

## READING GROUP GUIDE



Includes  
Common Core  
State Standards  
Correlations

WHEN YOUR TOWN IS ABOUT TO CRUMBLE,  
YOU DIG DEEPER INTO THE MUCK AND FIND A WAY TO WIN.

*Inspired by a true story...*

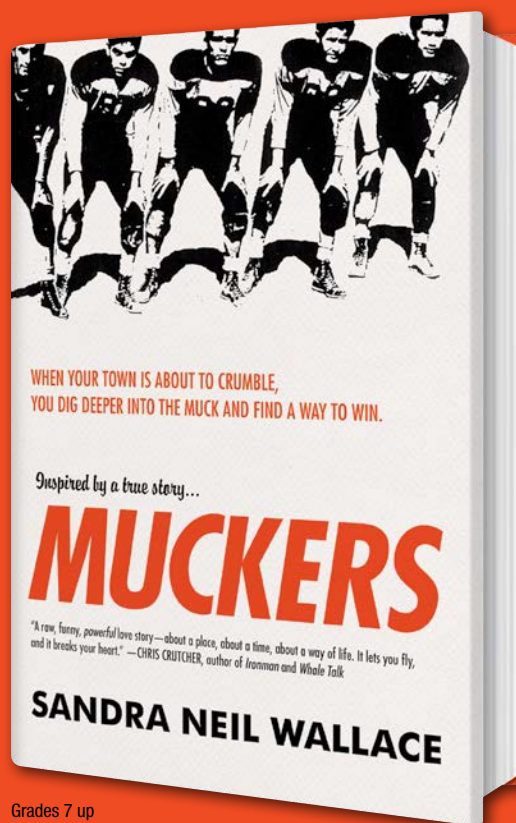
# MUCKERS

"A raw, funny, *powerful* love story—about a place, about a time, about a way of life. It lets you fly, and it breaks your heart." —CHRIS CRUTCHER, author of *Ironman* and *Whale Talk*

**SANDRA NEIL WALLACE**



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Grades 7 up  
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Once* a copper mining boomtown of thousands, the community of Hatley has long since passed its heyday. With barely enough boys to field a football team, much less be competitive, the community knows time is their nemesis. The copper veins are nearly depleted, and when the mine closes, so will the town and the school. This is the last chance for a town that cares about football and mining equally to count for something and leave a mark on the world. Winning the state football championship rests on quarterback Red O'Sullivan's shoulders; haunted by tragedy and an emptiness he can't shake, Red knows only tenacity can earn that win.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Ask students to do a quick Internet search of *copper mining* and gather the following:  
 a) three interesting facts about copper mining; b) one picture depicting some aspect of copper mining. Have students share their findings in small groups.

● Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5.

Have students use a dictionary to define the words *muck* and *mucker* and compare these definitions with the author's definition of mucker at the top of page 1. What similarities and differences do they see? What inferences can they make about the plot based on the author's definition?

● Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4.





## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Red O'Sullivan has the weight of the copper mining town of Hatley on his shoulders. What does the reader know about his home life early on in the story? Why is winning the state championship in football so important to him and to his friends and community?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1.

Red, Cruz, and Rabbit are close friends. Give examples of how the author illustrates their close bond. What makes their relationship impenetrable and why? Why does Rabbit leave? What does his exit contribute to the story?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1.

Red loves Angie, Cruz's sister, but their relationship is forbidden because he is Anglo and she Mexican. Describe the racial divisions in the town. Are there signs of changes? If so, what are they? Support your answer with examples from the story.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2.

Setting provides a sense of time and place, aids readers in better understanding a story, and contributes to mood. Describe the setting of *Muckers*. What role does setting play? Identify several descriptive scenes that are compelling. What words are especially gripping? How do they contribute to the mood?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4.



Nefertiti, named by ore prospectors after an Egyptian queen, is the mountain where copper is extracted. What changes in the mountain have occurred over time? What symbolism does the mountain hold for the town? Compare Red's description of her in the opening of Chapter 1 with his description at the end of Chapter 26. What differences are there and what does this shift in attitude convey about Red and the community?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2.

While *Muckers* is written from first-person point of view, the author also tells the story through a series of 15 carefully placed newspaper articles, ads, and announcements. What do these newspaper pieces add to the story? How do they connect with and support the plot?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5.

Red's father is a complex character. Using evidence from the text—beginning with the first dialogue between them prior to the season opening game (p. 52) and ending with the last scene in the Cribbs (p. 250)—analyze how the author develops his character over time. How would you characterize him in the opening of the story and how does that perspective change by the end?

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3.

The concept of time is one of many themes in *Muckers*. Consider the paragraph in which Red says, "Time never gives me more when I need it." (p. 84) Identify other passages in the story that reference time and explain how this multilayered theme emerges and how it develops throughout the story.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2.

There are a number of minor characters in the story (e.g., Leroy Piggett, Father Pierre, Mrs. Featherhoff, Peter Zolnich, Loco Francisco, and Faye Miller). Identify any two and analyze the roles they play in the story. Explain what would be lost on the reader if they were omitted from the story.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11.12.1.





# ACTIVITIES

## Digging into History

In the United States, boomtowns sprang up around mining quarries where crews dug for gold, silver, copper, coal, or other precious metals and minerals. Depending on their geographic location, these towns either became ghost towns after the ore was extracted or turned into major cities. Choose a type of boomtown of interest (e.g., gold, silver, copper, coal) and identify one community/town to research as a group project. Consider the following in your presentation: a) how the community developed; b) characteristics of the town; c) significant events, statistics, and/or interesting facts about the town; d) what happened to the community after the mining ended. Develop a PowerPoint presentation to share with the class, include visuals of the town, its people, the mining process used in the town, etc.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5.

## Education in Boomtowns

Boomtowns were often characterized as “wicked towns.” Saloons sprang up quickly around the tents and shacks where miners lived. In an effort to tame workers, mine operators often contributed financially to the community that grew up around the mine they owned. They sometimes built schools, churches, hired teachers to work in the schools, and encouraged family events. At their peak, these communities were often “cutting edge.” Identify a major mining company of the late 1800s to mid-1900s. Research the contributions made by that company to the community surrounding the mine and compare your findings with others in the class.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9.

## United States and the Korean Conflict/War

Research the Korean Conflict/War. Use at least two informational texts from the library and three Internet resources in your research. Write a brief paper outlining your findings and citing your sources appropriately. Prepare a brief overview of your paper for a small group presentation. Be prepared to discuss your position on which term—*conflict* or *war*—is more appropriate.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9.





## ACTIVITIES *(continued)*

### Communism

Research communism during the 1950s. Use at least two informational texts from the library and three Internet resources in your research. Write a brief paper outlining your findings and citing your sources appropriately. Be sure to define the term, address misconceptions, biases, and fears surrounding the term in the 1950s. Be sure to include information on McCarthyism in your project. Prepare a brief overview of your paper for a small group presentation.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9.

### Vocabulary Journal

Keep a journal of mining town terminology as you read the novel. As you uncover the meaning of the term, make note of it. Look up terms that are less familiar or that are confusing. Share your new terms with classmates. A few words to get you started are *smelter*, *mucker*, *clapboard*, *catwalk*, and *coyote holes*.

Correlates with CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4

## INTERNET RESOURCES

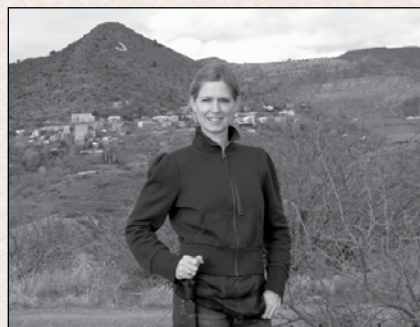
**Arizona  
Geographical Survey**  
AZGS.za.gov

**Copper Mining**  
Copper.org  
PolarInertia.com

**Korean Conflict**  
Archives.gov  
History.com/topics/korean-war  
KoreanWar.org  
LOC.gov/teachers  
PBS.org

**Tourism & Historical  
Information for  
Jerome, Arizona**  
AZJerome.com  
JeromeChamber.com  
GhostTowns.com

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**SANDRA NEIL WALLACE** was a news journalist and ESPN sports announcer for more than 15 years before leaving television to write novels. She lives with her husband, author Rich Wallace, and their shelter dog, Lucy, in New Hampshire. Her first novel, *Little Joe*, was released by Knopf in 2010.

Visit the author at [SandraNeilWallace.com](http://SandraNeilWallace.com)

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