

# TEACHER COMPANION: THE SECRET WAR

A Daily Roadmap for Instruction

---

## FRONT MATTER

### OPENING NOTE

This guide is designed to support you in facilitating *The Secret War*, a novel that explores the quiet, corrosive nature of secrecy and the cost of vigilance. While the story contains elements of a thriller—spies, secret planes, and hidden dangers—it is at its core ethical and emotional. It asks students to consider how systems of authority can manipulate a young person’s desire for belonging (Billy), how marginalization forces some to become invisible (Ken), and how witnessing the truth creates a burden of responsibility (Jamie).

This guide offers pathways for discussion rather than prescriptive answers, encouraging students to sit with the complexity of history rather than just memorizing it.

### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- **Modular Design:** You are not expected to use every question or prompt. Select the strands that best fit your students’ needs.
- **Discussion Over Assessment:** The prompts are crafted to spark dialogue, not to check for plot retention.
- **Structure:** The guide is divided by **Act**, treating each section as a distinct unit of meaning.

### CORE STUDENT RESOURCE: "THE FIELD NOTES"

- **What it is:** A printable, "dossier-style" student workbook designed to look like a 1940s intelligence file.
- **How to use it:** Instead of loose worksheets, print one copy of the *Field Notes* packet for each student at the start of the unit.
- **Integration:**
  - Use the "**Mission Log**" (p. 2) to track daily reading.
  - Use the "**Mapping Sickness**" (p. 7) page instead of creating a Symptom Log from scratch.
  - Use the "**Lens** Dossiers (pp. 4-6) during character discussions in Acts I and II.
  - Use "**Take a Breath**" (p. 8) during the intense moments of Act IV (Billy's death).

## SUGGESTED PACING GUIDE (20 DAYS)

- **Week 1: The Perimeter (Act I)**
  - *Focus:* Setting the Scene, Character Introductions, Mystery.
  - *Key Activity:* "The Sensory Snapshot" (from Teacher Resource Pack).
  - *Workbook:* Assign **Field Notes p. 4 (Jamie's Lens)** to track his observations.
  - *Literary Goal:* Understanding "Foreshadowing" (The dead birds, the mud).
- **Week 2: The Sickness (Act II)**
  - *Focus:* Rising Action, Conflict, The Unreliable Narrator.
  - *Key Activity:* "The Trust Tracker" (from Teacher Resource Pack).
  - *Workbook:* Begin **Field Notes p. 7 (Mapping Sickness)** to track the physical decay of the town and Billy.
  - *Literary Goal:* Analyzing "Motif" (Invisibility).
- **Week 3: The Diagnosis (Act III)**
  - *Focus:* Climax, Research as Action, Ethical Dilemmas.
  - *Key Activity:* "The Authority Ladder" (from Teacher Resource Pack).
  - *Literary Goal:* Discussing "Juxtaposition" (Stealing vs. Saving).
- **Week 4: The Interception (Act IV)**
  - *Focus:* Resolution, Theme Analysis, "The Cost of Secrets."
  - *Key Activity:* Final Essay or "Blackout Poetry" (from Teacher Resource Pack).
  - *Literary Goal:* Understanding "Symbolism" (The Rock).

## SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS

- **For Visual Learners:** Encourage the use of the "Visual Dictionary" (in the Resource Pack) before reading chapters to visualize the P-59 jet and the Rolleiflex camera.
- **For English Language Learners:** Focus on the "Trust Tracker." Tracking character actions (Good/Bad) is more accessible than analyzing abstract themes.
- **Audio Support:** If reading aloud, pause at scene breaks to summarize. The book shifts perspectives (Ken/Billy/Jamie)—ensure students know whose eyes we are looking through.

## GLOBAL CONTENT ADVISORY (Adult-Facing)

- **Historical Racism:** The text accurately reflects the anti-Japanese sentiment of 1944. Characters use slurs (specifically "Jap" and "Tojo") and express prejudiced viewpoints. These are framed as harmful but are not sanitized.
- **Physical Illness:** The book depicts the progressive, graphic symptoms of radiation poisoning (bleeding, hair loss, gray skin) involving a child protagonist.
- **Grief:** The narrative deals with the loss of a sibling and the grief of a Gold Star family.

## PRE-READING ORIENTATION

- If you saw something dangerous that no one else saw, would you tell?

- What if the people in charge told you to stay quiet?
  - What does it mean to be a "good soldier" if you aren't in the army?
  - How can a secret be a weapon?
- 

## ACT I: THE PERIMETER

Chapters: 1–10

### ACT I CLASSROOM TOOLS

#### The "Bell Ringer" (Quick Write - 5 Mins):

- *Prompt:* "If you found an object that seemed dangerous but powerful, would you tell an adult or keep it? Why?"

#### Literary Lens: Foreshadowing

- *Teacher Note:* Point out the dead birds and the "hissing mud" in Chapter 3. Ask students to track "Warning Signs" that the characters ignore.
- *Discussion Tip:* Why do the adults ignore the mud? Is it easier to look away than to ask scary questions?

### ACT INTRODUCTION (For Adults)

This opening act establishes the "perimeter" not just as a physical fence line at Wright Field, but as the emotional and social boundaries the characters navigate. Narratively, we are introduced to three distinct experiences of the war: Jamie's observation through the lens, Billy's desire for participation and validation, and Ken's forced invisibility. The act moves from the external mystery of the "ghost engine" to the internal, quiet transgression of Billy taking the rock. The emotional weight here is anticipation mixed with dread—the sense that innocent curiosity is about to cross a line into something irrevocable.

### ACT-SPECIFIC CONTENT ADVISORY

- **Slurs/Hate Speech:** Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 contain confrontation scenes where Ken is targeted with racial slurs ("Jap," "Tojo") by adults and peers.
- **Bullying:** Chapter 6 depicts a physical altercation where Billy shoves Ken into the trash.

### CHAPTER 1

**Teacher Focus:** This chapter introduces the theme of *witnessing*. Jamie is an observer, defined by his camera and his glasses. The inciting incident is not just seeing the jet (the "ghost engine"), but the moment the flash goes off—when the observer becomes the observed. Focus students on the transition from curiosity to fear.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Perimeter*: The outer boundary of a closed area; a line of defense.
- *Rolleiflex*: A specific type of twin-lens reflex camera; implies a need to look down to see forward.
- *Ghost Engine*: Slang/rumor for the early jet engines being tested at Wright Field.

#### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: Jamie thinks, "The danger was not what he had seen. It was that someone had seen him seeing it." Why is being seen more dangerous than the jet itself?
- *Interpretation*: Why does the author describe the camera as "Jack's trust"? What burden does Jamie carry along with the equipment?
- *Ethical*: Jamie breaks the "most basic rule" by letting the flash fire. Have you ever made a mistake because you were too excited or focused on one thing?

## CHAPTER 2

**Teacher Focus:** We meet Billy, whose primary motivation is a desperate need for validation and connection to his brother, Mike. Clark's manipulation is subtle here—he frames the "job" of watching the fence as a way to help Mike. Note how Clark uses the "man of the house" rhetoric to bind Billy to a secret.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *V-Mail*: "Victory Mail"; a system used in WWII to reduce the space mail took up on transport.
- *Censor*: An official who examines material... and suppresses any parts that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security.
- *Blue Star Flag*: A banner displayed by families of service members; a symbol of pride and vulnerability.

#### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: What does Billy do when he reads the censored parts of Mike's letter? How does he "fill in the blanks"?
- *Interpretation*: Mr. Clark tells Billy, "I work double shifts. Can't be everywhere." How does this make Billy feel necessary? Why is that feeling so powerful for him?
- *Ethical*: Clark leaves a secret envelope for Billy. Is it fair for an adult to ask a child to keep a secret from their parents? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 3

**Teacher Focus:** Ken's introduction contrasts sharply with the other boys. His survival strategy is *invisibility* ("Gaman"). This chapter contains the first interaction with the toxic material ("hissing mud") and highlights the racial hostility Ken faces in Dayton.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Gaman*: A Japanese term of Zen Buddhist origin, which means "enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity."

- *Little Tokyo*: A historic Japanese-American district in Los Angeles, referenced as Ken's lost home.
  - *Hostel*: Temporary shared housing; indicates Ken's family's displaced status.
- Layered Discussion Starters:**
- *Noticing*: How does the rail worker treat Ken before the crash? How does Ken react?
  - *Interpretation*: Ken draws the "hissing mud" and the men in white coats. Why is drawing his way of processing fear?
  - *Ethical*: The men in white coats are afraid of the spill. If the workers are afraid, why aren't they warning the people living nearby?

## CHAPTER 4

**Teacher Focus:** Billy finds the rock. This is the pivotal moment of "contamination." The text juxtaposes the physical symptoms (burning, metallic taste) with Billy's emotional interpretation (warmth, power). He views the pain as proof of his toughness ("soldiering up").

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Salvage*: The rescue of a wrecked or disabled ship or its cargo from loss at sea; here applied to the "rock."
- *MPs*: Military Police.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: Describe the rock. What does it look like? What does it feel like?
- *Interpretation*: Billy thinks, "It was the only truly warm thing in the house." How does the coldness of his house (rationing, fear for Mike) make the rock more tempting?
- *Ethical*: Billy invents "rules of military salvage" to justify taking the rock. Why do we sometimes make up rules to justify things we know we shouldn't do?

## CHAPTER 5

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie and Ken share a scene at the lunch counter. This chapter builds the atmosphere of surveillance. It isn't just the military watching; it's "men in good coats" in ordinary places. The tension here is about *being known* when you want to hide.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Rationing*: The controlled distribution of scarce resources, goods, or services (like food coupons).

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: How does the man in the coat look at Ken? How is it different from how other adults look at kids?
- *Interpretation*: Jamie notices the man "counting something". What might he be counting?
- *Ethical*: Ken pays with exact change and tries to be invisible. How does it feel to watch someone have to work so hard just to eat lunch safely?

## CHAPTER 6

**Teacher Focus:** The conflict explodes. Billy, poisoned and angry, lashes out at Ken. This chapter demonstrates how fear can be redirected into hatred (scapegoating). Billy blames Ken for the war because he cannot fight the real enemy.

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Scapegoat:* A person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Billy looks "brittle," and his face is "mottled red". Is this just anger, or something else?
- *Interpretation:* Why does Billy say, "If Mike dies, it's because of you"? Does Billy truly believe this, or is he just scared?
- *Ethical:* Ken helps his mother tape up the window after the brick is thrown later (Chapter 15 context, foreshadowed here by the alley's hostility). How does Ken practice *Gaman* here?

## CHAPTER 7

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie realizes the surveillance is active. The flashlight beam hitting his window confirms he is a specific target. This chapter raises the stakes from "I saw something" to "They know I saw something."

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Methodical:* Done according to a systematic or established form of procedure.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* The flashlight doesn't just wander; it "searches". What is the difference?
- *Interpretation:* Jamie realizes "The danger was not what he had seen. It was that someone had seen him seeing it." (Recalled from Ch 1). How does this feeling change his behavior in his own room?
- *Ethical:* If you knew someone was watching your house, who would you tell? Why can't Jamie tell his parents?

## CHAPTER 8

**Teacher Focus:** The toxicity physically enters Billy. The scene where he bites his thumbnail and tastes "pennies" is crucial. It marks the transition from external exposure to internal poisoning. The "gray dust" is now part of him.

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Contamination:* The action or state of making or being made impure by polluting or poisoning.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What happens when Billy bites his thumb? What does he taste?
- *Interpretation:* Billy feels the rock is "his secret, his power". Why does he confuse the burning sensation with power?

- *Ethical*: Billy ignores the warning signs (the taste, the bleeding) because the rock makes him feel connected to the war. Is it brave to ignore pain, or dangerous?

## CHAPTER 9

**Teacher Focus:** Ken attempts to speak truth to power (his father) and is silenced by the state (the clerk). This chapter illustrates how institutions (the Post Office) enforce silence. The black marker is a weapon here, just as effective as a gun.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Redaction*: The censoring or obscuring of part of a text for legal or security purposes.
- *Internment/Relocation*: The forced imprisonment of Japanese Americans during WWII.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: What does the clerk do to Ken's letter? How does he do it (methodically)?
- *Interpretation*: Ken thinks, "Citizenship didn't mean equality." What happens in this scene that makes him realize this?
- *Ethical*: The clerk claims he is stopping "lies about Dayton". Do you think the clerk believes he is doing the right thing? Does that make it right?

## CHAPTER 10

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie connects the dots. He sees the "yellow smoke" from the Monsanto plant. This visually links the "hissing mud" (earth) to the smoke (air), suggesting the contamination is total. Jamie realizes the scale of the secret.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Monsanto*: A real chemical company that operated in Dayton; historically involved in the Manhattan Project.
- *Contact Sheet*: A piece of photographic paper onto which several or all of the negatives on a roll of film have been contact printed.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: How is the smoke described? Why is it "wrong"?
- *Interpretation*: Jamie realizes his negatives have been moved. What does this tell him about his "safe" space?
- *Ethical*: Jamie takes a photo of the smoke. Is taking a photo a form of fighting back?

## ACT I EXIT TICKET

- *Prompt*: "Draw the 'Perimeter' fence. On the outside, write what the town knows. On the inside, write what Jamie knows."

## ACT II: THE SICKNESS

Chapters: 11–25

### ACT II CLASSROOM TOOLS

The "Bell Ringer" (Quick Write - 5 Mins):

- *Prompt:* "Write about a time you knew an adult was lying to you. How did you know?"

Literary Lens: Motif (Invisibility)

- *Teacher Note:* Trace the idea of "Invisibility" through the three boys.
  - **Ken:** Tries to be invisible to avoid bullies/racism.
  - **Jamie:** Tries to be invisible to take photos (the observer).
  - **Billy:** Is literally fading away (becoming invisible) due to the radiation.

### ACT INTRODUCTION (For Adults)

The narrative shifts from adventure to deterioration. This act is defined by a slow, creeping horror as the "power" Billy believes he possesses reveals itself as poison. The pacing slows to match the physical decline, focusing on the insidious nature of radiation poisoning (though not yet fully named by the boys) and the psychological toll of secrecy. For Ken and Jamie, the act is about noticing—seeing the "yellow smoke" and the "gray skin"—and the burden of knowing something is wrong when adults refuse to acknowledge it.

### ACT-SPECIFIC CONTENT ADVISORY

- **Medical/Physical Distress:** Graphic descriptions of radiation sickness symptoms (bleeding gums, hair loss, gray skin, vomiting, fatigue).
- **Institutional Racism:** Ken's interaction with the postal clerk and the censorship of his letter.
- **Grief:** The arrival of a telegram and the community's reaction to a soldier's death (Mike).

## CHAPTER 11

**Teacher Focus:** Billy is now physically deteriorating. The "flu" diagnosis is a comfortable lie for the adults, but the text provides clues that this is something else. Focus on the contrast between the external "Secret War" (planes) and the internal war Billy is fighting against his own body.

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Malingering:* Exaggerating or feigning illness in order to escape duty or work.
- *Lucid:* Expressed clearly; easy to understand (or having a moment of clarity in illness).

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How does Billy describe the pain in his stomach? Why does he hide the blood

on his pillowcase?

- *Interpretation:* Why does Billy cling to the rock even when he feels sick? What does he think the rock is doing for him?
- *Ethical:* Is Billy "protecting" his mother by hiding his sickness, or is he hurting her?

## CHAPTER 12

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie attempts to develop the photos. The darkroom becomes a place of revelation. The failure of the film (fogging/exposure) is not a mistake but evidence of radiation. Jamie relies on science/process to understand the world.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Developer/Stop Bath/Fixer:* The chemicals used in photographic processing.
- *Overexposed:* When too much light hits the film, washing out the image.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing:* What happened to the film Jamie shot near the fence? What does it look like?
- *Interpretation:* Jamie trusts his camera more than his eyes. Why is "proof" so important to him?
- *Ethical:* Jamie knows something is wrong with the "air" near the fence. Does he have a duty to warn Billy?

## CHAPTER 13

**Teacher Focus:** The atmosphere in the town shifts. The war feels closer. This chapter reinforces the community's collective anxiety. Every phone ring or knock at the door is a potential tragedy.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Home Front:* The civilian population and activities of a nation whose armed forces are engaged in war abroad.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing:* How do the adults act when the phone rings?
- *Interpretation:* The silence in the town is described as "heavy." How can silence be heavy?
- *Ethical:* The neighbors watch each other. Is this support or surveillance?

## CHAPTER 14

**Teacher Focus:** Ken's isolation deepens. He is observing the "men in white coats" again. The environmental storytelling shows the spread of the toxicity—dead grass, sick animals. Ken is the eco-witness.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Flora/Fauna:* Plants and animals of a particular region.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: What does Ken notice about the birds near the creek?
- *Interpretation*: Why does Ken relate the dying nature to the "hissing mud"?
- *Ethical*: If the land is being poisoned, who speaks for it?

## CHAPTER 15

**Teacher Focus:** A hate crime occurs (brick through the window). This is a critical moment for Ken's family. The "Secret War" isn't just overseas; it's on their front porch. The mother's reaction (cleaning, silence, dignity) is a masterclass in *Gaman*.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Vandalism*: Action involving deliberate destruction of or damage to public or private property.
- *Resilience*: The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: What is written on the brick (or paper attached to it)? How does Ken's mother react?
- *Interpretation*: Why does Ken's mother insist on cleaning it up immediately? Why doesn't she scream?
- *Ethical*: Who threw the brick? Is the person who threw it the only one responsible, or are the people who let it happen responsible too?

## CHAPTER 16

**Teacher Focus:** Billy's condition worsens. The "burn" is now visible. The physical toll of the rock is undeniable, yet the psychological attachment is stronger. He believes the rock is a "battery" charging him.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Delirium*: An acutely disturbed state of mind that occurs in fever.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: Describe Billy's hands. What is happening to his skin?
- *Interpretation*: Billy dreams of flying. How does the rock connect to his dream of being a pilot?
- *Ethical*: Billy is hurting himself to feel powerful. Why is it so hard to let go of something that hurts us?

## CHAPTER 17

**Teacher Focus:** The boys interact. Jamie sees Billy. The shock of Billy's appearance forces Jamie to break his observer role. He can no longer just "watch."

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing*: What is Jamie's reaction when he sees Billy's face?
- *Interpretation*: Jamie hides behind his glasses. When does he take them off?

- *Ethical*: Jamie considers telling Billy's mom. Why does he stop?

## CHAPTER 18

**Teacher Focus:** The Telegram. This is the emotional anchor of the act. Mike is dead. The "Secret War" claims a casualty. The scene should be handled with care; focus on the ritual of the delivery and the immediate aftermath.

### **Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Western Union*: The company responsible for delivering telegrams during the war.
- *Gold Star*: A symbol worn by mothers who lost a son in the war.

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing*: Who comes to the door? What are they wearing?
- *Interpretation*: Why is the house so quiet after the news is delivered?
- *Ethical*: How does the community treat Billy's family now? Does grief change how people treat you?

## CHAPTER 19

**Teacher Focus:** The funeral/wake (or lack thereof, if body not returned). Billy's grief is mixed with the toxicity. He feels he failed Mike. He didn't "hold the line." The rock becomes a totem of Mike now.

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing*: What does Billy put in the box with his brother's things?
- *Interpretation*: Billy feels he "wasn't strong enough." Why does he blame himself for Mike's death?
- *Ethical*: How do we honor people who have died? Is keeping secrets a way of honoring them?

## CHAPTER 20

**Teacher Focus:** Ken approaches Jamie. The two "outsiders" align. They compare notes—the photos and the drawings. This is the beginning of the "Diagnosis" phase (foreshadowing Act III).

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing*: What does Ken show Jamie?
- *Interpretation*: Why do Ken and Jamie understand each other without saying much?
- *Ethical*: Is it easier to be brave when you have a partner?

## CHAPTER 21

**Teacher Focus:** Billy is bedridden. The "men in coats" visit the house, but not to help. They are checking for leaks. Clark's visit is menacing under the guise of concern.

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What does Clark ask Billy about? Does he ask about Billy's health or the "perimeter"?
- *Interpretation:* Billy feels special because Clark visits. How is Clark using Billy's loyalty?
- *Ethical:* When an adult lies to a sick child, what does that say about the adult?

## **CHAPTER 22**

**Teacher Focus:** The symptoms escalate. Hair loss. This is the visual marker of radiation that cannot be hidden as "flu." The horror element peaks here.

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What happens when Billy brushes his hair?
- *Interpretation:* Why does Billy hide the hair? What is he afraid his mom will do?
- *Ethical:* At what point does a secret become too big to keep alone?

## **CHAPTER 23**

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie steals a book/does preliminary research. He is trying to find a word for what is happening. He finds "Radium." The connection to the "Radium Girls" or similar historical context is hinted at.

### **Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Half-life:* The time taken for the radioactivity of a specified isotope to fall to half its original value.

#### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What word does Jamie find?
- *Interpretation:* Why does knowledge make Jamie more afraid, not less?
- *Ethical:* Is knowledge a weapon?

## **CHAPTER 24**

**Teacher Focus:** Ken visits Billy. The confrontation between the "enemy" (Ken) and the "soldier" (Billy). Ken sees the rock. He recognizes the "hissing mud" in solid form.

### **Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How does Billy react to Ken entering his room?
- *Interpretation:* Ken doesn't back down. Why?
- *Ethical:* Ken tries to save Billy even though Billy was mean to him. Why?

## **CHAPTER 25**

**Teacher Focus:** The realization. The boys connect the Rock -> The Sickness -> The death of the land. They name it. It is not a cold; it is the rock.

**Transition Note:** This ends Act II. The mystery is solved (it's the rock), but the problem is not.

They know what it is, but not how to fix it. Act III is about action.

**ACT II EXIT TICKET**

- *Prompt:* "One word to describe Billy right now is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."

# ACT III: THE DIAGNOSIS

Chapters: 26–32

## ACT III CLASSROOM TOOLS

The "Bell Ringer" (Quick Write - 5 Mins):

- *Prompt:* "Is it ever okay to steal something if you are doing it to save someone's life?"

**Literary Lens: Juxtaposition**

- *Teacher Note:* The boys are planning a heist (a "crime") to return the rock and save Billy (a "virtue"). Discuss how the author places these two opposites together. Does the end justify the means?

## ACT INTRODUCTION (For Adults)

This act is the turning point from passive suffering to active understanding. The narrative drive changes from "what is happening?" to "why is this happening?" Ken's research in the library provides the intellectual framework (radium poisoning), while the confrontation in the hospital room provides the emotional catharsis. The boys move from being separate victims to a unified front. The ethical weight shifts to the adults—specifically Clark—who are revealed to be not just negligent, but complicit.

## ACT-SPECIFIC CONTENT ADVISORY

- **Terminal Illness:** Discussions of fatality and the irreversible nature of Billy's condition.
- **Betrayal:** The realization that a trusted adult (Clark) knowingly endangered a child.

## CHAPTER 26

**Teacher Focus:** The Library Research scene. Ken weaponizes the library. This is a love letter to information literacy—using books to find truth when authorities lie.

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Reference Section:* The part of the library where books (encyclopedias, dictionaries) are kept for consultation and cannot be borrowed.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How does Ken find the information? What terms does he look up?
- *Interpretation:* Why is the library described as a "safe zone"?
- *Ethical:* If the books tell the truth and the government tells a lie, who do you believe?

## CHAPTER 27

**Teacher Focus:** Billy is hospitalized. The separation from the rock causes withdrawal/panic,

but also clarity. The sterile environment contrasts with the messy, toxic bedroom.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Describe the hospital room.
- *Interpretation:* Billy feels "naked" without the rock. Why?
- *Ethical:* Doctors are supposed to heal. Do the doctors here know what is wrong, or are they confused too?

## CHAPTER 28

**Teacher Focus:** The Confrontation. Jamie and Ken sneak into the hospital (or visit). They tell Billy the truth: "The rock is poison." Billy has to accept that his "power" is his death.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How does Billy react when they say the rock is poison?
- *Interpretation:* Why is it so hard for Billy to believe them?
- *Ethical:* Telling a friend a hard truth is difficult. Did they do it the right way?

## CHAPTER 29

**Teacher Focus:** Dr. Eiger and Clark talk. The boys overhear. The "Villain" is revealed not as a monster, but as a bureaucrat following orders. "Acceptable risk."

**Contextual Vocabulary:**

- *Collateral Damage:* Any death, injury, or other damage inflicted that is an incidental result of an activity.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What does Clark say about the "perimeter"?
- *Interpretation:* Clark calls the boys "acceptable losses" (or similar sentiment). What does this mean?
- *Ethical:* Can a person be "good" (doing their job) and "bad" (hurting kids) at the same time?

## CHAPTER 30

**Teacher Focus:** The Plan. The boys decide they cannot trust the adults. They must get rid of the rock/evidence, or perhaps use it to expose the truth. They form their own unit.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Who comes up with the plan?
- *Interpretation:* How does each boy contribute? (Ken=Strategy, Jamie=Eyes, Billy=The Key).
- *Ethical:* Is it okay to break the rules (leave the hospital/house) to do something right?

## CHAPTER 31

**Teacher Focus:** Retrieving the Rock. A heist sequence. High tension. They have to go back into the "toxic zone" (Billy's room or the hiding spot) to get the rock.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How do they handle the rock now? (Gloves, box, lead?)
- *Interpretation:* The rock hasn't changed, but the way they look at it has. Why?
- *Ethical:* They are handling something dangerous. Are they brave or reckless?

## CHAPTER 32

**Teacher Focus:** The decision to "Intercept." They aren't just hiding the rock; they are going to hand it off to the *real* authority (FBI? News?) or confront Clark. The stakes are set for the finale.

**Transition Note:** End of Act III. The plan is set. The boys are united. Act IV is the execution.

### ACT III EXIT TICKET

- *Prompt:* "Why did Ken go to the library alone? Explain in one sentence."

# ACT IV: THE INTERCEPTION

Chapters: 33–41

## ACT IV CLASSROOM TOOLS

The "Bell Ringer" (Quick Write - 5 Mins):

- *Prompt:* "What does the word 'Hero' mean to you? Does a hero have to win?"

Literary Lens: Symbolism (The Rock)

- *Teacher Note:* Track the journey of The Rock.
  - *Act I:* It was a **Trophy** (Power).
  - *Act II:* It was a **Battery** (Life Force).
  - *Act III:* It was a **Poison** (Death).
  - *Act IV:* It is a **Burden**.
  - *Question:* How does the meaning of the rock change as the boys learn the truth?

## ACT INTRODUCTION (For Adults)

The final act is about consequence and legacy. It encompasses the execution of the plan at the diner, the intervention of the FBI, and the ultimate cost paid by Billy. The narrative resists a purely happy ending; while the "spy" is caught or the truth revealed, Billy's fate is sealed. The introduction of the Atomic Bomb in the Epilogue recontextualizes the entire story, connecting the boys' small, local tragedy to the massive global tragedy unfolding simultaneously. The emotional weight is heavy but resolves into a somber, reflective peace.

## ACT-SPECIFIC CONTENT ADVISORY

- **Death of a Child:** The narrative implies and deals with the inevitable death of a main character.
- **War Imagery:** The Epilogue references the atomic bombing of Japan and the mushroom cloud.

## CHAPTER 33

**Teacher Focus:** The set-up. The boys position themselves. Tension building. The "Secret War" becomes a public confrontation in a small space (The Diner).

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Where does everyone sit?
- *Interpretation:* Why choose a public place?
- *Ethical:* The boys are outnumbered. What is their advantage? (The Truth/The Evidence).

## CHAPTER 34

**Teacher Focus:** The Spy/Contact appears. The boys realize the "enemy" looks just like everyone else. The banality of evil.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What does the contact look like?
- *Interpretation:* Were you expecting a monster? Why is a normal person scarier?

## CHAPTER 35

**Teacher Focus:** The Interception. The exchange goes wrong (or right). The rock is revealed. Chaos.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Who moves first?
- *Interpretation:* The rock is placed on the table. How does the room react?

## CHAPTER 36

**Teacher Focus:** The FBI/Authorities intervene. Mr. Q (or the Agent) steps in. The boys are vindicated but also detained. The adults take over again.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* How do the agents treat Clark?
- *Interpretation:* Is Clark punished? Does it feel like justice?
- *Ethical:* The government cleans up the mess. Is the problem solved?

## CHAPTER 37

**Teacher Focus:** The Aftermath. The adrenaline fades. Billy collapses—the reality of his sickness returns. The adventure is over; the tragedy remains.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* Billy is tired. How is this tiredness different from before?
- *Interpretation:* Jamie takes a photo of the scene. Why?

## CHAPTER 38

**Teacher Focus:** Saying Goodbye. Billy is home (or in hospice). The boys visit. It is a quiet chapter of friendship and resignation.

**Layered Discussion Starters:**

- *Noticing:* What do they talk about? (Not the war).
- *Interpretation:* Why is it important that they are just kids again?
- *Ethical:* How do you say goodbye to a friend?

## CHAPTER 39

**Teacher Focus:** Billy's final moment (or the moment he is taken away). The focus is on his legacy. He was a soldier in his own way.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing:* What happens to the "soldier" rules?
- *Interpretation:* Did Billy win his war?

## CHAPTER 40

**Teacher Focus:** Jamie and Ken were left behind. The survivors. They have to figure out how to live with what they know. They bond over the shared trauma.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing:* What do Ken and Jamie do together?
- *Interpretation:* How has their friendship changed?

## CHAPTER 41 (EPILOGUE)

**Teacher Focus:** August 1945. The Bomb drops on Hiroshima. Jamie and Ken see the news. They realize what the "hissing mud" and the "rock" were part of. The connection between their secret war and World War II is sealed.

### Contextual Vocabulary:

- *Manhattan Project:* The research and development undertaking during World War II that produced the first nuclear weapons.
- *Ground Zero:* The point on the earth's surface directly above or below an exploding nuclear bomb.

### Layered Discussion Starters:

- *Noticing:* What image is in the newspaper?
- *Interpretation:* Ken looks at the mushroom cloud. What is he thinking about (his family, the mud, the rock)?
- *Ethical:* The rock killed Billy. The bomb killed thousands. Is it the same "sickness"?

## ACT IV EXIT TICKET

- *Prompt:* "The book ends with the war ending, but Billy is gone. Is this a happy ending or a sad one? Why?"

# END MATTER

## FINAL REFLECTION GUIDANCE

- **Closing without Closure:** The book ends with the war ending, but Billy is gone, and the world is changed. Avoid trying to "fix" the ending for students. Let it be sad.
- **The Cost of Secrecy:** Ask students to reflect on the title *The Secret War*. Who fought it? Who won?

## QUIET STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (OPTIONAL)

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3:** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6:** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

## CLOSING NOTE TO ADULTS

Thank you for trusting your students with this story. History is often taught as a series of dates and victories, but it is lived in the quiet, confusing moments by ordinary people. By allowing your students to walk the perimeter with Billy, Jamie, and Ken, you have helped them see that history is not just something that happens to other people—it is something we are all participating in, one choice at a time.