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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities  
for the Enriched Classic edition of  
*Bless the Beasts and Children* by Glendon Swarthout  
0-7434-9369-9 • \$6.99 / \$10.50 Can.**

Activities created by Katie Gideon

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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- An outline of key themes and plot points to help readers form their own interpretations
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- A list of recommended books and films to broaden the reader's experience

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Lesson Plan #1

**“A transient parental environment”**  
(A Lesson in Background Research)

In order to connect with *Bless the Beasts & Children*, it helps to have some understanding of historical concepts that form the novel’s backdrop. In this lesson, students will research one relevant topic and then share findings with the class. In addition to preparing them for the novel, this research activity demands that students critically read their information sources. It also gives them valuable rehearsal in creating correctly formatted MLA citations.

This activity takes two or three fifty-minute class periods and also includes homework.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**What To Do:**

1. Have each student read *Bless the Beasts & Children* introductory materials (pgs. XI-XXIV) for homework. As they read, they should track unfamiliar words and concepts. The goal is to come to class with questions regarding this recent, transitional time in American history.
2. The next day in class, have students share any questions raised by the timeline. Discuss their initial observations: how are the 1960s similar to today’s society? How are they different? How will this knowledge affect their reading of the novel?
3. Explain to students the importance of social turmoil during the 1960s. Read aloud page XVI to underline the point.

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4. Pass out Handout #1. Explain that each student will use at least two online resources to create a trading card explaining whatever topic they investigate. Go over your expectations for the assignment. Review with your students what web sources will be acceptable and unacceptable for this assignment. (e.g., do they need to restrict their research to university websites only?) Their findings will create the historical context necessary for building understanding of this novel.
5. Review MLA citations. Provide students with examples of correctly formatted bibliographies and in-line citations. Inform them that they'll have to redo any work that comes in without proper citations--this is an assignment that will be done over and over again, until students meet all criterion.
6. Assign two or three students to one of the following potential topics. Students should work individually, but pairing up on topics ensures that the class receives quality information. Possible topics for research include:
  - a. Baby boom
  - b. birth control becoming available in the U.S.
  - c. Divorce rates in the 1960s
  - d. Assassination of John F. Kennedy
  - e. Protests of the Vietnam War
  - f. News coverage of the Vietnam War
  - g. Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act
  - h. Dr. Spock's theories on childcare
  - i. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*
  - j. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*
  - k. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*
  - l. Vietnam War: The Tet Offensive
  - m. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
  - n. The Civil Rights movement
  - o. Anti-Semitism
  - p. Bar mitzvah
  - q. Famous western movies of the 1960s
  - r. Freudian theory: id and ego
  - s. 1960s: rock 'n roll
  - t. 1960s: country music
7. Assist your students as they complete their research in the library. Encourage them to take accurate notes, complete with citations. Students will take their research home to begin working on their trading card, which should be brought to class the next day.
8. Students will have the class period to create their trading card, either in your classroom or a computer lab. The trading cards are due at the end of class.
9. Choose the best trading cards and create a laminated class pack for students to use as reference over the course of the unit. You can use the pack as background review material--the student can use the pack as flashcards, or create a game around the pack. If so desired, create a pop quiz based on the information students gather.

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Bless the Beasts & Children* (0743493699) for each student

Copies of Handout #1

Access to a library/lab with Internet

3x5 index cards

Art supplies

**How Did It Go?**

Based on the criteria you chose for them, were the students able to distinguish between reputable and non-reputable web sources? Could they successfully locate and use web sources? Were their trading cards attractive and useful? Did they successfully meet all criterion on the rubric? Finally, a question to revisit as you read the novel: did this historical research project build sufficient background knowledge to aid textual understanding?

Lesson Plan #2

**“Cotton's group was unique”**  
(A Lesson in Comparing and Contrasting)

The ability to analyze two characters—in terms of similar and dissimilar characteristics allows students to describe complex relationships in concrete terms. In this lesson, students will compare the oldest and youngest Bedwetters. The lesson gives them a step-by-step process by which to improve their skills with writing compare/contrast statements.

This activity takes one fifty-minute class period.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

**3.** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

**6.** Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

**12.** Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**What To Do:**

1. In order for this lesson to succeed, it's best if students have read through Chapter Fifteen. This gives them plenty of material to use regarding the two boys being analyzed.

2. Pass out a copy of Handout #2 to each student. Explain that today's activity will give them practice in writing strong compare/contrast statements that will only be successful if they follow specific guidelines.

3. Perform a class brainstorm on the Venn diagram. Students should brainstorm everything they can think of regarding (a) what the two boys have in common (b) those characteristics unique to Cotton and (c) those characteristics unique to Lally 2. After students have brainstormed, go over all of their potential answers. Explain that not all comparisons are created equally--for instance, "both boys are at the camp" isn't nearly as interesting as "both boys care about other living beings; Cotton provides leadership for the other Bedwetters, while Lally 2 lavishes his caring on animals." Encourage students to use their best observations to draw explicit comparisons on the backs of their sheets.

4. Students should work individually to answer the compare/contrast questions on the second side of the paper.

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5. After students have written their compare/contrast statements, encourage them to share with one another. Have peers edit one another's work to ensure that students meet all of the criterion before they turn in their compare/contrast statements.

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Bless the Beasts & Children* (0743493699) for each student

Double-sided copies of Handout #2 (one per student)

**How did it go?**

Did the graphic organizer on the handout help students draw connections between the two characters? Were they able to write strong compare/contrast statements? Could students meet all criterion on the compare/contrast rubric? Were they able to use transition words effectively?

Lesson #3

**“The herd's gonna bust out and so're we”**  
(A Lesson in Character Analysis)

The following assessment activity assumes that students have finished reading the entire novel. It is designed to develop students' confidence and effectiveness as they write literary analysis. In this lesson, students will focus their attention on one specific character. They will analyze the beginning, middle, and end of the character's story arc using close reading and critical thinking skills. Students successfully completing the activity will be able to explain how their focus character embodies a larger theme of the text.

This activity takes two fifty-minute class periods and also includes homework.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**What To Do:**

1. Begin class with a discussion of symbolism. Symbols are a concrete person, place, event, or thing used to represent something else (often an abstract idea). Ask students about the dollar sign (\$), an exclamation point (!), and tri-colored traffic lights. How do Americans interpret these symbols? What do these symbols tell us to do? How do they affect our reading of a situation—whether it's a bank statement, a sentence, or right-of-way at an intersection? If students already understand the basics of symbolism, move them directly to a discussion of more complex symbols—a white dove, a red heart, or a single long-stem rose. What do these symbols mean in our culture?
2. Explain to students that their skills interpreting visual symbols can also be used to interpret literary symbols. Remind students that in this novel, Swarthout takes a critical look at our notions of masculinity, as well as the dual currents of freedom and powerlessness in American society. Given this purpose, how might the Bedwetters (and their actions) be interpreted symbolically? On a related note, how might one use symbols to portray the Bedwetters?

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3. Tell students to pick one of the Bedwetters. They'll be creating a visual symbol to summarize the character's change over the course of the novel. Assist individuals as they identify three key moments that define their chosen character's story arc at its beginning, middle, and end. The incidents they choose should show how the boys change into men over the course of the story.

4. Pass out Handout #3, and read the general overview to students. Explain that they will start the symbol picture portion of the assignment in class, and finish it for homework. The placard paragraph portion of the assignment will be dealt with in class tomorrow—for now, they should just concentrate on the symbol picture. Direct their attention to the assessment criterion for the symbol picture. Make sure everyone understands what comprises “composition,” “effort,” and “symbolism.” Answer any questions and support individuals as they begin to create their symbolism pictures.

5. Have students take out their completed symbol pictures (last night's homework) and Handout #3. Congratulate them on last night's work and reassure them that it will make the next component much easier: they already intuitively understand how their character has grown and changed over the course of the book. Now, they just need to explain their intuitive analysis using written evidence and explanation. The paragraph they write will be hung next to their picture; this will create a classroom museum exhibit that everyone can learn from and enjoy.

6. Tell students to silently read the rest of the rubric on Handout #3 (all of the items related to the paragraph). If they successfully include all of the criteria described, they'll have a cohesive paragraph.

7. Pass out Handout #4 and explain each item. Students need to create a strong thesis statement. Their next step should be to find three key pieces of evidence from the book that (a) support their interpretation of the character and (b) allow for interesting analysis. Completing these tasks will probably take the rest of the class period. Help individual students as necessary, and encourage them to start writing the paragraph directly onto Handout #3 once they've created a thesis (their topic sentence), and located satisfactory evidence.

8. Students should finish writing their paragraph directly onto Handout #3 for homework.

9. The next day in class, students will hand in their paragraphs. You will grade them to make sure that the paragraphs meet your criteria and direct students to fix any spelling errors. (Note: students must achieve each of the criteria to pass the activity.) As you deem each paragraph satisfactory, give the student author of that paragraph a 4x6 index card. Each individual student should use his/her best penmanship as he copies his/her paragraph onto the card. Students can then turn in their placard paragraph with the symbol picture. You will post these satisfactory assignments on the classroom wall you've designated for the museum exhibit.

10. After a majority of students have posted their pictures and paragraphs, give the class a chance to walk through the exhibit and admire one another's work.

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Bless the Beasts & Children* (0743493699) for each student

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Copies of Handout #3 (one for each student)

Copies of Handout #4 (one for each student)

4x6 index cards

Art supplies for collages

**How Did It Go?**

Were students able to select appropriate evidence? Does their outline indicate a sense of organization? Did their paragraph thoughtfully examine the portrayal of a key character in Swarthout's novel? Could they consider the larger theme of masculinity/manhood in the book? Could they create a tightly locked argument by using intentional vocabulary and strong statements to relate evidence back to the thesis statement?

Handout #1

### Historical Background Trading Card: Rubric

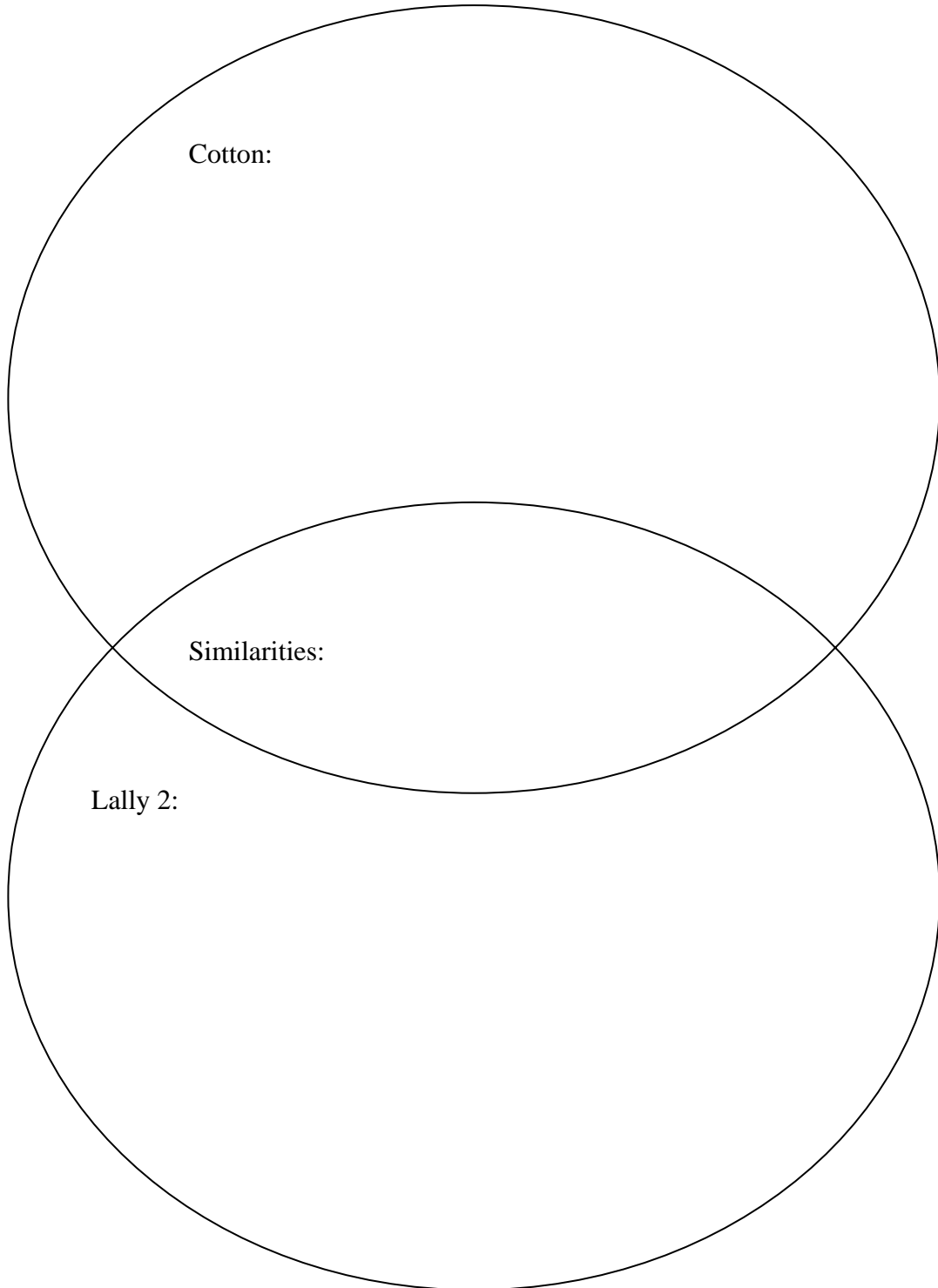
Required Elements for Trading Card:

- 3X5 index card
- Side one:
  - student's name and class period clearly stated.
  - Attractive picture/photo related to topic.
  - Citation for picture/photo.
  - Summary statement succinctly and clearly describing the topic's historical significance.
- Side two:
  - 7 pertinent facts regarding the topic
  - Parenthetical citations for each fact
  - Clearly labeled bibliography containing two correctly-formatted citations.

Category	Achieved	Not Achieved
Required elements	The card includes all required elements and perhaps some additional information.	Required elements are missing.
Parenthetical citations	All graphics and information have MLA parenthetical citations attached.	Parenthetical citations not given and/or not properly done.
Bibliography	Bibliography present and formatted correctly. Two approved sources documented.	Bibliography not present, not formatted correctly, and/or not sufficient.
Graphics—Relevance	All graphics are related to the topic and make it easier to understand. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	Graphics do not relate to the topic OR several borrowed graphics do not have a source citation.
Attractiveness	The card is attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness.	The card is distractingly messy or poorly constructed.

Handout #2 (side one)

*Bless the Beasts & Children: Venn Diagram*



Handout #2 (side two)

***Bless the Beasts & Children: Compare and Contrast***

**Directions:** Use your Venn diagram and the compare/contrast word bank (at the bottom of the page) to answer the compare/contrast questions. Make sure that you meet all criterion listed on the rubric.

A successful compare/contrast short answer response...	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses specific word choice to state a clear relationship between the two elements being analyzed. <input type="checkbox"/> Includes comparative transition words and modifiers to clarify the relationship between the two elements being analyzed <input type="checkbox"/> Supports comparisons with at least one direct citation (or close paraphrasing) concerning <u>each</u> of the elements being analyzed
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1. In the story, both Cotton and Lally 2 have difficult relationships with their parents. How does Cotton's relationship towards his mother *compare* with Lally 2's relationship with his parents? Include two details from the story in your answer.

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2. How does Cotton's relationship with the other Bedwetters *contrast* with Lally 2's relationship with the other Bedwetters? Include two details from the story in your answer.

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**Compare/Contrast: Similarities**

as	both
in addition	neither
likewise	just as... so
similarly	like
moreover	also
too	
in a similar way...	

**Compare/Contrast: Differences**

although	but
whereas	yet
conversely	instead
in contrast	on the contrary
however	
unlike	
on (the) one hand . . .	on the other hand

***Bless the Beasts & Children: Character Analysis***

Create a mural or collage that illustrates changes in one of the Bedwetters, from the character's past behavior (described in flashbacks) through the last chapter of the novel. Your art piece will be posted as part of a classroom museum exhibit. You'll also write a paragraph on a placard explaining your interpretation of the character. This will be posted alongside your collage.

<b>Achieved?</b>	<b>Criterion</b>
Y / N	<p><b>Composition:</b> elements of the collage/mural successfully arranged to create a unified piece of art.</p> <p><b>Effort:</b> Art piece shows thoughtful exertion.</p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> elements of the collage/mural successfully convey changes in the character throughout piece.</p>
Y / N	Placard paragraph: reads smoothly--uses transitions, sentence variety, and intentional word choice.
Y / N	Placard paragraph: should relate the character's story arc to one of the greater themes of the novel--what it means to be a man.
Y / N	Placard paragraph: Topic sentence is a thesis statement (stating unique subject and opinion in a clear, concise manner). Thesis statement explicitly states the argument made implicitly in the art piece.
Y / N	Placard paragraph: contains cited evidence. Three direct quotes and/or paraphrases come from beginning, middle, and end of the novel. They are cited properly using MLA parenthetical notation.
Y / N	Placard paragraph: Each piece of evidence anchored by and explained through relevant interpretation. The interpretation relates the evidence directly back to the thesis/topic sentence. No redundant restating of the obvious.
Y / N	Placard paragraph: concluding sentence ties the paragraph together.

Handout #4

***Bless the Beasts & Children Paragraph: Outline Organizer***

Thesis Statement about character: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Statement (character's beginning): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence #1: \_\_\_\_\_ ( )

Interpretation of evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Statement Sentence (character's transition): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence #2: \_\_\_\_\_ ( )

Interpretation of evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Statement (character's ending): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence #3: \_\_\_\_\_ ( )

Interpretation of evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion about character's growth: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_