship that develops between Little Man and Mr. Spiro. How does Mr. Spiro know so much about Little Man? What does Mr. Spiro offer the boy that no one else has? Describe Little Man's friendship with TV boy. What do they offer one another?
- Good and bad things happen to Little Man on the paper route. What might he say are the best and worst things that happen? Would Little Man consider his experiences with Mrs. Worthington to be "good stuff" or "bad stuff"? Why is he so intrigued by her? Explain why he doesn't share any of these things with Rat.
- Describe Little Man's fascination with Ara T. What is the first clue that Ara T isn't an honest man? How does Mam's warning about him foreshadow trouble? Mam is away for several days, and returns with bruises and a black eye. Discuss why Little Man suspects that Ara T is responsible. Why doesn't Mam call the police after Ara T robs Little Man of his three most prized possessions? Why is Mam eager to put their brush with death behind them? Discuss why it's important for Mam and Little Man to keep the incident between them. What might happen if Little Man's parents knew?
- Several times in the novel Little Man makes reference to being lonesome. Debate whether this is because of his speech problem, his best friend being away, or the fact that his parents are gone a lot. How does Mam fill the empty space?

## Questions for Group Discussion (continued)

- Explain the following quote: “I can scrub something off my skin a lot easier than I can scrub it out of my head” (p. 135). What things would Little Man like to scrub out of his head? How does writing down the events of his summer help him? Explain how his writing reflects a summer of courage, friendship, and hope. Why does he bury his writing under the “wicked furniture”?
- Define racism. Discuss Little Man’s struggle to understand all the rules that Mam must follow. He is upset when Mam is mistreated at the Overland Park Zoo. How does her response to Little Man define her character? Debate whether Little Man’s parents decide to build a new house because of integration. Explain his mother’s vague answer when Little Man asks where Mam will live in the new house.

🕒 These discussion questions correlate to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.1, 4-6.2, 4-6.3; Craft & Structure RL. 4-6.4, 5-6.5, 4-6.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 4-6.1, 4-6.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-6.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

## Internet Resources

[StutteringHelp.org](http://StutteringHelp.org)

The official website for the Stuttering Foundation of America

[WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org)

The official website for the National Stuttering Association

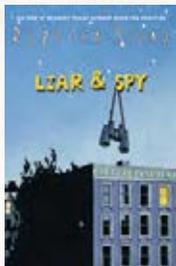
[MayoClinic.org/diseases-conditions/stuttering/basics/definition/con-20032854](http://MayoClinic.org/diseases-conditions/stuttering/basics/definition/con-20032854)

The Mayo Clinic discusses stuttering, including the causes, risk factors, and when to see a doctor.

## About the Author

VINCE VAWTER, a native of Memphis, retired after a forty-year career in newspapers, most recently as the president and publisher of the *Evansville Courier & Press* in Indiana. *Paperboy* is his first novel.

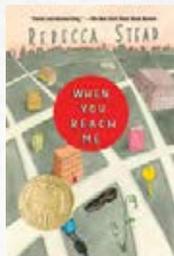
## Related Titles



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Rebecca Stead

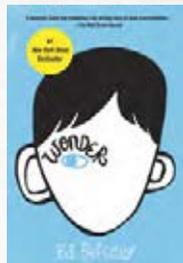
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Rebecca Stead

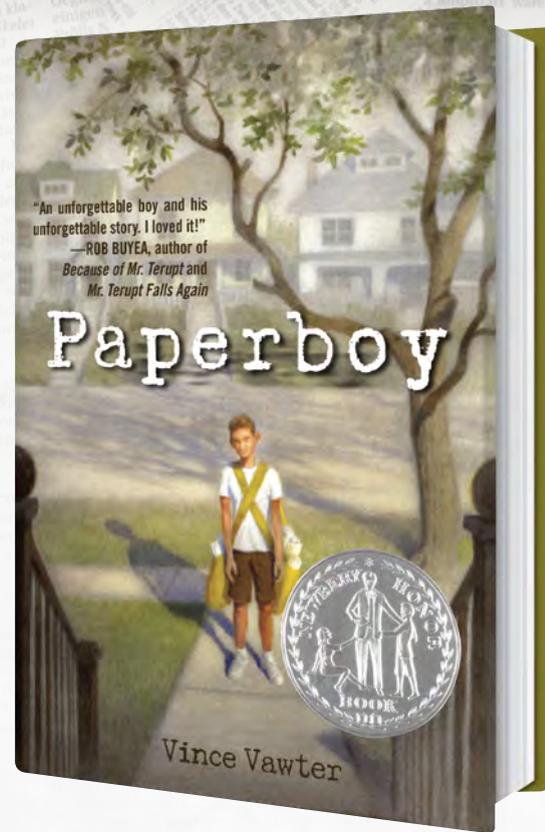
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- Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-6.7.



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