

EDUCATOR GUIDE FOR

THE F WORDS

A NOVEL BY BARBARA GREGORICH

384 pages

ISBNs: 978-1-952536-26-7 Softcover | 978-1-952536-27-4 eBook



Cross Your Heart
A City of Light Publishing imprint

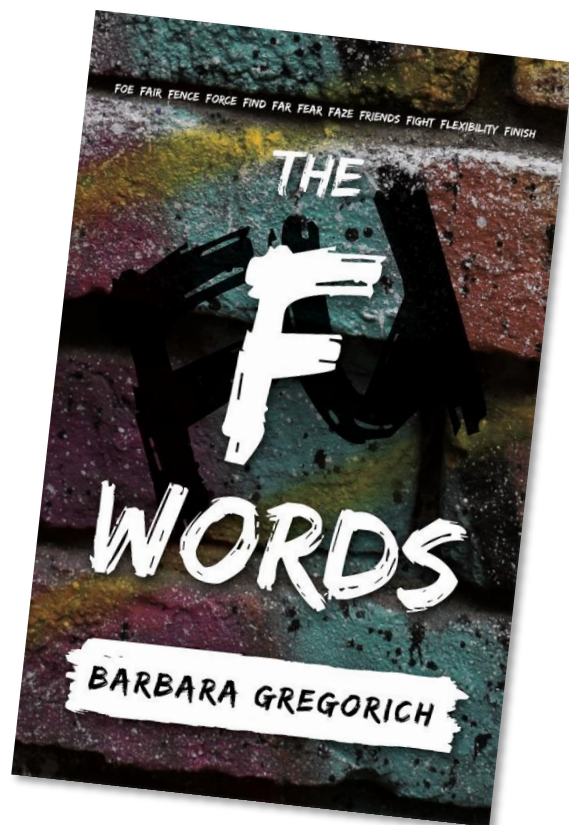
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This guide contains many suggestions that educators might find helpful when teaching nearly any subject (math, science, geography, history, art...), but especially social justice themes – and poetry! *The F Words* provides a rich array of provocative discussion starters, assignments, and group activities. The suggestions, which are modeled on state curriculum guidelines regarding analysis, compare-contrast, making predictions, recall, etc., include cross-curricular activities and, like the novel itself, recognize and support diversity.

Section One is organized by chapter groups (five chapters at a time), so that educators can begin to use the suggestions and activities even before students have finished reading the book. It is, in brief, a chapter approach to the book. Section One also emphasizes the types of skills that state boards of education expect high school students to have (the ability to analyze, for example).

The suggestions in Section Two are based on the assumption that students have read the entire book. These questions are larger in scope and require more thought and analysis. The questions in Section Two center around literature and writing, emphasizing topics such as character, conflict, and theme. Educators may switch back and forth between these two sections as needed.



SECTION ONE

CHAPTERS 1-5

CHAPTER 1

1. **Lists** — In chronological order, list the surprises that Cole encounters in the first chapter.
2. **Details**— What details help reveal that this story is set in Chicago?
3. **Analysis** — Write several paragraphs analyzing the importance of running to Cole, using evidence from this chapter.
4. What are some early clues that Cole has a sense of humor?

CHAPTER 2

1. **Research and Conclusion** — In his meeting with Ms. Delaney Cole says he has the right to remain silent. Where did this right come from? Research the right to remain silent and write a brief report on its history, drawing a conclusion.
2. **Discuss/Debate** — Do you agree that people should have a right to remain silent? Why or why not?
3. **Words/Meanings** — What are the origins of the word *solvent*? As an adjective, it has two different definitions, one applying to finances, the other to chemistry. Can you determine which definition came first? Did the second come from the first? What, if anything, is the relationship between the two definitions?
4. **Diversity/Language** — Chapter 2 contains the first examples of Cole and Felipe conversing in both Spanish and English. Do you enjoy this? Why or why not? What does it say about Cole that he speaks Spanish?
5. **History/Analysis** — Do some research to learn about German Americans during the Civil War. What role did they play? How important were they? Why were so many of them such experienced soldiers?

CHAPTER 3

1. **Compare and Contrast** — In Chapter 3, Cole and his mother see the list of rules for prisoners and visitors to Cook County Jail. Create a chart listing these rules. Think about the rules. Is this how you would run things if you were in charge? Would you be more strict? Less strict? Next to each item on the chart, write what your rule would be.
2. **Analysis** — In Chapter 3 Cole thinks about his father: *It feels like he's in jail on the inside, and we're in jail on the outside*. What do you think he means by that thought? Do you agree or disagree? Can people on the “outside” be in jail in any way?

- 3. Write a Poem** — In Chapter 3 Cole and his mother are looking at the computer screen of Do's and Don'ts for Cook County Jail, and Cole puts his finger on the word *Food*. But he doesn't even think of it as an F word. Why not? Write a poem titled "Food."

CHAPTER 4

- 1. Slogans** — What slogan does Felipe come up with for his campaign? Do you think it's a good one? Discuss. If you were running for class president in your school, what slogan would you come up with?
- 2. Metaphor** — Felipe's mother refers to ICE not by name, but by metaphor. She calls them "the cold ones." How does her metaphor suit this organization? What names would you call them if you wanted to refer to them without saying their name?
- 3. Objective vs. Subjective** — Do you think that "the extension of rights for Americans" is an objective way to describe the 1920 amendment which gave women the right to vote and the 1924 law that gave citizenship to Native Americans? Do you think that the phrase Cole and Felipe prefer, that women and Native Americans "won the right" is more objective? Less objective? Describe this situation in two ways, first using the least objective expression you can, then using the most subjective expression you can.
- 4. Different Point of View** — Write a poem entitled "Just Jillian," from Jillian's point of view.

CHAPTER 5

- 1. Internal vs. External Reality** — What kinds of things, external and internal, does Cole think about as class progresses? Do you think it's normal for people to be thinking "in and out" of a subject as they're sitting, listening to information? How is this different from watching a movie or reading a book?
- 2. List** — List the ways that help you see that Cole is attracted to Treva from the beginning
- 3. Analysis and Conclusion** — If Mr. Nachman asked you where you stand on Thoreau's sentence about what kind of house a person should have, how would you answer? Analyze the pros and cons of different sizes of houses. Draw a conclusion

CHAPTERS 6-10

CHAPTER 6

- 1. Dialogue** — Do you see any humor in Cole and Treva's initial discussions? Rewrite one of their dialogue scenes from this chapter so that the scene contains no humor at all. Which scene appeals to you more: the one you wrote, or the one the author wrote? Why?
- 2. Analysis** — How is "Fluster" different from the other poems Cole has written so far? What influences him to write it?

- 3. List** — Using only Chapter 6, make a chronological list of the indications that Cole thinks about words that start with the letter *F*? What does it tell us about Cole that he's totally into Mr. Nachman's assignment?

CHAPTER 7

- 1. Math** — In Chicago, if your friend lived 28 blocks away, what is the distance in miles? If you ran an eight-minute mile to your friend's house, how long would it take you to get there? If you walked a 15-minute mile, how long would it take you to get there?
- 2. Analysis, Categories, Conclusions** — What are the different names that the Ramirez family calls Cole? Which, if any, do you like? Why? Do you think the nicknames have any relevance to the story? Think about nicknames in families, in sports, among friends, in politics. Put the nicknames into at least three different categories. Draw a conclusion about nicknames.
- 3. Art** — Illustrate, in color, the kitchen in Felipe's house.
- 4. Predictions** — Felipe's mother is confident he will win the election for class president because he is very sociable. Do you think that being sociable is an important qualification for winning an election? Describe the ways in which you think Felipe is sociable. Do you think he will win the election?
- 5. Discuss/Debate** — When you were in grade school, did you walk to school or take a bus? Or were you drive to school by your parents? Do you think that grade-school kids should live within walking distance of their schools? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 8

- 1. Cause and Effect** — This chapter begins with Felipe's reaction to Jillian's campaign slogan. Discuss her slogan and his reaction in terms of cause and effect. Do you empathize with Felipe's reaction? Why or why not?
- 2. Geography** — Felipe states that the Americas extend from Tierra del Fuego to Ellesmere Island. Where is each of these places? Do you think of only citizens of the U.S. as "Americans," to the exclusion of other residents of North or South America? Why? Do you think this is right?
- 3. Objective vs. Subjective** — In Canada, people refer to the U.S.A. as "the States," as do some other countries around the world. They will ask, "Are you from the States?" or they'll say, "I've visited the States." Why do you think they use these terms? If you visited Canada, would you make an effort to adjust your language, so that you state you're from "the States" rather than that you're "American." Why or why not? Discuss the meaning of "American" first objectively and then subjectively.
- 4. Other Languages** — Discuss Treva's attempts at speaking Spanish. What does she get right? What does she get wrong? Have you ever tried speaking another language by imitating forms of speech, only to find

that there are exceptions? Can you think of other words in Spanish that don't follow the normal pattern of speech, spelling, or grammar? Can you think of words in English that do the same?

CHAPTER 9

1. **Analysis and Prediction** — When Cole, Felipe, and Treva walk into the schoolyard with the *Fa mi lia* posters the next morning, which fellow student helps them start off the campaign photos? What does she do that sets a tone for the photos? Do you think that what she does will help or hurt Felipe's campaign? Explain why.
2. **Compare and Contrast** — In this chapter, Cole learns that Treva's father died three months ago. How does it make Cole think a bit differently about his father being in jail? In what ways are their losses similar? In what ways are their losses different?
3. **Vocabulary** — In class, Cole asks Mr. Nachman what the word is for a bombardment of things. What is that word? Why is Cole thinking of it? Write out a definition of the word. Be sure to include word origin information and be sure to use the word in a sentence.

CHAPTER 10

1. **Discuss and Debate** — Cole thinks that guards and the prison system listening in on what prisoners say is an injustice. Do you agree or disagree?
2. **Math** — Stacey Renner urges Cole to think about math to calm him down. How does she relate the math to Cook County Jail? Going from Cole's answer of "1,350 houses," work back to the original question. Make a chart showing how 96 acres ends up being 1,350 houses.
3. **Analysis** — What phrase does Emerald Jackson use about Cole's father? Why does Cole agree with this? Who else does Mrs. Jackson apply the phrase to? What is a political prisoner? Explain why you agree or disagree that Cole's father is a political prisoner.

CHAPTERS 11-15

CHAPTER 11

1. **Analysis** — Cole and his mother both tell each other that they have to be strong for Hank. What does this mean? In what ways are they strong for him? Give examples.
2. **Description** — Describe the visiting conditions at Cook County Jail as experienced by Cole and his mother. If you were in charge of prison visits, what would you do different?
3. **Cause and Effect** — Cole writes two poems in this chapter. What are they about? What causes him to write them? Why does he decide to not show them to Mr. Nachman?

CHAPTER 12

1. **Pros and Cons** — When Treva tells Cole that she might be changing her mind about being an anarchist, she says she's been talking to people. When Cole asks her who, what does she reply? What are the pros and cons of "naming names?"
2. **Analysis of Motivation** — When Jillian tells Treva, "I'd like to talk to Cole. Alone," what do you think she expects to happen? Is she dissing Treva? Explain your reasons for thinking yes or no. What happens that is the opposite of Jillian's expectations? What does this scene tell us about Jillian? What does it tell us about Treva?
3. **Vocabulary** — Ms. Delaney tells Cole to not talk to her "in that insolent tone." What does *insolent* mean? Do you agree or disagree that Cole was being insolent when he asked the question she reacted to?
4. **Analysis** — Upon leaving the principal's office, Cole writes the poem "Fence." In what way is the poem a response to what just happened in Ms. Delaney's office?

CHAPTER 13

1. **Details** — What are the indications that Felipe is nervous on election day?
2. **Biology** — Cole's eighth period biology class is studying plant parts. Illustrate, in color, a plant cross-section, with all the parts labeled.
3. **Nutrition** — Make a list of plant parts (root, stem, flower, seeds, etc.), and next to each part write the names of two vegetables from that part of the plant. Example: Root = Radish.
4. **Objective vs. Subjective** — Cole looks up the word *curfew*. Do the same. Write an objective explanation of the word. Then, in a separate paragraph or paragraphs, write a subjective explanation of the word.

CHAPTER 14

1. **Lists** — Treva asks Felipe what student issues he plans to tackle now that he's class president. What issues would you raise if you were class president? Rank them from most important to least important.
2. **Discuss/Debate** — Felipe says that teaching-to-testing drives kids out of school, especially Latinx kids. Discuss or debate this.
3. **Analysis** — What is Cole's reaction to Jillian's anguish over losing the election? Do you think that being an athlete helps shape Cole's attitude? How do athletes take losing?
4. **Predictions** — Jared Anderson threatens Cole. Do you think he will carry out his threat? Why do you think so? Is Cole worried? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 15

1. **Compare-Contrast** — Cole's coach tells runners they need both fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles. Create a chart on which you compare and contrast fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles.
2. **Literal vs. Figurative** — In the chart above, you compared literal fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles. Now discuss these muscles figuratively.
3. **Analysis and Detail** — Do you think that what Coach says about Cole is true: that he has great discipline and that he understands strategy? Give examples to support your argument.

CHAPTERS 16-20

CHAPTER 16

1. **Vocabulary** — Fatima invites Cole to a rally. What, exactly, is a *rally*? Look this word up and write one or two paragraphs about its origins. Once you know its origins, do you feel any differently about the word? Under what circumstances would you use this word?
2. **Details** — What things does Cole like about working at Mrs. Green's?
3. **Compare-Contrast** — What is the F word which Cole says means *a contemptible person who informs on others*? Write a paper in which you compare a fink to a whistleblower.

CHAPTER 17

1. **Analysis** — Many different kinds of sports are held outdoors, no matter the weather. Cross-country is one of these. What are the conditions like in the race Cole runs? How does he do? What is the relationship between Cole's "braving the elements" and his journey through high school?
2. **Compare** — What types of things can cause confusion in a cross-country race? How do these "confusers" relate to real life?
3. **Recall** — Near the end of the race, Cole falters because he starts thinking that neither his mother nor his father can come to see him race. What saves him?

CHAPTER 18

1. **Analysis of Expectations** — When Cole and his mother go on their second visit to Cook County Jail, what is the result? How does it make them feel? How does it make you feel? What do you think might happen?
2. **Recall** — Who is Della Kazarian? What does she say she will do?

CHAPTER 19

1. **Analysis** — Cole’s mother says, “Baking is my therapy.” Discuss what she means by that. Do you know people who have “therapies” of this kind? Give a few examples. Explain the importance of such “therapies.”
2. **Recall** — What does “*Podemos soñar*” mean? What is Felipe referring to when he says it?
3. **Plants and Nutrition** — Is Felipe right about the origins of the pumpkin? Read about this vegetable and write a brief report on it. Be sure to include origin, growing season, growing regions around the world, harvesting, and importance as a food crop (including nutrition).
4. **Communication and Protest** — What is your favorite protest sign from the pro-immigrant rally? If you had the opportunity to make and carry your own sign, what would it say? What would it look like? Create a digital version of the sign.

CHAPTER 20

1. **Analysis** — This is the first chapter in which a poem stands by itself. What is the importance of this poem? What is your conclusion as to why the poem has its own chapter?
2. **Discuss/Debate** — Agree or disagree with Cole’s statement that the “system” uses fear as a weapon. Give examples to support your argument.

CHAPTERS 21-25

CHAPTER 21

1. **Analysis** — What household task does Cole do in this chapter that his father used to do? How did his father prepare Cole for this? Analyze: When a parent goes away for a long time, such as to jail or prison, what tasks fall on those who remain? How does this create difficulties in the household?
2. **Compare-Contrast** — When everybody asks Della Kazarian how she took the photo of Hank, she doesn’t answer, nor does she acknowledge the guesses. In what way is this similar to Treva’s not naming names?
3. **Understanding Decisions** — What major decision about himself does Cole make at the end of this chapter? Do you think this decision will have repercussions as the story continues?

CHAPTER 22

1. **Word Play** — What’s the word play in the poem “Fear 2.” Word play calls attention to the words being used. Is this important? Why or why not?

2. **Analysis** — Who do you think Cole is speaking about in this poem? Himself? His father? Somebody else? How does this poem relate to the decision Cole made at the end of the previous chapter?

CHAPTER 23

1. **Vocabulary**—Mrs. Green uses the word *spiffy*. Look up the word and write a paragraph about its origins and meaning. Then write a poem entitled “Spiffy.”
2. **Art; Objective vs. Subjective** — Illustrate, in color, what you think Mrs. Green’s Greenhouse looks like during the fall months. Describe the art objectively. Then describe it subjectively.
3. **Analysis and Judgment** — Do you think that Jillian is a fink? Or wants to be one? Do you think she operates like a fink would when she attends the tenth grade officers meeting?
4. **Compare-Contrast** — What are some of Felipe’s duties as class president? How do his duties compare to the duties of a class president in your school?
5. **World History** — Who was Zapata? Why does Felipe raise a fist and shout, “*Viva Zapata!*”

CHAPTER 24

1. **Write a Poem** — Felipe sets Cole up to say “us” when Cole is talking about himself and Treva. Later in the same scene, Cole uses the word “us” to refer to himself and Felipe. Write a poem entitled “Us.”
2. **Details** — In this chapter, Cole senses that Ms. Delaney is after Felipe in some way. Make a list of the ways Cole tries to protect Felipe, even though Cole isn’t sure what’s going on.
3. **Cultural Diversity** — Henry Thunder is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Read about the Ho-Chunk and draw a map of where they lived: their territory.

CHAPTER 25

1. **Recall** — What is the Crow’s Nest, and why does Mr. Nachman tell Cole about it?
2. **Analysis** — What is Mr. Nachman’s purpose in speaking to Cole in this chapter?
3. **Research and Analysis** — Write a report on Old Norse, explaining what it is, what happened to it, and in what ways it still lives today.
4. **Objective vs. Subjective** — Write a one-paragraph objective description of something you’re interested in. Then write a one-paragraph subjective description on the same topic. After you finish, analyze the words you used. Did your objective description contain more words of French-Latinate origin? Did your subjective one contain more words of Old Norse or Anglo-Saxon origin? Discuss.

CHAPTERS 26-30

CHAPTER 26

1. **Recall** — Of the two types of poetry (syllable count and form) that Mr. Nachman tells Cole about, which does Cole choose first? Why?
2. **Analysis** — On Cole's first attempt to rewrite his "Force" poem into a cinquain, he stops after three lines and thinks: *Problems. Lots of problems.* Look at those first three lines and explain what the problems are.

CHAPTER 27

1. **Predictions** — Once again, Cole asks Felipe what's bothering him, and once again, Felipe replies that it's nothing. What do you think is bothering Felipe? Explain why you think so.
2. **Discuss/Debate** — Discuss or debate Felipe's statement to Jillian: "You really should learn Spanish, Jillian. Spanish and English are the languages of the Americas."
3. **Research** — Cole writes a form poem, a rondelet, for Treva. Write a report on the history of the rondelet.
4. **Write a Poem** — Write a rondelet on any subject of your choice.

CHAPTER 28

1. **Dialogue** — In Cole's last race of the season, he's feeling bad that neither his mother nor father can come, nor can Felipe (because he's in Wisconsin). He looks for Treva but doesn't see her. Imagine that Coach notices how Cole is feeling and speaks to him. Write the dialogue between Coach and Cole.
2. **Alliteration** — Mr. Nachman's encouragement, "Flashy finish, Cole! Flashy finish!" is an example of alliteration. Write three or four of your own encouragements to Cole, using alliteration that starts with the letter *F*.

CHAPTER 29

1. **Health and Healing** — When Cole and his mother visit his father again in jail, Hank Renner has yellow-green bruises on his jaw and arms. What is a bruise? What is its purpose in the healing cycle? What happens to a bruise over the course of a few weeks? What causes the color change? Read about bruises and write a report on them, answering the questions above.
2. **Vocabulary and Analysis** — On the way home from the visit, Cole and his mother talk about resilience. What is resilience? Why is it important?

CHAPTER 30

1. **Lists** — Make a list of the ways in which Cole tries to diffuse the situation with Jared Anderson.
2. **Similarities and Differences** — Write a compare-contrast piece on the ways in which Cole's confrontation with Jared is similar to his father's confrontation while in jail, and the ways in which it's different. If you think that the more important part of the comparison is the similarities, then start your composition with the differences, so that you end on the strong point of the similarities. And vice versa if you think the more important part is the differences.
3. **Anticipation** — Readers anticipate what will happen next in a novel. As Chapter 30 ends, Mrs. Teklova marches Cole and Jared into Ms. Delaney's office. Write a paragraph about what you think will happen next.

CHAPTERS 31-35

CHAPTER 31

1. **Vocabulary and Analysis** — Define the word *ominous*. Did you feel it was ominous when Ms. Delaney dismissed Mrs. Teklova? Explain how and why.
2. **Vocabulary and Distinctions** — Ms. Delaney says that Cole participated in a brawl. Cole says it wasn't a brawl. Look up the word *brawl* and write several paragraphs taking either Ms. Delaney's side or Cole's side.
3. **Analysis and Metaphor** — In what way do Cole's fast-twitch muscles want to respond to Ms. Delaney giving him a suspension? In what ways do his slow-twitch muscles take over?

CHAPTER 32

1. **Write Ballad Stanzas** — What is a ballad? Why do you think Cole comes up with the idea of a ballad stanza while he's waiting for his mother to talk to the principal? Write two additional ballad stanzas to follow the one that Cole wrote.
2. **Compare/Contrast** — Cole's mother tells him, "Clear your strategy with me before you implement it." Do you think this is fair? Why or why not? Write a compare-contrast piece on how your parent(s) would handle the situation if you were suspended and wanted to stage a protest in front of the school (comparing Stacey Renner's response to that of your parent/s).

CHAPTER 33

1. **Discuss/Debate** — Felipe thinks that a self-governing student body would expel Jared Anderson for bullying. Cole thinks maybe not. What are Cole's reasons? Which point of view do you favor? Discuss

or debate the pros and cons of suspending or expelling a bully versus requiring them to attend anti-bullying classes.

2. **Word Origins** — When Treva proposes the word *expunge*, Felipe asks who's going to understand that word. When Felipe proposes the word *rescind*, Treva says, "Oh, rescind. Nice easy word." Write a paragraph on the origin and meanings of *expunge*, and another paragraph on the origin and meanings of *rescind*. Which of these two words would you be more inclined to use? Why?

CHAPTER 34

1. **Analysis** — What word that's a synonym of both *expunge* and *rescind* did Cole, Felipe, and Treva end up using? Do you think this was the best word choice? Why or why not?
2. **Sound Bite** — Cole gives a very quick statement to the first reporter who interviews him. Write your own statement of what you would say if you were Cole.
3. **Protest Posters** — Imagine that you are a student at August Mersy High and Felipe has just offered you the opportunity to make your own poster. What would it say? Reproduce it on a sheet of paper.
4. **Interview** — In what way does Mr. Nachman use Cole's protest to teach? What assignment does Mr. Nachman give the English class? If you were there and were given this assignment, and were permitted only three questions, what would they be? A good interview question is always an open-ended question: this means that it can't be answered Yes or No. It requires the interviewee to give a complete response of some kind. Make all three of your interview questions open-ended ones.
5. **Prediction/Anticipation** — What is the unexpected ending to Chapter 34? What do you anticipate will happen next?

CHAPTER 35

1. **New Information** — At the beginning of the chapter Della Kazarian reveals information about Cole that the reader did not know until now. What is that information? Does this information cause you to think differently about Cole in any way? Explain.
2. **Vocabulary** — What does *pro bono* mean? Why do you think Della Kazarian offers it?

CHAPTERS 36-40

CHAPTER 36

1. **Cause and Effect** — What happened to Hasna? Why? How did Fatima and Salma originally respond? How did Cole's demonstration in front of the school change their response?

2. **Understanding Change** — What nickname does Cole’s father call him at the beginning of their video chat? Why? What has changed?

CHAPTER 37

1. **Food Research** — Cole’s Thanksgiving Day “assignment” is to make cranberry-orange aspic. Find a recipe for such a sauce, aspic, relish. Print it out and bring it to class. Discuss the different recipes that students bring in. Which is the easiest? Which is the most complicated? Which seems the sweetest? Which seems the most tart? If you had to make this for Thanksgiving Day dinner, which recipe would you use? Why?
2. **Analysis** — What does Felipe shout to his mother when he sees ICE walking toward their house? What does Cole immediately realize? What does he do?

CHAPTER 38

1. **Recall** — What happens at the cantina? Does the owner’s attitude surprise you? Why or why not?
2. **Analysis** — What kept Tía from becoming a U.S. citizen? What guilt does she feel as she and Cole wait in the garage?

CHAPTER 39

1. **Hypothesis** — Upstairs in his room, Cole questions why the raid on Felipe’s house happened. What are some of the possibilities he comes up with? What do you think about how and why it happened? Support your position, with explanation, in a three-paragraph paper.
2. **Analysis** — Is Cole’s poem in this chapter a poem, or is it a rant, something like his tagging the high school walls with the F word? Do you notice any poetic techniques in the poem? What are they? How do they work?

CHAPTER 40

1. **Art** — In this chapter, we “see” the ICE raid from Felipe’s and Treva’s descriptions (they were there, and Cole was not). Illustrate this raid. Discuss the illustrations. How are they similar? How are they different? Which do you find more terrifying: the word description or the visual images. Why do you think that is?
2. **Lists** — Felipe explains the options he and his family have at this point. List these options. If you were Felipe, which of these options would you want? If not one of these options, then what?
3. **New Information** — What stunning information does Treva deliver near the end of Chapter 40? Does this make you think of Treva in a different way? Explain.

4. **Objective vs. Subjective** — Make two lists: one of Cole’s objective reasons for suggesting he run letters to and from Tía, the other of his subjective reasons for this.

CHAPTERS 41-45

CHAPTER 41

1. **Analysis** — In what ways does Cole help Benito feel better in this chapter? What does this say about Cole? About Benito?
2. **Lists** — Make a list of the signs that might indicate that Felipe is depressed.
3. **Recall** — How do we know that Hank Renner is counting the days until his release?

CHAPTER 42

1. **Metaphor** — This chapter starts out with Cole making a comparison. What are the two parts of his metaphor? What does shoulder padding do for a backpack? What is a sternum strap, and how does it make carrying a backpack easier?
2. **Recall** — What does Coach say that shows that he is concerned about Cole? What does Coach say that makes Cole sad?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** — What is worrying Stacey Renner about Cole’s running each day?
4. **Details and Analysis** — When Cole sees the stranger in Ms. Delaney’s office, he thinks, “I hate him already.” Why does he feel this way?
5. **Cause and Effect** — What threat does Agent List make that causes Cole to react?

CHAPTER 43

1. **Analysis** — This is the third poem in the book that stands alone as a chapter. Why do you think this is so? How do you think it compares to the other two poems in tone and in content?
2. **Word Origins** — Write a definition, including origin, of *foul*, *flint*, and *fangs*.
3. **Write a Poem** — Choose one of the three F words above and write a poem about it.

CHAPTER 44

1. **Interpretations and Conclusions** — When Cole, Felipe and Treva meet at the fence, Treva says that there are indications that the Ramirez family must act. What does she list as these indications? Do you agree with her?
2. **Analysis** — Cole says he is too angry to write form poems. Discuss why he thinks this. Do you think that writing a form poem requires a calmer state of mind than does writing a free verse poem? Explain.

3. **List** — Make a list of the fears Cole feels during the encounter with the ICE agents. Organize the list from the least dangerous (to Cole) to the most dangerous (to Cole).

CHAPTER 45

1. **Health** — At the beginning of this chapter, Cole is cold and shaking. What is he suffering from? What is the best treatment for this?
2. **Word Origins** — Stacey Renner uses the word *fraught*. Look it up and write out its definition and origin. In what way is *fraught* related to *freight*?
3. **Prediction** — This chapter ends without stating where the meeting will be. Where do you think it will be?

CHAPTERS 46-50

CHAPTER 46

1. **New Information** — What startling piece of news does Treva reveal in this chapter? Once you know it, can you look back on previous chapters and see any hints about it?
2. **Definition and Analysis** — What is decisiveness? In what ways does Mr. Nachman show it in this chapter?

CHAPTER 47

1. **Analysis** — Explain what you think the title of “Finding Is Binding” means.
2. **Analysis and Timing** — Explain why this poem couldn’t have come earlier in the book.

CHAPTER 48

1. **Recall** — To Cole, what is it that’s a lose-lose situation? Agree or disagree.
2. **Write a Poem** — Write a poem titled “Forlorn.”

CHAPTER 49

1. **Analysis** — Were you happy with this chapter, or unhappy? Why? Analyze how this chapter works within the novel. What is its purpose?
2. **Prediction** — Carlos hopes that the Ramirez family can return one day. Do you think this is possible? How?

CHAPTER 50

- 1. Analysis** — In what ways does this chapter reflect the beginning of the novel?
- 2. Compare/Contrast** — When Stacey tells Hank that there's something special waiting at home, what did you think it would be? Is what was waiting better than what you anticipated, or not as good? Explain why you think so.
- 3. Analysis** — What is the importance of Cole's last poem and his reading it to the crowd?

SECTION TWO

ENTIRE NOVEL

1. The novel covers a period of five months. Imagine it's the last day of school in June and that Cole and his parents and Felipe drive to Canada the next day. Write the opening paragraphs of a chapter titled "June."
2. Read Chapter 1 again. This time, look for foreshadowing: hints of what is to come. List all the foreshadowing you can find in Chapter 1. Write a paragraph or two on your favorite foreshadowing from this chapter, explaining how it works and why it's your favorite.
3. In Chapter 2, Cole thinks: *Nachman is messing with my mind, even though he's not here*. In what ways did Mr. Nachman end up "messing with" Cole's mind?
4. In Chapter 2, Ms. Delaney introduces the term *troublemaker*, warning Cole to not turn into one. In what other places in the novel does this term come up? Is being a troublemaker always a bad thing, or can it sometimes be a good thing?
5. In Chapter 2, Felipe says "Tío Hank is strong." Felipe says this several times throughout the story. In what ways is Hank Renner strong? In what ways is his strength important?
6. Spanish is part of this story. It first appears in the second chapter, and from there throughout the novel. Discuss the different attitudes that characters have toward people who speak Spanish. What is Treva's attitude? Jillian's? The teacher who told Bianca to learn English or "go home"? Why do you think so many Anglo Americans feel hostility toward people who speak Spanish?
7. In a blog called "The F Words: Setting," author Barbara Gregorich discussed how she worked on the Chicago setting of the novel, including the ethnic background of the city. Were you aware of this diversity as you were reading the story? Discuss the different backgrounds and ethnicities of characters in the book. Do you think that the wide variety of backgrounds of the characters makes for a more realistic story, or a less realistic one? Do you think it accurately portrays the makeup of large city public schools today?
8. Think about jails and prisons, and how prisoners are treated in the United States. Do you think the main purpose of incarceration should be punishment or rehabilitation? Why?
9. What does Cole learn about jails by being a visitor? What does his father learn by being a prisoner?

10. Early in the novel, when Cole realizes he can't see his father on the Sunday he had planned to see him, he goes on a run and ends up at the garage his father rents. What is the importance of the garage in the first scene, and what is its importance later?
11. Imagine that you want to urge Americans to either abolish ICE or to increase its funding. Whichever side you take, write a newspaper opinion piece of about 250 words explaining why you feel this way.
12. When Cole first sees Treva, he thinks *Tall and straight, like a pillar. And, Dressed in black, like the bad guy in a western.* Do you think these are good similes to describe Treva? Why or why not? Write two of your own similes to describe her.
13. In Chapter 6 Treva tells Cole that her uncle sent her links to articles about Hank Renner. Under what other circumstances in the story does she mention her uncle?
14. Cole appears to be initially distrustful of Treva. Why? What makes him change his mind? Is it something Treva says? Or is it what she does?
15. When Treva asks Jillian the name of the student newspaper, Jillian says it's *The Fire*. Treva responds, "Totally right." What do you think she means by that? Where else does fire come up in the story?
16. With the entrance of Treva Soldat into the story, things start to change a bit. How early in the story can you see them changing? What are the changes? How do you think the story would be different if Treva weren't there?
17. What are the ways in which the Ramirez family shows that it is proud of Felipe?
18. What is the overall feeling created by the Ramirez family kitchen? What role does this play at the end of the book? What role does the kitchen play in Cole choosing colors for the syllables in *Fa mi lia*?
19. Felipe considers Jillian's campaign slogan a sign of war. Cole says it's not war yet, it's a battle. What is the difference in these two approaches, war vs. battle? Who do you think is more correct? Why? How does this issue resurface at the end of the story?
20. What is Emerald Jackson's importance to the story? Consider her relationship to Felipe's campaign, her participation in Mr. Nachman's classes, her interactions with Cole.
21. Before he goes to sleep one night, Cole intends to write a poem about joining forces. He ends up writing the poem "Force." How is it different from what he intended? What role do you think his subconscious played in writing the poem he ended up with? What does Cole learn from this experience?

- 22.** *McJobs or the military* is the choice that Cole and Felipe say working class kids have. Do you agree or disagree? Give examples.
- 23.** In Chapter 10 Emerald Jackson tells Cole, “We’re all in the same fight. Black people know it. Most white people don’t.” Discuss what she means.
- 24.** Several times in the book, Cole thinks of jail and school in equal terms. In what ways does he equate the two? Do you see any similarities between jail and school? Make a comparison-contrast chart with two columns, one labeled *Differences*, the other *Similarities*. List all the jail-school differences and similarities you can think of.
- 25.** On the bus ride back from Cook County Jail, Cole writes two poems, “Face Time” and “Faze.” What does writing these poems make him realize about his writing assignment?
- 26.** Jillian and Treva have several minor confrontations in the novel, including the one in front of Cole’s locker when Jillian says she wants to talk to Cole alone and the one in the schoolyard where Jillian leaves the minute she sees Treva. What is it you think Jillian dislikes about Treva? Do you think that Treva dislikes Jillian? If so, why?
- 27.** Immediately after Felipe wins the class election, Cole tells him (indirectly) that after victory one must have courage. Why does Cole tell him this now? What does it mean? Do you think that urging somebody to have courage usually comes after a victory, or is it more likely to be said after a defeat?
- 28.** Cole’s poem “Fire” is a shape poem. Read about the history of shape poems and write a brief report on them. What do you think of shape poems? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of shape poems.
- 29.** Discuss *Past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior*. What does it mean? Do you agree or disagree? Give examples from real life.
- 30.** Cole thinks, *Coach is into developing fast-twitch muscles. And slow-twitch muscles*. What is the difference between the two types of muscles? In the novel, how do fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscles work as metaphors?
- 31.** In what ways does running cross-country help Cole think?
- 32.** How well does Cole get along with his mother? What are some examples. In what ways have his parents influenced Cole?
- 33.** In what ways is a cross-country meet similar to real life? In what ways does Cole benefit from cross-country running?

- 34.** What kind of energy flows from the pro-immigrant marchers in Chapter 19? Describe some of the ways in which this energy is conveyed to the reader.
- 35.** Explain the importance of the chant, *We Are Young, We Are Strong! We Can Rally All Day Long!* In what ways are young people important to social change? In what ways do they lead it? In what ways do they follow?
- 36.** In which places in the story does the concept of fear come up? What does Cole learn about fear?
- 37.** After Della Kazarian visits the Renner household and tells them what happened to Hank, plays back his words, and shows them his photo, what is the last piece of news she gives them? How is this treatment of Hank Renner unjust?
- 38.** Do you agree with Felipe's statement, *Self-defense is a human right*. Explain your argument.
- 39.** Most fiction has what is called a *turning point*. This usually occurs somewhere near the middle of the novel. The turning point consists of the main character making a decision about himself/herself, about what kind of person they are going to be. What is Cole's turning point at the end of Chapter 21?
- 40.** How important is being class president to Jillian? In what ways does this importance to her come out in the story?
- 41.** Mr. Ortiz tells the tenth grade class officers that they need to think about how to function as good citizens of the world. Do you agree or disagree that this should be part of the duty of class officers in high school? Why or why not?
- 42.** What are some of the ways in which the author indicates the passing of time? When you reach a story division that has the month as the title such as "November," are you prepared for it to be November in the school year? Do you feel that time is progressing?
- 43.** In the scene in Chapter 24, where Cole and Felipe have been called into Ms. Delaney's office because she wants to discuss the immigrant rights rally they attended, what are the clues that the three of them see things differently and use words in different ways?
- 44.** What are the indications in Chapter 24 that Ms. Delaney might know more about Felipe and his family than would be normal for a principal to know?
- 45.** There have been many reported cases in which teachers tell students to speak English or go back to Mexico (even though the students are Americans.) In what ways is this wrong?

- 46.** Do you agree with Felipe when he says that if Bianca had been speaking French or German, the teacher would have thought she was cultured, but when she spoke Spanish, the teacher thought otherwise. Give examples to support your opinion.
- 47.** In Chapter 25 Mr. Nachman tells Cole, *Holidays can be tough. Very tough.* In what ways is this foreshadowing?
- 48.** Write two poems: one about a word from Old Norse or Anglo-Saxon origin, the other about a word from French or Latin origin. What, if anything, is different about the two poems? What causes the difference or the similarity?
- 49.** When you write poetry, is it mostly free verse, or is it mostly syllable count poetry, or form poetry? Explain why you choose the type you do. Do you have any interest in writing in one of the other types of poetry? Why or why not?
- 50.** What is it that Cole likes about the cinquain? Research the cinquain and write a brief report on its history. Then write a cinquain at the end of the report.
- 51.** Of Cole's two poems on force (one free verse, the other a cinquain), which do you like better? Why?
- 52.** Write your own poem titled "Force," but write it in one of the poetic forms, such as sonnet, triolet, ghazal, etc.
- 53.** After Cole finishes his "Force" cinquain he thinks: *Wow. I didn't know what I was going to say until I said it.* Has that ever happened to you? Do you think everything out logically before you write it down? Or do you think as you go?
- 54.** After he writes "Force" as a cinquain, Cole says he likes it so much he's sure he'll have to stop himself from writing nothing but cinquains. Does he write another cinquain? If so, what is it?
- 55.** Literary irony is an event or statement which is either contrary to what one expects, or ends up being contrary to what one expects. In Chapter 27, Coach tells Cole: *Winter runs are pleasure runs. No pressure.* In what ways is this statement ironic? Can you think of other examples of literary irony in *The F Words*?
- 56.** Write a rondelet on the subject of your choice. Did you find it hard to write the rondelet, or easy? If, as Cole says, writing a rondelet is difficult, why do you think that's so?
- 57.** At Cole's last race of the season Emerald shouts, *Mersy, Mersy, Mersy!* What famous jazz tune does this sound like? Listen to a recording of Cannonball Adderly's rendition of "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy." Discuss how you feel about it.

- 58.** At the end of Chapter 28, Cole writes a fibonacci poem entitled “Flanks.” His poem is two stanzas long, each identical: 1/2/3/5/8. Write a two-stanza fib poem in which the first stanza is 1/2/3/5/8 but the second stanza is inverted: 8/5/3/2/1.
- 59.** If you were in jail for 120 days, as Hank Renner is, and you felt that you could help yourself and your fellow inmates by teaching a course or courses, what would you teach? Why? Create a ten-week outline of the course you would teach, including the books you would request for the prison library.
- 60.** In Chapter 29 Cole writes another syllable-count poem, a tanka. What is a tanka? Write one on any subject you choose.
- 61.** In Chapter 30, where Jared Anderson attacks Cole, it seems as if, from the minute Jared slams him against the locker, Cole is in a can’t-win situation. Detail the steps of this situation, of how Cole tries to get out of it, and how Jared responds each step of the way.
- 62.** In the scene in the nurse’s office, in what ways can we tell that Cole has become a poet?
- 63.** What do Cole’s various visits to the principal’s office reveal about him? What do they reveal about Ms. Delaney?
- 64.** Cole tells Ms. Delaney, *You’re treating the attacker and the person he attacks as the same*. Choose an incident from today’s news that, in your opinion, fits this definition. Discuss whether the attacker and the person he attacks should be treated as the same.
- 65.** While waiting for his mother to talk to Ms. Delaney, Cole writes one stanza of a ballad. Read up on what a ballad is. Then write a 6-10 stanza ballad about Cole’s experiences in August Mersy High School.
- 66.** What is a crow’s nest? Why do you think the restaurant has that name?
- 67.** Who is Stacey Renner alluding to when she tells Cole, *That’s why sports franchises get rid of quarterbacks who speak out for racial justice*? Illustrate this person’s famous protest.
- 68.** What is Stacey Renner alluding to when she tells Cole, *The masses are not ready to storm Cook County Jail and release the prisoners*? What is the significance of that historic moment?
- 69.** Treva says, *Students should determine if a suspension is right or wrong. You can be that if we rule ourselves, we aren’t going to suspend somebody who fights back against a bully*. As a class, conduct a live enactment of such a situation. One student will be the bully, another student will be the person who fought back. Five people will be the student council members. Allow the bully to defend his/her case and the other student

to defend his/her case. Then allow each student council member to speak and to vote for or against suspension. After the vote, allow the rest of the class to vote. Are the votes the same? Discuss why or why not.

- 70.** Imagine that you are Cole. Write the press release that you would send to the newspapers and other media the night before your demonstration in front of the school. In class, discuss the press releases. Which seemed the best to you? Why?
- 71.** What is a megaphone? Do you think that in *The F Words* the megaphone is a symbol? If so, of what?
- 72.** What is it that Della Kazarian offers to do for Cole? Why do you think she succeeds?
- 73.** From whose point of view is the poem “Forego”? Do you think that using this point of view works in Cole’s poem? Why or why not? What does *Fee fi fo fum* allude to? Do you think the allusion works in this poem? Why or why not? Write a poem about some aspect of justice or injustice, from the point of view of Jack (in “Jack and the Beanstalk”).
- 74.** How did earlier parts of the book prepare you for Tía’s escape in Chapter 37? Consider Cole’s running skills, Chicago’s alleys, Cole’s height.
- 75.** What is the conflict between Cole and Tía in Chapter 37? Why does she want to go back home? Why doesn’t he want her to go there?
- 76.** Explain Tía’s feelings of guilt. What are they and why does she have them? Do you think she should or should not feel guilty?
- 77.** Felipe and his father are supposed to discuss what to do about their situation. What are the reasons they don’t reach a decision?
- 78.** As you were reading *The F Words*, were you expecting a poem about *the F word*? Were you anticipating it sooner than Cole wrote it (Chapter 39)? If so, why? Do you think that this is the appropriate place in the book for this poem? Explain why or why not.
- 79.** Poets sometimes invent words. Cole invented a word for the poem in Chapter 39. This word is not in the dictionary. What is the word? What do you think Cole’s word means? A very similar word *is* in the dictionary: what is the similar word? (Hint: The similar word shares the first seven letters of Cole’s word.)
- 80.** There have been incidents in the U.S. of friends and neighbors surrounding somebody that ICE wants to deport, of surrounding the person or the van that ICE placed them in. Research one of these

incidents online. Assign half the class to write a newspaper article on it, reporting it as if it were just-happening news. Assign the other half of the class to write an eye-witness report (as if they were there, surrounding the van, or standing on the sidewalk watching others surround the van). Discuss the differences between newspaper articles and eyewitness reports.

- 81.** In Chapter 41 when Benito asks if he can go with Cole on his run, both Cole and his mother immediately answer, *No*. Why do they say that? This event seems a precursor to something that happens in a later chapter. What is it? In what ways are the answers to Benito's question of *Why can't I?* similar to the answers later in the book?
- 82.** Write a new jail-visit scene like the one in Chapter 41, using the same situation, but with different code words. Read the scenes out loud. Which do you like the best? Why?
- 83.** Analyze the scene in Ms. Delaney's office in Chapter 42. Discuss whether what she does with Cole is legal? Moral? Effective or ineffective? Give reasons.
- 84.** How does Cole know that Agent List is offering a false promise when he says, *I'm happy to tell you that your father can be released from jail tomorrow?*
- 85.** Describe the role of Nikki Zurlo in *The F Words*. What purpose(s) does she serve? Who or what do you think she represents?
- 86.** Why do you think the poem "Foes" is a free form poem? Cole has already written a couple of syllable count poems and two form poems. Why do you think he goes back to writing a free form poem?
- 87.** Rewrite the scene in which Cole encounters the ICE agents, telling it from a third-person point of view. What changes did you have to make to tell this from the third person POV? Analyze the two approaches: the first-person scene and the third-person scene. Which scene do you prefer? Why?
- 88.** In what ways is Cole running from the ICE agents the same as Tía running from them? Do you think Cole has any alternatives? If so, what are they? Write a poem entitled "Flight."
- 89.** Why are Felipe and his father willing to trust Treva?
- 90.** In the Crow's Nest scene in Chapter 46, Cole thinks that Nachman has a whole new side to him. Have you ever had an experience in which, suddenly, you see a whole different side to somebody you've known for quite a while? What do you think when something like this happens?
- 91.** In *The F Words*, there are four poems which have a chapter of their own. What are these poems? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

92. Draw a picture of Cole and Felipe's room after they have finished painting it.
93. In Chapter 49 Felipe says that he won the class election but lost the battle. Write a poem about this.
94. What does the January block party tell you about Cole's father and his friends and neighbors?
95. What is the significance of the fact that Cole writes "Fight" as a form poem and not a free verse poem?
96. When Cole turns to the crowd to read his poem, in what ways has he changed from his very first reaction in the book (tagging the high school wall)? Write a paper analyzing the ways in which Cole is the same as he was in September, and the ways in which he is different.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA GREGORICH has designed, built, carried, and shared protest signs. On the street, not in books. Now, because the world needs people to protest injustice, she has written *The F Words* — in which she brings the importance of those signs into a story which honors the powerful role that young people have always played in movements for social change.



She brings her experience as a former educator (Kent State University, Cuyahoga Community College) and also as a former writer of educational manuals (Scott Foresman, Macmillan, School Zone) into this rich, detailed Educator Guide — a guide which she hopes will help teachers involve students in critical thinking and analysis of both life and literature, especially poetry.



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