



Classroom Guide for **DESTINY'S GIFT**

written by **Natasha Anastasia Tarpley**
illustrated by **Adjoa J. Burrowes**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.0/.5

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Intergenerational Friendship, Neighbors, Community Involvement, Reading/Love of Books, Sharing and Giving Creativity, African American Interest

Synopsis

Destiny loves words, and her favorite place in the entire world is Mrs. Wade's bookstore. She loves to spend her Saturdays with Mrs. Wade at the store, helping out during the day, and reading and sharing tea and cookies at day's end. One Saturday, Destiny senses that something is wrong with Mrs. Wade and learns that the store may have to close. Determined to save the store, Destiny rallies the community to help keep the store open. And by creating a special journal for Mrs. Wade, Destiny captures the warmth and special magic of the store while she preserves her memories of a place that means the world to her.

Background

Even during the best economic times, small businesses face many challenges to stay competitive with larger companies and remain profitable. When the economy hits a downturn, things become even harder. Rising rents, wages, and costs of materials and products all eat into profits, while at the same time sales may decrease. Independent bookstores have been especially hard hit over the past few decades, since the rise of superstores and online booksellers that often offer steeper discounts than small, independent stores. Community support is crucial to keep small, local businesses alive.

Destiny's Gift was inspired by author Natasha Anastasia Tarpley's childhood experiences visiting local bookstores. "As a kid, walking through the doors of my favorite neighborhood bookstore, I felt as though I was entering a place that was somehow separate from the noise and busyness of everyday life," says Tarpley. "The owners always remembered me. I don't know if they ever knew my name, but they could recall the last book I'd purchased from them and usually asked me what I thought about it. Then they'd steer me down crowded aisles, excitedly pulling books off the shelves for me to look at as we went along. They must have read every book in the store, because they talked about each one as if it was an old friend. . . . [T]his story encourages kids to acknowledge and celebrate all of their talents and gifts, as well as their own capacity to make a difference in their community."

Teaching Tip

Destiny's Gift is an excellent support title for social studies units that focus on places in the community and their importance.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. Think about the places and stores in your community. Which ones are most important and special to you and your family? Why? What might you do to help if you heard that one of those stores might close?
2. What is a role model? Why do you think having a role model is important?
3. What is the best gift you ever received? Was it store bought or something made especially for you? Why did the gift mean so much to you?
4. What is realistic fiction? How can you tell if a story is realistic fiction? What are some realistic fiction stories we have read?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read the title. Then show the back cover so students can see the picture. What do students think the story is about? What do they think Destiny's gift might be?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: title page, dedications, and illustrations. Explain that these expressions help tell the story.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out about who Destiny is, who received the gift, and why the gift is important.

VOCABULARY

The story contains several descriptive words and phrases, some of which may be unfamiliar to some students. Talk about the meanings of the words and phrases listed below. Then ask students to give synonyms and/or use each in a sentence that reflects its meaning.

wind chimes	landlord
tinkled	rent
dreadlocks	midbeat
pedestal	wrapped me in her arms
gobbling up (words)	stroking
author	fliers
fluffed	block party
comfy	deep breath
take a big whiff	heart pounded
wasn't her usual self	stoop
beaming	eyes lit up
	powerful gift

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding for the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. Why does Destiny love Mrs. Wade's bookstore? What are some of the things that make Mrs. Wade and her store special to Destiny?
2. How would you describe Mrs. Wade? What clues does the author give you about her personality and character?
3. What special game do Destiny and Mrs. Wade play when Destiny visits the bookstore?
4. What does Destiny write in her notebook? Why do you think she takes her notebook with her wherever she goes?
5. What does Destiny want to be when she grows up? Why?
6. Describe Saturdays at Mrs. Wade's store. What does Destiny do to help Mrs. Wade? What do they do at the end of the day?
7. What problem does Mrs. Wade face? How does she feel about the problem? How does Destiny feel about Mrs. Wade's problem?
8. What do Destiny and her family do to try and help Mrs. Wade?
9. How do Destiny's neighbors try to help Mrs. Wade's bookstore?

10. What happens at the block party? How do you think the people there feel about Mrs. Wade and her store?
11. Why does Destiny want to do something more for Mrs. Wade? What does Destiny decide to do? Do you think it is a good idea? Why or why not?
12. How do you know that Mrs. Wade likes Destiny's present?
13. How does the story end? What do you think will happen to Mrs. Wade's bookstore?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines or passages that suggest how each character feels at different points in the story.
- The **Illustrator** might create a poster advertising the visit of a real or imaginary author to Mrs. Wade's bookstore.
- The **Connector** might find other stories about children who love reading or who want to learn to read.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find more information about locally owned businesses in his or her community.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion.

1. Why do you think the author chose to call the book *Destiny's Gift*? Do you think this was a good title? Why or why not? What different meanings could the title have?
2. Why do you think Destiny loves books and reading? How do you feel about reading? Why do you feel that way?

3. The illustrator shows lots of books in the background of many of the pictures. Do any of the books look interesting to you? Which ones? Why? What are some of your favorite books?
4. How do Destiny and the people in her community show that they value the bookstore? What else could they do in the future to make sure that Mrs. Wade can keep her bookstore open?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Have students go through the book and on a separate sheet of paper, write captions for the illustrations.
2. Ask students to work with a partner or in small groups to make lists comparing the advantages of shopping in a small, local store versus the advantages of shopping in a big chain store. Which type of stores do students prefer, and why?
3. Have students retell the last part of the story from the landlord's point of view. Students might think about questions such as these as they write: How does the landlord feel about the bookstore? Why does he or she need to raise the rent? What increasing expenses might the landlord have? How might the landlord work with Mrs. Wade to help the bookstore stay open?
4. Have students write a book blurb explaining why they would or would not recommend this story to other students.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Assign each English language learner to a partner who is a strong English speaker and reader. Have the partners read the story together.
2. After the first reading, go back through the illustrations and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
3. Teach ELL students simple phrases such as "I don't know that word." "I have a question." "Speak more slowly." "Please repeat that sentence." Encourage ELL students to use these phrases to communicate their needs while reading.

4. Have each ELL student write three questions about the story.
Then have students pair up and discuss answers to the questions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. If possible, arrange for a trip to a small, local business/shop in your community. Before the trip, have students generate a list of questions to ask the owner and others who work at the business.
2. Students may be interested in becoming involved in community service projects, such as picking up litter at a public space or developing a recycling program. Ideas for numerous projects may be found online at websites such as [Kid Activites](#) and [Kids Korps USA](#).
3. Destiny is friends with Mrs. Wade, a person much older than herself. Students may wish to interview special older adults in their lives to find out how the adults' childhoods compare to their own. Technology has expanded by leaps and bounds over the past two decades, so students may discover some eye-opening differences.

Math

Have students research the cost of renting a storefront in your area. Then let the class plan an imaginary business. What items would they sell? How much would each item cost? What expenses would they have? How much of each item would they have to sell to earn enough money to pay the rent each month, once expenses were covered?

Writing

Destiny carries around a notebook in which she writes words, stories, and poems. Encourage students to keep their own notebooks or journals in which they record words, thoughts, stories, or anything else they wish to remember or create on their own.

Music

Mrs. Wade has wind chimes hanging about the door of her store. Discuss wind chimes with students and talk about why people might like to have them in their homes or stores. If possible, bring in some wind chimes made from different materials and have students compare the sounds produced by the chimes.

Art

Students may wish to make their own wind chimes. Here are instructions for making chimes from paper backing cups. Directions for making other types of wind chimes can be found online at [this site](#) and others.

Poke a tiny hole in the middle of the bottom of three regular size paper baking cups (not mini cups). Place a hole reinforcement on both sides of the bottom of each cup to protect the hole. Cut three pieces of string of different lengths (for example 8", 11", and 14") and tie a small bell to an end of each string. Pull the other end of each string through the hole in a cup so that the bell is near the bottom inside of the cup. Tie all the strings together and hang the chimes in a place where some slight movement of air will make them tinkle.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natasha Anastasia Tarpley became a writer because she fell in love with words as a child, just like Destiny in her story *Destiny's Gift*. The author of several award-winning picture books, Tarpley wrote *Destiny's Gift* to encourage children to celebrate their creative talents and realize their ability to make a difference in their communities and the lives of those they love. Tarpley has received several writing awards and fellowships, including a National Endowment for the Arts poetry fellowship. She lives in Chicago and can also be found [online](#).

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Adjoa J. Burrowes has illustrated many books for children, including two published by Lee & Low: *My Steps*, a *Child* magazine Best Book of the Year, and *Grandma's Purple Flowers*, which she also wrote, an *American Bookseller* Pick of the Lists selection. In addition, Burrowes has written and illustrated books for LEE & LOW's Bebop Books educational imprint. Burrowes received a Fine Arts degree from Howard University and currently lives in Maryland. You can find out more information about her books on her [website](#).

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Destiny's Gift* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/42/pb/destiny_s_gift

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/42/pb/destiny_s_gift (secure on-line ordering)

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