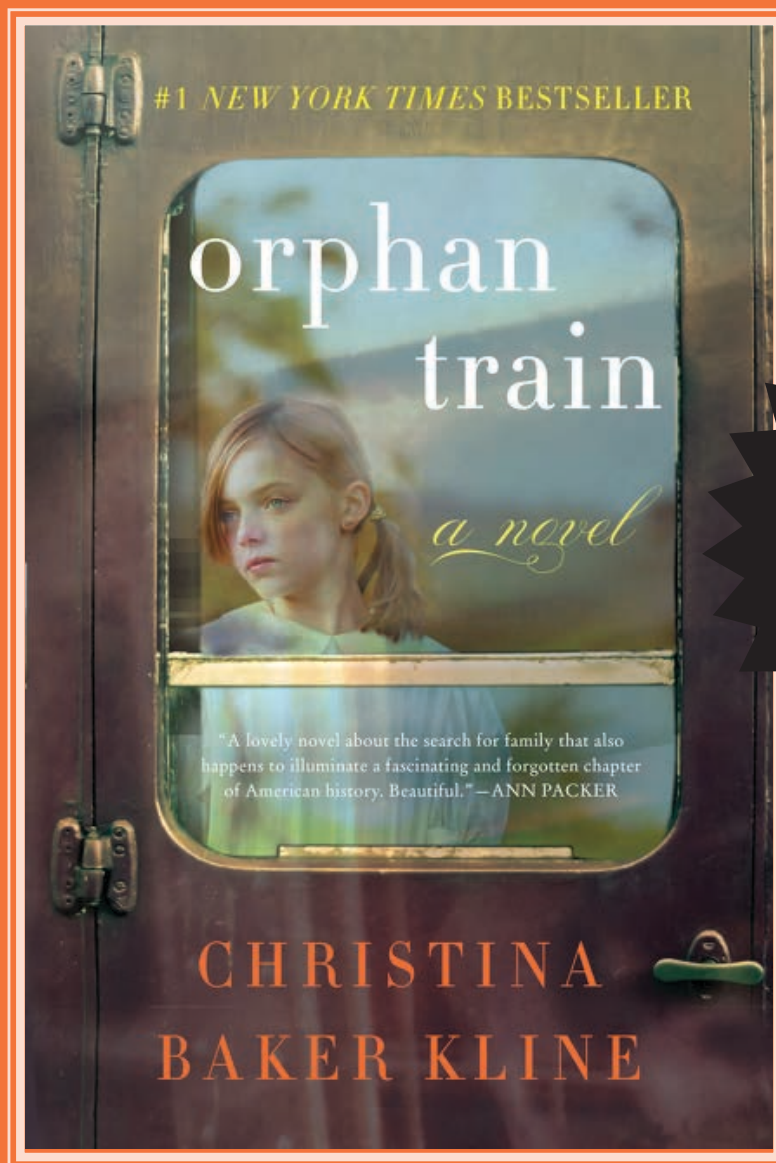


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



**ALIGNED
TO THE
COMMON
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Note to Teachers

If you have been looking for a contemporary novel to engage students and build multidisciplinary connections between American Literature and U.S. History courses, Christina Baker Kline's novel *Orphan Train* is the perfect addition to your curriculum. With two strong female protagonists and a framing narrative that links the present day with the past, Kline's novel will capture student interest and promote cross-curricular learning. The questions and activities in this teaching guide are written to support standards-based instruction. *Orphan Train* meets the standard for **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity** for grades 9-12. Since American Literature and U.S. History courses are most commonly taught at the 11th grade level, the CCSS for 11-12 grade level students are used in this guide. However, the text and guide can easily be adapted for 9-10 grade CCSS.

A complete list of the Common Core State Standards can be found [here](#).

About This Guide

This Teacher's Guide is divided into two sections. The first, "**Guided Reading Questions**," will help students with reading comprehension and appreciation. These questions can be used as a guide for annotating the text, journal responses, or discussion. Chapter-specific vocabulary lists are included as a reference. The second section, "**Writing and Research Prompts**," consists of analytical writing and research prompts and is subdivided into genres based on the Common Core writing standards. Teachers will be able to incorporate the argumentation prompts into Socratic seminars or class debates if they wish to focus on Speaking and Listening standards.

Before You Read

As an activating strategy, show students the [book trailer for the novel](#). Discuss the social problems that led to the creation of the Orphan Train program. The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness has excellent [resources](#) to guide your exploration.

Guided Reading Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

PROLOGUE

Page 2

Vocabulary: console, incarnation, solace, lamenting, tedium, jinx

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. The author includes a prologue: a vehicle for an author to establish tone and provide background and/or foreshadow the rest of the novel. Using specific textual evidence, explain how the prologue establishes mood, gives background, and foreshadows future events in the novel. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
2. Consider the names and descriptive details that are introduced in the prologue. What do these details reveal about the narrator's ethnicity? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5b**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 3 - 17

Vocabulary: affronted, prowess, conventionality, angst, wariness, loath, wayward, musty, monolith, curlicues, meticulous, dowager, recoil

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

3. Using evidence from the text, contrast Molly's relationship with her foster father and her foster mother. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
4. What object does Molly have from her past? What do you think this object symbolizes? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
5. On page 8, the author uses figurative language to describe the way that Molly controls her emotions. How does this description help develop Molly's character? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**
6. What do the details of Molly's crime reveal about her personality? If you are unfamiliar with the plot of *Jane Eyre*, look up a summary of the novel online. Why do you think this book appeals to Molly? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7**
7. What details suggest that Molly is making an effort to stay in her current foster home? At this point in the novel, what do you think is motivating her to stay? Use specific textual evidence in your response. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
8. When Terry asks Molly if she is an orphan she replies, "My mother is alive, but—yes, I consider myself an orphan"(16). How can a person be an orphan if they have a living parent? What does Molly's comment reveal about her past? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**
9. Find specific textual evidence that suggests that Vivian has an immediate connection with Molly. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

NEW YORK CITY, 1929; NEW YORK CENTRAL TRAIN, 1929

Pages 19 - 38

Vocabulary: constitution, braying, loathing, seedy, tenement, superlatives, matron, peat, milquetoast, adhere, litany, entreaties, lulled, destitution, retort, depravity, impudently, dubious

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. This section begins with the comment, “Maisie sensed it first” (20). Based on details in the rest of the chapter, what was it that Maisie sensed? Find specific textual evidence to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
2. Why did Vivian’s family leave Kinvara? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
3. Using specific textual evidence, contrast the expectations that Vivian had about her new life in America with the reality she encountered. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
4. Find evidence in the text that reveals the extent of the bond between Vivian and her sister Maisie. How would you describe their relationship? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
5. How does the author reveal the fact that, in this time period, immigrants of Irish descent were victims of discrimination and prejudice? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
6. What object from her family does Niamh/Vivian have? Why is it significant? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
7. In this section, the reader realizes that Vivian was originally named Niamh “Pronounced Neev” (28). Make a prediction about why her name will eventually be changed to Vivian. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
8. Explain what Niamh’s interactions with Carmine reveal about the relationship she had with Maisie. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
9. According to the sponsors, what is the goal of the Orphan Train? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

UNION STATION, CHICAGO, 1929

Pages 39 - 45

Vocabulary: abode, translucent, muss, appellation, ruffians, impeccable, comport, complacent, cavernous, flouted, meager, consigned

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. What do you the reality of being adopted will be for Carmine, Niamh, and Dutchy? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
2. Why does Dutchy get in trouble with the police? What do his actions reveal about his personality? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 47 - 55

Vocabulary: trivet, affront, infraction, irk, unwavering, quash, cryptic, maudlin, surreptitiously

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. Examine the way the author uses dialogue and other details to develop Dina’s character. What details do you find the most revealing? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
2. After observing the interactions of her foster parents, Molly “can’t quite figure out how Ralph fits into all of this”(49). What is your opinion of Ralph and Dina’s relationship? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**

3. What new details about Molly's past are revealed in this section? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
4. What is the first artifact that Molly helps Vivian unpack? What details about it seem significant? Why do you think Vivian kept a coat she says she did not like? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

THE MILWAUKEE TRAIN, 1929; MILWAUKEE ROAD DEPOT, 1929

Pages 57 - 68

Vocabulary: furrowed, titter, slovenly, earnest, gaping, benevolent, pious, skittish, quaking, destitution, depravity

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. What promise does Dutchy ask Niamh to make with him? Do you think they will be able to keep this promise? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
2. Cite specific descriptive details suggesting that the orphans are being dehumanized and treated like animals at an auction. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**
3. At the first train stop, Niamh notes that, "The older boys no longer seem so rough. Their masks have slipped; I see fear on their faces"(63). What is the reason for this fear? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6**
4. What terms do adults have to agree to in order to be given an orphan from the orphan train? Are there any safeguards in place to protect the children from potentially abusive homes? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
5. Based on the descriptions of the families that take Carmine and Dutchy, what sort of homes do you think each of the boys will be given? Use specific details from the text to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
6. Why do you think Niamh was not selected at the same time that Dutchy and Carmine were selected? Why would it be more difficult to find a home for an older girl? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**

ALBANS, MINNESOTA, 1929

Pages 69 - 82

Vocabulary: florid, circumspect, ravenous, austere, sweltering, rapt

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. Compare Niamh's thoughts on staying in an institutionalized home on page 69 with Molly's thoughts on page 12. What does this comparison reveal about both girls? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
2. Based on her initial interactions with the Byrnes, what sort of home do you think Niamh will find with them? Cite specific textual detail to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
3. Since they do not intend to adopt Niamh, why do you think the Byrnes choose to change her name to Dorothy? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
4. How does the author reveal that Niamh's spirit remains unbroken? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
5. Explain what the Byrnes' house rules reveal about their intentions towards Niamh/Dorothy. Do any of the rules surprise you, or are they what you expected? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 83 - 93

Vocabulary: circumspect, effervescent, apropos, non sequitur, rouse, pilfer, narcolepsy, rescind

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. What details suggest that Molly and Vivian's relationship is evolving? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
2. Why do you think Vivian connected with the book *Anne of Green Gables*? Why do you think she gives her copy to Molly? If you are unfamiliar with the story of *Anne of Green Gables*, look up a summary of the novel online.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7

3. Explain the symbolism of Molly's tattoo. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
4. Why is Terry suspicious of Molly? Do you think her suspicion is understandable? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

ALBANS, MINNESOTA, 1929; ALBANS, MINNESOTA, 1929 – 1930

Pages 95 - 112

Vocabulary: congealed, insolent, swoon, suffice, sacrilegious, trinket, desiccated, lank, procure, hearsay

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. How do the Byrnes violate the agreement they made with the Children's Aid Society? What excuse do they give for this violation? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
2. What role does the character of Fanny serve in the text? In what specific ways is she a foil for Mrs. Byrne and Mary? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
3. What is significant about Mrs. Byrne's decision to provide Niamh with clothes? Based on the revelations in this section, why do you think Vivian kept the jacket for so long? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
4. Why does the stock market crash affect the Byrnes as significantly as it does? How is Niamh's life affected by the couple's change of fortune? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
5. Find textual evidence suggesting that Mr. Sorenson feels bad both about the situation that Niamh has been in and the situation that she is going to? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

HEMINGFORD COUNTY, MINNESOTA, 1930

Pages 113 - 126

Vocabulary: qualms, slink, tepid, squalid

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. Identify specific details in the description of the Grotes' homestead that suggest neglect. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
2. Using examples from the text, explain how the author's use of imagery reinforces the idea that the Grote family lives in poverty and desperation. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**
3. Why do you think Mr. Sorenson emphasizes that the Grotes must send Niamh to school? Why does Mr. Grote agree to send her to school when the rest of his children are kept at home? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
4. Is life at the Grotes' homestead an improvement over the Byrnes', or is it worse? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
5. What is your first impression of Miss Larsen? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
6. Why do you think Niamh turns down Miss Larsen's offer to call her by her real name? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 127 - 138

Vocabulary: incentive, cackles, guerilla, pillaging

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. What specific details suggest that Dina is spiteful and jealous? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
2. Before she begins her portage project, what does Molly assume about Vivian's life? How are these assumptions an example of dramatic irony? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6**
3. Compare Molly's childhood memories on page 132 with the description of Niamh's life on page 125, noting the similarities in the girls' experiences. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
4. On page 134, Kline writes that Molly stares at a picture of Penobscot legend Molly Molasses, "looking for answers to questions she doesn't know how to ask." What questions do you think Molly wants to ask? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
5. In this section, Kline offers a more elaborate explanation of each of the charms on Molly's necklace. In your own words, summarize the significance of each charm. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**

HEMINGFORD COUNTY, MINNESOTA, 1930

Pages 139 - 167

Vocabulary: opiate, vagrant, vermin, lacerate, misconstrued, inadvertently, obscured

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. How does Kline foreshadow that Mr. Grote has bad intentions towards Niamh? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
2. Using specific details from the text, contrast Niamh's memories of her Gram and her mother with the reality of life with the Grotes. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
3. What does Miss Larsen's reaction to Niamh's cropped hair reveal about her personality? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
4. Why do you think Mr. Sorenson is hesitant to believe Niamh when she tells him about being abused by Mr. Grote? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
5. How does Mrs. Murphy reveal that she is sympathetic towards Niamh? Why do you think she treats her so kindly? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 169 - 178

Vocabulary: tamp, imbecile, vertiginous

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. What details suggest that Vivian and Molly are growing close to each other as they work together on Molly's school project? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3**
2. What do you think is the real source of the argument between Jack and Molly? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

HEMINGFORD, MINNESOTA, 1930; HEMINGFORD, MINNESOTA, 1930-1931

Pages 179 - 199

Vocabulary: indefinitely, comport, apathetic, intonation, dirge, dire,

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. Why do you think Mrs. Murphy is not able to adopt Niamh? Do you think she wanted to? Support your answer with evidence from the text. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
2. Describe Niamh's life with the Nielsens. In what ways does it exceed her expectations? In what ways is it unsatisfying? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
3. Explain why Mrs. Nielsen's offer to help Niamh polish her necklace is significant. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
4. In this section, Kline reintroduces both the Grotes and the Byrnes. What does Niamh learn about both families? Why do you think she agrees to change her name to Vivian after seeing Mr. Byrne? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**

HEMINGFORD, MINNESOTA, 1935-1939

Pages 201 - 205

Vocabulary: reprobation, impropriety, avidly, placate

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. How does Niamh/Vivian demonstrate that she has an understanding of entrepreneurship? What changes does she make to the way the Nielsen's shop is managed? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
2. Why do you think Niamh says she is uninterested in marriage? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 207 - 219

Vocabulary: pusillanimous, wan, pretenses, sycophantic

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. How does Molly's flight from her foster home mirror Vivian's experiences as a child? How do you think Vivian's past informs the way she interacts with Molly? Use specific textual evidence to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, 1939

Pages 222 - 236

Vocabulary: circumspect, raucous, tedious, flourish, abject, tamped

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

2. Why does Vivian agree to go to Minneapolis with Lillian and Emily? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
3. How does Vivian respond to the film, *The Wizard of Oz*? Why do you think the movie affects her the way it does? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9**
4. Examine Vivian's interactions with Dutchy, comparing them to the way she interacts with Lillian, Emily, and the Nielsens. How does Kline show the reader that Vivian is immediately physically and emotionally comfortable with and connected to Dutchy? Support your answer with specific evidence from the text. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**
5. What string of events lead to Vivian reconnecting with Dutchy? In what ways have their lives been similar? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**

HEMINGFORD, MINNESOTA, 1940-1943

Pages 237 - 247

Vocabulary: circumspect, disemboweled, delirious, languorous, invincible, civilian

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. How does her relationship with Dutchy help Vivian come to terms with her past? Cite specific textual evidence to support your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
2. Describe the impact that World War II has on operations at the Nielsens' store. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
3. Why doesn't Dutchy's shipmate say anything about Vivian's pregnancy when he writes to tell her about Dutchy's death and return his personal items? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1**
4. Read Vivian's thoughts during the birth of her daughter on pages 246-7. How do Vivian's thoughts help you understand her decision to give her child up for adoption? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**

SPRUCE HARBOR, MAINE, 2011

Pages 249 - 273

Vocabulary: pristine, consolation, fathom, beholden, protocol, pilgrimage, postscript, proliferate, resonance, pretense

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4a-d

1. Why does Vivian's comment that the love she felt for her second husband was "enough" affect Molly as deeply as it does? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
2. Explain Vivian's comment that, "marrying Jim was like stepping into water the exact same temperature as the air" (251). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**
3. What do you think Molly's dream on page 253 symbolizes? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6**
4. When Vivian begins researching the Orphan Train archives she discovers that she shares experiences with other riders. Explain how discovering this connection to her past empowers her. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2**
5. Kline mentions that Molly reads the novels *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* from Vivian's library. If you are unfamiliar with these novels, look up a summary of each book online. Why do you think Kline chose to allude to these novels? How does each book relate to Molly and Vivian's story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7**
6. Consider the last lines of the book: "Now then. Where shall we begin?" (273). Why is it significant that Kline chose to end *Orphan Train* with a beginning? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**

Writing and Research Prompts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.9

EXPLANATORY/INFORMATIONAL PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 (a-f) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

1. Examine Kline's choice of structure and point of view, paying specific attention to her use of a frame narrative and alternating shift from first-person to third-person present tense narration. How do these choices impact the development of character, plot, and/or theme? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9**
2. When Molly begins working for Vivian, she does so with resentment: "Molly has decided to think of this job as indentured servitude" (52). In time, however, the two women develop a bond and connection. Trace the development of the relationship between Molly and Vivian. How does Kline reveal their deepening connection? Choose specific moments in the text and use them to guide your analysis. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9**
3. On the first pages of the novel, Kline reveals a list of vocabulary words that Molly has selected because she "likes the way they sound" (5). Each of these words foreshadows later events in the novel. Analyze Kline's use of foreshadowing using Molly's list of vocabulary words: *harridan*, *pusillanimous*, *talisman*, *dowager*, *enervating*, *sycophantic*. What specific event does each word foreshadow? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9**
4. On page 93, Molly shares her favorite quote from *Jane Eyre*: "I assured him I was naturally hard—very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him diverse rugged points in my character: he should know what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it." Explain how Kline's allusion to Charlotte Brontë's famous novel about the orphan Jane Eyre enhances the reader's understanding of Molly's character. In what specific ways do both Vivian and Molly reflect Jane's comment and personality? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9**
5. *Orphan Train* illustrates how important food is as a part of our identity. Molly uses food as a part of her identity by choosing to be a vegetarian. When Vivian moves in with Mrs. Murphy, she is comforted by the cultural connection she feels to the food Mrs. Murphy serves: "The food she makes, familiar to me from Ireland, evokes a flood of memories" (179). Examine the role that food plays in your own personal and cultural identity. What is your own family origin? What role does food play in your family and/or community? Create a visual essay about the connection between food and identity. (Note to teachers: You'll find information about how to create a visual essay [here](#).) **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5**
6. On pages 97-98, Niamh discusses Irish history with Mr. Byrne. Choose one of the figures or events mentioned in this section and conduct a short research project to deepen your understanding. How do you think Irish heroes and Irish history impacted Irish immigrants in the United States? What lessons and/or character traits became part of the American melting pot? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8**
7. Part of Molly's cultural heritage is her Native American ancestry. Research the Penobscot Indians, in particular, the heroine Molly Molasses. You can start [here](#). Explain how an understanding of the Penobscot tribe enhances your understanding of the novel. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9**
8. In the novel, Molly interviews Vivian about her history and uses her findings to create a project for her American History class. Interview an older family member or member of your community about their personal history and use this information to create a PechaKucha-style presentation about their life [here](#). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5**

9. In *Orphan Train*, Kline references several significant historical events, from the Stock Market Crash to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Choose one of these moments in the novel and research the complete historical context of the event. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8
10. After Dutchy joins the military, Vivian reads George Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* and some of his essays to try to understand the culture and climate of Burma, where he husband is stationed (242). Read Orwell's essays "[Shooting an Elephant](#)" and "[A Hanging](#)." Using specific details from the texts, analyze the way these essays would have impacted Vivian's feelings about her husband's deployment. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

ARGUMENTATION PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 (a-e) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

1. Molly asks Vivian the following questions: "So is it just human nature to believe that things happen for a reason—to find some shred of meaning even in the worst experiences?" (265). How would you answer Molly's question? Is there greater meaning to be found in human suffering? Debate this question as a class. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1a-d
2. One of the themes of the novel is the role of community. On page 32, Vivian reflects, "In Kinvara, poor as we were, and unstable, we at least had family nearby, people who knew us. We shared traditions and a way of looking at the world. We didn't know until we left how much we took those things for granted." Examine the impact that the loss of community plays in the novel. How do Molly and Vivian create their own communities? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9
3. The Orphan Train project is significant because it is the first documented foster care system in the United States. Examine the development of the foster care system. Ideally, what role does foster care serve? How has the program evolved over the years? What needs to be done to improve or reform our current foster care system? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8
4. Using Kline's novel as a starting point, conduct your own research about the Orphan Train program and synthesize your findings. Links to help you begin your research can be found at the end of this guide. Ultimately, was the Orphan Train program a good or bad idea? Research and debate this question as a class. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1a-d
5. On page 55, Molly tells Vivian that she is "missing out" by not being connected to the Internet, and she eventually helps Vivian use the web to reconnect with her past. How important is it for people to stay connected via social media? Is our "connectedness" ultimately a good thing or a bad thing? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4
6. Molly seems especially interested in American history; in particular, she is interested in the ways that it connects to her own personal history. Kline writes: "In American History, they've been studying how the United States was founded on indentured servitude" (52). Research the subject of indentured servitude in America. Do you agree or disagree with Molly's history teacher's thesis? Debate this question as a class. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1a-d
7. Was Vivian's decision to give up her daughter for adoption justified? Compose a compelling argument using a variety of rhetorical strategies. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9
8. When a classmate in Molly's American History class suggests that oppressed groups should "stop their complaining," Molly challenges him and relates the experience of the Indians to the Irish under British rule (171). Research the similarities between the two historical events and compose a thoughtful argument agreeing or disagreeing with Molly's point of view. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8
9. Both Molly and Vivian have difficulty interacting with their foster mothers. Examine the role that gender plays in the relationships in the novel. Why do you think the women in the novel often serve as antagonists for each other? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

10. Imagine that you have purchased the film rights to Kline's novel and create a 5-minute multimedia "pitch" presentation for your vision of a film adaptation of the novel. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5**

NARRATIVE PROMPTS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 (a-e) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

1. One of the central motifs of Kline's story is Molly's portage assignment (Note to teachers: the details for this assignment can be found on page 131). Create your own portage assignment, examining what you would bring with you and what you would leave behind. Compose a narrative essay in response to the portage project. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
2. One of the most important adults in Vivian's life is her teacher, Miss Larsen. Compose a reflective narrative essay about your most significant teacher. Describe the impact that they had on your life. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
3. In the prologue, Vivian reflects: "I've come to think that's what heaven is—a place in the memory of others where our best selves live on"(1). Compose a personal narrative about someone important in your life. Why do they (or will they) live on in your memory? What part of their "best self" will you hold onto? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
4. Molly uses her appearance as a protective mask. "As a newcomer Molly had liked the distance her persona created, the wariness and mistrust she saw in the eyes of her peers. But though she's loath to admit it, lately that persona has begun to feel restrictive"(5). Compose a personal narrative reflecting upon the "persona" that you have created for yourself. What parts of this persona feel safe and comfortable? What parts feel restrictive? If you could move to a new school and recreate yourself with a new look and identity, what would you change? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
5. Molly holds onto her anger, reflecting that, "it kind of feels nice to nurture her resentment, to foster it. It's something she can savor and control, this feeling of having been wronged by the world" (53). Compose a compelling personal narrative about a time that you held onto your anger or resentment. What happened when you finally let go of your anger? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
6. When Vivian reconnects with Dutchy, she muses: "My entire life has felt like chance. Random moments of loss and connection. This is the first one that feels, instead, like fate"(235). Describe a moment in your life that felt like fate. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
7. The majority of *Orphan Train* centers on the first twenty-three years of Vivian's life. She reflects, "Time constricts and flattens, you know. It's not easily weighted. Certain memories linger in the mind and others disappear. The first twenty-three years of my life are the ones that shaped me . . ." (176). Compose a personal narrative examining the significance of one specific moment in your life, noting the ways that the moment shaped you. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5**
8. Research the real-life stories of *Orphan Train* riders and compose a monologue about one rider's real or imagined experience. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8**
9. Vivian remembers learning the poetry of Scottish poet [Robert Burns](#). Like art or music, poetry can help us connect to our cultural heritage and identity. Research the work of a poet that shares some element of your cultural identity and compose a poem in the style of your selected poet. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6**
10. The ending of Kline's novel suggests a new beginning for Vivian and Molly. Write an epilogue to the novel that explores what happens after Vivian and her daughter reconnect. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5 ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6**

About the Author



PHOTO BY KARIN DIANA

Christina Baker Kline was born in England and raised in Maine. She is the author of five novels, including *Bird in Hand* and *The Way Life Should Be*. Writer in Residence at Fordham University from 2007 to 2011, Ms. Kline is also a recipient of a Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Fellowship and several research fellowships to Ireland and Minnesota. She lives outside of New York City and spends as much time as possible on the coast of Maine. Visit her website at www.christinabakerkline.com.

 [Facebook.com/CBakerKline](https://www.facebook.com/CBakerKline)

Links of Interest

Christina Baker Kline's Website with [Orphan Train Resources](#)

[Children's Aid Society](#)

[National Orphan Train Complex](#)

[PBS American Experience: The Orphan Trains](#)

[NPR interview](#) with Christina Baker Kline

[Washington Post article](#) about an Orphan Train rider

Other Titles of Interest

FICTION

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian – Sherman Alexie

Jane Eyre – Charlotte Brontë

My Antonia – Willa Cather

Oliver Twist – Charles Dickens

[The Round House](#) – Louise Erdrich

A Farewell to Arms – Ernest Hemingway

[House Made of Dawn](#) – N. Scott Momaday

Anne of Green Gables – L. M. Montgomery

Burmese Days – George Orwell

The Grapes of Wrath – John Steinbeck

NONFICTION

[*Growing Up Native American: Stories of Oppression and Survival, of heritage denied and Reclaimed—22 American Writers Recall Childhood in Their Native Land*](#) - Patricia Riley, editor

[*The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*](#) - Eleanor Roosevelt

[*The Burma Road: The Epic Story of the China-Burma-India Theater in World War II*](#) -Donovan Webster

About This Guide's Author

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