

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Barn

by  
Avi

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### Book Information

Avi, The Barn  
Quiz Number: 10894  
Orchard Books, 1994  
ISBN 0-531-06861-7; LCCN  
106 Pages  
Book Level: 3.9  
Interest Level: MG

Ben is called back from school to his family's Oregon farm when his father becomes ill.

**Topics:** Family Life, Death; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Illness; Places, Farms; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; Technology, Construction

### Main Characters

Ben the principal character in the story, the nine-year-old son of a homesteader in Oregon Territory

Father a settler in the Oregon Territory

Harrison Ben's older brother

Mr. Dortmeister Ben's schoolmaster

Nettie Ben's fifteen-year-old sister

Tod Buckman a young neighbor who has asked Nettie to marry him

### Vocabulary

**barrow** a small cart pushed by hand

**foursquare** in a square form

**gruel** a thin broth made by cooking meal in water or milk

**lean-to** a shed with a one-slope roof

**palsy** a loss of power in any voluntary muscles

**privy** an outhouse

### Synopsis

Ben is a nine-year-old boy who has to leave boarding school because his father has an accident. He returns home to find that his father is ill from a fit

of palsy, cannot work and needs care.

Ben, his sister and brother must decide what to do about their father, the farm and staying on the claim. They learn to make decisions and work together while coping with their father's illness.

Ben decides that building the barn his father was planning will help his father recover. First he must convince his brother and sister to help with the project.

Their father dies before Ben can "give him the barn." They must now deal with his death.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

How do you think Ben felt when his father could communicate with him? Did Nettie and Harrison feel the same way?

*Ben was excited and became hopeful that his father would recover. He could see his father as a person again. In the beginning, both Nettie and Harrison were apprehensive, but later they believed in Father's ability to communicate and were happy. They didn't feel he would recover though.*

#### Literary Analysis

How does Ben change during the story?

*He grows to understand and accept sickness and death. He also grows in physical strength.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Why did Nettie feel Father died when he did?

*He had understood when Ben told him the barn was finished and didn't want to accept a gift without having one to give in return. You could also include the idea that the barn was Father's gift to Ben.*

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### Constructing Meaning

Ben had many admirable character traits. Describe how a person you know is like Ben.

*Ben was smart, hardworking, sensitive, loving and considerate.*

### Teachable Skills

#### Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Throughout *The Barn*, there is discussion about "working the claim." In 1862, the Homestead Act was passed by Congress in an attempt to improve the land and help people obtain farms of their own. This act attracted thousands of settlers to the West. Have the students look up information on homesteading and find out what requirements had to be met before the settlers owned the land. Ask the students to talk with their grandparents or older friends or neighbors about homesteading. They could write a report or orally share this information with the class.

**Comparing and Contrasting** The children in this story had many jobs and responsibilities including caring for their father. Have the students explain what they would do if faced with caring for a sick parent under the conditions in the story. Have the students compare the actions and attitudes of each of the children to their own.

**Recognizing Feelings** Ask the students to make a list of the various feelings Ben has during the story. Then have them watch a movie or read a book with a similar theme. Which of Ben's feelings can you find in the book or movie. Have the students identify the dominant emotion in each story.

**Identifying Reading Strategies** Have the students choose one problem that the children encountered in this story: who should care for father, how to locate the foundation for the barn, should Ben return to school, or should the planting be done. Then have the students write a different solution to the problem including five specific reasons for their solution. This could be presented orally before the class to stimulate discussion.