



Whirligig by Paul Fleischman

Summary:

Brent is an insecure teenager who tries to fit in. At a party, a girl dismisses his advances and he becomes angry and drunk. As he drives away from the party, he hits and kills Lea, an innocent bystander. Sinking into a greater depression, Paul finds hope in the strange request of Lea's mother. She asks that Brent constructs four large whirligigs to commemorate Lea and place them at the four corners of the United States. During his journey, Brent learns to rely on himself and begins to build a new life for himself. The novel alternates between Brent's narrative and the narratives of the people who are influenced by the whirligigs.

Whirligig -Chapter 1 and 2

Party Time

Please complete the writing activities in your Reading Response Log. Each writing should be about a page long. Make sure you label with the chapter name and activity title.

Pre-Reading – Activate Prior Knowledge

Have you ever tried to join or “fit in” but been rejected by a person or group? How did that make you feel, and what did you do about it? What were the consequences?

During Reading

- Highlight or sticky note places that describe Brent's thoughts about himself.
- Highlight or sticky note places that describe how other people view Brent.

After Reading

1. Draw a character map (see example provided) of Brent's physical and emotional traits and actions, drawing from Ch. 1.
2. Imagine Brent is talking to a psychologist – in his voice, describe what leads him to consider suicide.
3. Rewrite the party scene from another character's point of view. Make it clear who the character is and what he/she thinks of Brent.
4. Go to Google, and images. Search for images of whirligigs. Print some of your favorites and paste in your RRL.

Weeksboro, Maine

The action of the story jumps forward in time to two middle school girls who use one of Brent's whirligigs of Lea to help inspire them.

Pre-Reading – Activate Prior Knowledge

Read the handout “Facts for Teens: Teens and Alcohol.” Write a reaction to the information you read. What did you already know? What surprised you? What did you learn?

During Reading

- Highlight or sticky note places that describe the main character in this chapter.

After Reading

1. List important information (name, age, sex, ethnicity, occupation, etc.) about the character that narrates the chapter?
2. Describe the character's main conflict.
3. Explain how the character comes across one of Brent's whirligigs.
4. What effect does the whirligig seem to have on this character's life? Explain.
5. Draw and color this whirligig using the information from the book.

Whirligig -Chapter 3 and 4

Please complete the writing activities in your Reading Response Log. Each writing for "After Reading" should be about a page long. Make sure you label your notebook with the chapter name and activity title.

The Afterlife

Pre-Reading

- Read the website <http://www.itsnotanaccident.com/> . Look at the top of the page - "Drunk driving is not an accident . . . it is a choice." Do you agree with this? What does Jason's message against drunk driving mean to you? How does his story make you feel? Are you in favor of his message or against it?

During Reading

5. Sticky note or highlight how Brent feels about his "sentence."

After Reading

- Focus on the topic of guilt. The judge sentences Brent to probation in place of the detention center. Although most teenaged criminals would welcome probation, Brent wants to be punished. Discuss why Brent needs a punishment. What is Brent's reaction when he meets Lea's mother? Why does he say that he wishes his parents weren't around when he sees Mrs. Zamora? How does Brent begin to deal with his guilt on his trip? Do you feel that this is a realistic portrayal of guilt? What experiences do you have with guilt that you can relate to Brent?
 - Read the poem "The Mother Writes to the Murderer: A Letter," by Naomi Shihab Nye. First, summarize the poem in your own words. Then, compare the reaction of the poem's narrator and Lea's mother.
 - Brent sees Mount Olympus when he travels to Washington, the first stop on his journey. Why does Mount Olympus makes Brent think of the story of Hercules? Read the website <http://www.mythweb.com/hercules/herc01.html> "Hercules" and summarize the story. Then, explain the parallels between Hercules and Brent.
6. Draw the whirligig that Brent makes in this chapter.

7. Find pictures of the places mentioned in the chapter. Glue them into your RRL.

Miami, Florida

Pre-Reading

Most teenagers can recall being responsible (or hearing about someone responsible) for a "disaster" or "crisis" because they didn't take into account the impact of their behavior. Loosening the brakes on a car to play 'drive'. Throwing a water-filled balloon that breaks the victim's glasses and scars his eye. Think about a situation that either you have been involved in, or heard about, where a person made a quick, thoughtless decision or action, that had long term consequences (good or bad). You should change the names to protect the people involved.

During Reading

- Highlight or sticky note descriptions of the main character of this chapter.

After Reading

- Although we don't know his name, we know a lot about the main character of this chapter. Summarize the important information about the character that narrates the chapter. Describe the character's main conflict. Explain how the character comes across one of Brent's whirligigs. What effect does the whirligig seem to have on this character's life? Explain.
- Unlike your American peers studying this book in the US, the students of ISA have a greater understanding of this chapter because you have been this person. Describe your experiences with being the new person, in a new country/school, not understanding what is going on. What aspects of this Puerto Rican immigrant can you relate to?
- The shearwater bird is a very important symbol in this chapter. Find a picture of this bird. Paste it in your RRL. What does it symbolize and how does the character's understanding of it change?
- Research Willie Colon's band. Who is he? Why is he important in the realm of Hispanic-Americans? What type of music does he play? Why do you think this character is drawn to Willie Colon's music? (At home, you can listen to his music at his official website.)

Whirligig Chapters 5 and 6

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Pre-Reading

As you can tell from the title of this chapter, the stars will be important. Before you read the chapter, write down what you know about the constellations and stare. Then, please read the handout "Star Myths" and summarize the story. Hypothesize why the stars may be important to Brent.

During Reading

6. Highlight or sticky note places that show Brent learning to know himself.
7. Highlight or sticky note places where other people begin to influence Brent positively.

After Reading

- Describe the people Brent rides with on the bus. How are these people important to the plot of the story and Brent's journey?
- Describe the people Brent interact with at the hostel. Include quotes from the chapter. How are these people important to the plot of the story and Brent's journey?
- Describe how Brent has changed so far. "He had no desire to revive that life. It had all been crumpled in the crash." What impact has the journey has so far on him? Be specific and use quotes to prove your points.
- Sketch and color the whirligig Brent created.
- Research the places mentioned in the chapter. Print pictures and paste in your RRL.
- http://www.windows.ucar.edu/tour/link=/the_universe/Constellations/constnavi.html&edu=high
 - Go to the website above and read more about constellations. Summarize what you read and, over the next week, observe the sky. Which constellations can you find?

Bellevue, Washington

Pre-Reading

Write about a time where someone made an incorrect assumption about you based on your gender, age, race, religion, or any other stereotypical factor.

During Reading

8. Highlight or sticky note the stereotypes in this chapter.
9. Highlight or sticky note how the character feels about himself and his life.

After Reading

- This time, we know a lot about the main character of this chapter. Summarize the important information about the character that narrates the chapter. Describe the character's main conflict. Explain how the character comes across one of Brent's whirligigs. What effect does the whirligig seem to have on this character's life? Explain.
- What are the stereotypes mentioned in this chapter? How do they affect the characters?

Whirligig -Chapter 7-9

Please complete the writing activities in your Reading Response Log. Remember quality writing is important with specific examples and details – either from the book or your own experience. Make sure you label your notebook with the chapter name and activity title.

Apprentices

Before Reading

The United States is the third largest country in the world geographically, after Russia and Canada. With 9,629,091 square kilometers of land, there is bound to be major differences in regions. Often, you will hear an area be referred to as a "belt." Read the handout "Belts of the United States." Which areas have you been to or know about? What is new or surprising to you from the reading?

During Reading

This is a very important chapter in Brent's development. Pay attention to the following:

- Highlight or sticky note the “firsts” in this chapter.
- Highlight sticky note the things, people, or events that teach Brent something.

After Reading

8. “He felt like an escaped criminal who'd come face to face with his own “Wanted” poster.” (pg 87) Draw Brent's “Wanted Poster.” This is a description of a wanted poster from Wikipedia:
A wanted poster is a poster put up to let the public know of a criminal whom authorities wish to apprehend. They will generally include either a picture of the criminal himself when a photograph is available, or of a facial composite image produced by a police artist. The poster will usually include a description of the wantee and the crime(s) with which he is charged. Wanted posters are usually produced by a police or other public government body for display in a public place, such as on a physical bulletin board or in the lobby of a post office, but in ages past wanted posters have also been produced by vigilante groups, railway security, Pinkerton's, or by express companies that have sustained a robbery. Wanted posters for particularly notorious fugitives frequently offer a reward or bounty for the capture of the person, or for a person who can provide information leading to such capture.

If you've never seen a wanted poster, check out this site for examples. Notice what kind of information is given on wanted posters.

<http://libweb.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids/WC127/>

- Twice in this chapter Brent mentions a “second life.” Why does he feel this way? What indicates that he is living a new life? Again, highlight how Brent is different from the person he was in the first two chapters, using examples from this chapter.
- There are many uses of the word “stranger” in this chapter. In what instances is the word used – referring to who and why? Why is this such an important word in this chapter.
- Brent compares himself to Robinson Crusoe and Rip Van Winkle. Find out who these people are and why Brent feels he is like them.
- Why is this chapter entitled Apprentices? Find out the meaning of the word. Who are the apprentices? What are they apprenticed to?
- Draw the whirligig Brent makes in this chapter.

San Diego, California

Before Reading

- Most of you are familiar with the Holocaust, from our study last year. Summarize what you know about the Holocaust and Auschwitz.
- If you don't know much about the Holocaust, then go to this site and read about it and summarize what you learned: “The Holocaust: A Brief History for Young Children.”
http://www.cdli.ca/CITE/ns_camps.htm

During Reading

- In this chapter, there is another journey. Highlight or mark the parts of the journey.
- There are two contrasting characters – highlight or mark descriptions of the characters.

After Reading

- What favor did Jenny's grandmother ask of her? Describe the journey. Why did Jenny's

grandmother want to go on the journey? What was the last thing that Jenny and her grandmother saw? Why was it so special? Explain your answer.

- How does the author use the Holocaust to develop the story in this chapter? What effect does the Holocaust have on each character?
- What was Jennifer's explanation about why her parent's gave her the name Jennifer? What effect did this have on Jennifer? How important do you think a person's name is? Why? How did you get your name? What does it mean? Does it fit you, or would you like to change it? Why?
- Where do the characters encounter the whirligig? What is the importance of it?
- Find pictures of the places mentioned in this chapter, and not just San Diego. Look for words with capital letters that indicate a place. But, do remember that it is in San Diego, so add that to your search terms.

Everybody Swing

Before Reading

- "The world itself was a whirligig, its myriad parts invisibly linked...." (pg 133) Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

During Reading

- Highlight or mark sections that show Brent's feelings about himself and his journey.

After Reading

- Brent had an opportunity to visit relatives of his. Why does he choose to continue on his trip without stopping to visit?
- How do the characters in this chapter add "color" to the world around them? Who are they and what examples can you give of the "colorful" characters? Does this "color analysis" work with people you know?
- The following quote refers to a musician from 1681 that is still listened to today. "The darkness swallows up most of us." How does this quote relate to Brent's life?
- Why did Brent tell his story to the artist? What realization did he come to in the process?
- "It felt to Brent like a rite of reentry." (pg 131) What does this quote refer to? What was the "rite" and what is he "reentry"?
- There is a lot of talk about books in this chapter. What is the importance of these books in Brent's journey? What does he learn from them – both literally and figuratively.

Belt Regions of the United States

In the United States, roughly defined regions that have a feature in common are colloquially called "belts", after the article of clothing. The common feature may be cultural, economical, geographical, or some combination of the three. The term is applied metaphorically to contiguous geographic regions; it is unrelated to the geologic or astronomical use of the term.

The first such coinage was the Bible Belt, which has a clear east-west orientation, perhaps contributing to the use of "belt" as a metaphor.

These regions are not formally defined; they frequently overlap each other and have vaguely-defined borders. Many "belts" are neologisms coined by tourism or commercial promoters or by writers ad hoc.

List of regions

- Bible Belt, southeastern and midwestern states where evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism is prevalent.
- Black Belt, a region of fertile farmlands in the Southeast now known as a region of persistent poverty with a high ratio of African-American residents.
- Black Belt (region of Alabama), a section of Alabama (and extending into Mississippi) having a particular concentration of the same characteristics.
- Borscht Belt, a region of Jewish resorts in the Catskills
- Citrus Belt, a region running across the southern and southwestern states, but particularly Southern California and Florida, known for its oranges and grapefruit
- Corn Belt, midwestern states where corn is the primary crop
- Cotton Belt, southern states where cotton is or was a primary crop
- Dairy Belt, a region in north-eastern USA, where silage is grown for dairy cattle
- Fruit Belt(s), regions where fruit is the primary agricultural output, often around the Great Lakes (see also Lake Erie Grape Belt)
- Grain Belt, sometimes Wheat Belt, northern midwestern states where most of North America's grain and soybeans are grown
- Grazing Belt, extensive pasture farming in the prairies of central USA
- Irrigated Crops Belt, substantial watering of vegetables, cotton and animal food (central USA).
- Jello Belt, western states with a large Mormon population
- Lake Erie Grape Belt, northern Ohio, northwestern Pennsylvania, and Western New York, where Concord grapes are grown
- Peach Belt, southeastern states where peaches are grown
- Porn Belt, a derisive term coined by The Wall Street Journal for the coastal states which voted for Al Gore in the 2000 U.S. presidential election
- Rice Belt, southern states where rice is a major crop
- Rust Belt (also known as the Manufacturing Belt), northeastern and central northern states where heavy industrialization—and some economic stagnation—is common
- Snowbelt, areas in the Northeast and northern Midwest prone to lake effect snow
- Stroke Belt, an area in the southeastern US where death rates from stroke range from 1.5 to 2 times the national average
- Sun Belt, southern, hot-weather states stretching from coast to coast
- Tobacco Belt, southeastern states where tobacco is or was a primary crop
- Tornado Belt, more commonly Tornado Alley, central states reputed to receive many tornadoes

"Belt Regions of the United States." [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt_regions_of_the_United_States). Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 17 November 2006. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt_regions_of_the_United_States>

Design a Whirligig

Objective:

Design a whirligig to memorialize, celebrate, and/or commemorate a person who has influenced you.

Requirements:

- Must be 3-dimensional
- Must have a part that will spin in the wind
- Must be colorful
- Must represent the person
- Must have a pole or rod to post in the ground
- Can be of any size
- Can use any material - wood, cardboard, recycled materials

You will also need to turn in a formal essay describing the person, highlighting the reasons you selected him/her, and explaining the design of your whirligig.

Due: October 23, 2006

Resources: Check out these sites for ideas

From Windmills to Whirligigs - pursue the site, but especially "Try These."
<http://www.smm.org/sln/vollis/>

Whirligigs & Thingamajigs- 2 ideas at the bottom
<http://www.mothersgoose.com/Whirligig/whrlgig.htm>

Wind Spinner or Whirligig
<http://www.wwwvisions.com/bbc/windspin.htm>

A Pop Bottle Whirligig
http://favoriteprojects.com/a_pop_bottle_whirligig.htm

Plans for Making a BottleGig Whirligig - check out the rest of the site too - lots of examples!
http://www.beamscreations.com/pages/plans_bottlegig_index.html

Road Runner Whirly-Gig - good to see how a basic design is created
<http://www.binkyswoodworking.com/RoadRunnerWhirlyGig.html>

Make a Pinwheel
<http://www.leslietryon.com/3dcolorecutout/makepinw/makepinwheel.html>

“The Mother Writes to the Murderer: A Letter”

"Alicia didn't like sadness."

-- *The Dallas Morning News*

To you whose brain is a blunt fist
pushed deep inside your skull
whose eyes are empty bullets
whose mouth is a stone more speechless
than lost stones at the bottoms of rivers
who lives in a shrunken world where nothing blooms
and no promise is ever kept

To you whose face I never saw but now see
everywhere the rest of my life

You don't know where she hid her buttons

arranged in families by color or size tissue-wrapped in an oatmeal box
how she told them good-night sleep well
and never felt ashamed

You don't know her favorite word
and I won't tell you

You don't have her drawings taped to your refrigerator
blue circuses, red farms

You don't know she cried once in a field of cows
saying they were too beautiful to eat

I'm sure you never thought of that

I'm sure nothing is too beautiful for you to eat

You have no idea what our last words were to one another
how terribly casual

because I thought she was going a block away
with her brother to the store

They would be back in ten minutes
I was ironing her dress
while two houses away an impossible darkness
rose up around my little girl
What can I wish you in return?
I was thinking knives and pistols
high voltages searing off your nerves
I was wishing you could lose your own life
bit by bit finger by toe
and know what my house is like
how many doors I still will have to open
Maybe worse would be for you to love something and have it snatched up sifted out of your sight
for what reason?
a flurry of angels recalled to heaven
and then see how you sit
and move and remember
how you sleep at night
how you feel about mail my letter to you
all the letters passing through all the hands
of the people on earth
when the only one that matters
is the one you can neither receive
nor send

by Naomi Shihab Nye

from *Hugging the Jukebox*

reprinted in *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*