

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Walking Through Mirrors by Brian Keith Jackson

## Book Information

Brian Keith Jackson, Walking Through Mirrors  
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Book Level: 5.4  
Interest Level: UG

Jeremy, a New York photographer, must journey back home to help bury his father, who left him in childhood.

**Topics:** Adventure, Discovery/Exploration;  
Adventure, Life Changes; Family Life,  
Death; Family Life, Fathers

## Main Characters

Anthony Jeremiah the man who is revealed to be Jeremy's biological grandfather

Aunt Jess Jeremy's unmarried aunt, who helped to raise him

Carol Bishop Christopher Bishop's second wife and Jeremy's stepmother; a kind woman who welcomes Jeremy into her life even though he is unable to accept her as a mother

Charles a homosexual man who lived in the rental house on Mama B's property; he was like a father to Jeremy, but was later murdered for his sexual orientation

Christopher Bishop Jeremy's father, who disappeared from Jeremy's life for a long time, only to return later with a new wife and children

Gloria a gregarious friend of Aunt Jess whose stories teach Jeremy about men and women

Helen Jeremy's mother, who dies hours after giving birth to him

Jason and Jessica Bishop Jeremy's half brother and sister; strong-willed teenage twins of Carol and Christopher Bishop

Jeremy Bishop the main character of the story; a twenty-six-year-old successful photographer who returns to his childhood home and learns the real story of his life

Kim a young unwed mother of three who leases the rental house

Mama B Jeremy's grandmother; a loving woman who raises Jeremy after his mother died and his father left

Papa B Mama B's husband; a funeral home director who lived apart from Mama B after discovering the baby she bore was not his

Patrick Daley Paul's older brother, who commits suicide while still a teen; his cause of death is kept from all but Paul and Jeremy

Paul Daley Jeremy's best friend in high school, who adopted "blackness" after his brother's suicide; he is able to console and challenge Jeremy

## Vocabulary

**alacrity** cheerful quickness

**diatribes** a long speech filled with anger

**Juggernaut** a powerful force or object that crushes things in its path

**Seconal** a drug usually prescribed to aid sleep

**segue** to make a smooth transition

## Synopsis

Jeremy Bishop, a successful twenty-six-year-old photographer living in New York, is called to return to his hometown of Elsewhere, Louisiana for his father's funeral. Jeremy was never close to his father, who abandoned him, leaving him with his grandmother, Mama B, after Jeremy's mother died hours after he was born. Jeremy first learned who his father was when he was five years old, but his father remained absent from Jeremy's life until Jeremy became a teenager.

Upon his arrival in Elsewhere, Jeremy sees many of his friends and relatives. He decides to stay at his childhood home, occupied by his Aunt Jess, who tries to convince Jeremy that his father truly loved him. Jeremy then visits his friend Paul, whom he describes as the "blackest" person he knows, even though Paul is white. As Jeremy reminisces with Paul, he thinks about a man named Charles who used to live in the rental house on Mama B's property. For many years Charles served as a father figure to Jeremy until Charles and another man were

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brutally murdered for being homosexual. While returning home drunk from Paul's house, Jeremy encounters his younger half brother, Jason, and the two get into an argument. Jeremy ends the night by visiting Mama B's grave, being pulled over by a police car, and almost sleeping with the new eighteen-year-old tenant of the rental house.

The next morning, people arrive to convey their condolences and Jeremy patches up his misunderstanding with Jason. He then asks Aunt Jess about his mother and learns that his mother was aware of the complications with her pregnancy and probably would have lived if she had listened to his father and aborted him. Jeremy spends the night at his father's house. His stepmother, Carol, tells Jeremy that his father's love for him was genuine, and she gives him a box that contains mementos of his father's past. Jeremy feels he is not yet ready to open the box.

At the funeral home the next evening, Jeremy becomes transfixed by his father's body. A mysterious man then confronts Jeremy and claims to be his grandfather. This same man had wept at Mama B's funeral, and Jeremy is stunned. Jeremy learns from Aunt Jess that the man is Jeremy's biological grandfather, as Mama B had an affair with him that resulted in the birth of Jeremy's father. The man was paid to leave and Mama B's husband gave Jeremy's father his last name, even though his marriage with Mama B soon fell apart.

After his father is buried, Jeremy returns to the grave and speaks with the cemetery caretaker. Jeremy learns that his father had come to this spot every Sunday to mourn for Jeremy's mother. Jeremy then meets his maternal grandmother, and he is finally able to admit to himself that he loved his father and his father loved him, even though they never told each other so. Jeremy returns to New York and discovers that Carol had mailed him his father's box of memories. Jeremy opens the box, which contains pictures and memories of Jeremy's life, and Jeremy is finally given a tangible indicator of his father's love.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

In what ways does Aunt Jess show concern for Jeremy's emotional well-being?

*Aunt Jess knows when something she says may be disturbing to Jeremy. Although she does not go and find Jeremy herself, she puts the word out to Paul or Jason to keep an eye on Jeremy because he may be hurting. Aunt Jess does not blurt out confidentialities, but she reveals things to Jeremy when he asks. She probably takes this as a sign that he is ready to hear things that may be difficult.*

### Literary Analysis

Other than the obscure response of, "More like St. Christopher," the author does not reveal Jeremy's father's name until the very last chapter, when Jeremy reads it on his birth certificate. How was this an effective literary tool?

*Throughout the story, Jeremy is a person in search of his father. He does not know whom his father was, what he was really like, or if his father truly loved him even though others said he did. To Jeremy he was distant, because Jeremy did not understand him. Jeremy does not feel a sense of connection with his father until after the funeral. Revealing Jeremy's father's name to the reader after that point reinforces the bond Jeremy now feels with his father. He is finally able to acknowledge that his father loved him, not only to the groundskeeper at the cemetery, but also to himself.*

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## Inferential Comprehension

Even though Carol hangs up the phone before Jeremy was able to say that she could call him Patience, what does Jeremy's willingness to allow this reveal?

*In the past, Jeremy had only allowed Mama B to call him Patience. Mama B was "mother" to him. His willingness to let Carol call him Patience shows he has come to respect and love Carol and understands she did not keep his father away from him. By staying overnight at Carol's house before returning to New York, Jeremy finally feels a bond with the family and he becomes genuinely happy for the easy banter that takes place between his family members. By allowing Carol this privilege, Jeremy is revealing a newfound willingness to reach out to others and become attached.*

## Constructing Meaning

Paul hides behind a mirror of "blackness." Was there ever a time when you needed to "hide behind a mirror" to disguise how you were really feeling? Explain.

*Answers will vary. Students handle difficulties in different ways. Some may hide their hurt behind anger, like Jason did. Others may deny their feelings and claim they are perfectly fine. Some may try to act perfect while others rebel. Some find solace in humor, so that no one can ever get close enough to hurt them.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The majority of the action takes place in the rural South. On a map of the United States, find the area Jeremy describes as the Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi corner. Write to the chamber of commerce of one of the larger towns in the area and ask for information about the region. Include in the letter requests for tourist sites as well as area culture and history. Have students give a presentation to the class about the area, emphasizing its unique flavor and what it might have to offer someone planning to move there.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Jeremy discovers many things about his past that surprise him when he returns to Elsewhere. Personal journeys to find one's roots are sometimes painful, but enlightening. Direct the students to construct a family tree and learn a bit about each of the people in it. Encourage them to look for any similarities among the relatives. Pictures of the people may be helpful in linking physical characteristics. Occupations may show an aptitude that may run along family lines. If the students wish to do so, they may share them with the class.

**Recognizing Feelings** Jeremy expresses some of his thoughts and feelings through a poem written when he was young. Have the students reread *The Coloring of Crayonville*. Discuss what message Jeremy is trying to communicate in the poem. Ask the students to compose a poem about an issue they feel strongly about.

**Responding to Literature** *Walking Through Mirrors* is a novel that provokes a reaction from its readers. Have the students act as literary critics and write a critique of the book, basing it on their reaction to the story. Responses are sure to vary. Some may see the book as poignant, while others may take offense at the handling of the various issues. The students should defend their viewpoints. As a further exercise, the students could compare various reviews of this book. They can speculate how much of a book review is based on personal preferences and subjective viewpoints.