

# The Aurora County All-Stars

By Deborah Wiles

## *Library of Congress Summary:*

For most boys in a small Mississippi town, the biggest concern one hot summer is whether their annual July 4<sup>th</sup> baseball game will be cancelled due to their county's anniversary pageant, but after the death of the old man to whom twelve-year-old star pitcher House Jackson has been secretly reading for a year, House uncovers secrets about the man and the history of baseball in Aurora County that could fix everything.

## **Book Information:**

Time Period: Contemporary

Setting Location: Mississippi

Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Curriculum Ties: *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, negro baseball league

## **Booktalk:**

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/712305.The\\_Aurora\\_County\\_All\\_Stars](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/712305.The_Aurora_County_All_Stars)

## **Author Information**

[www.deborahwiles.com](http://www.deborahwiles.com)

This website includes a biography of the author, interviews, summaries of other works, and a link to Ms. Wiles' blog spot.

<http://www.harcourtbooks.com/AllStars/interview.asp> -

Interview with Deborah Wiles regarding *Aurora County All-Stars*.

## Pre-Reading Activities

1. Have the children research Walt Whitman and read some of his poems. Have children discuss in small groups what they have learned about Whitman and talk about the meanings of the poems they have read.
2. Play a game of baseball with the students. Explain the game and rules beforehand and take an afternoon just to play.

## Chapters 1-3

### Questions:

1. What do you think the note says? Why?
2. Why does House say he hid in the bushes? Do you think this is really why he hid?
3. What kind of news is given in the newspaper clipping? What does this tell you about the town of Halleluia?

Journal Topic: Imagine you have a sports team of your own. Write 8 “rules and bylaws” you would enforce on your team, as House has done.

### Vocabulary:

Philanthropist (page 1): someone who makes charitable donations intended to increase human well-being

Mechanical (page 2): mechanically - in a machinelike manner; without feeling; "he smiled mechanically"

Spangling (page 3): a small piece of sparkling metallic material sewn on to a garment as decoration; a sequin; any small sparkling object; to sparkle, flash or coruscate; to fix spangles to a garment

Curlicue (page 16): coil: a round shape formed by a series of concentric circles (as formed by leaves or flower petals)

## Chapters 4-6

### Questions:

1. What happened between Frances and House last summer?
2. How does the author describe Frances' appearance? What does this tell you about Frances?
3. Which of the characters are excited about the pageant? Which characters want nothing to do with the pageant?

### Journal Topic

Choose a character and write a paragraph from their point of view. How do they feel about the pageant? About Frances? What would they like to do with their summer?

### Vocabulary

Accoutrements (page 27): dress; trappings; equipment; specifically, the devices and equipments worn by combatants

Transfixed (page 31): fascinated: having your attention fixated as though by a spell

Smattering (page 32): handful: a small number or amount; "only a handful of responses were received"

Asphyxiated (page 42): asphyxiate - To smother or suffocate someone; To be smothered or suffocated

## Chapters 7-9

### Questions:

1. How does the book describe Aurora County?
2. What do we learn about Mr. Boyd in these chapters? What is the truth and what is probably fiction?
3. Page 62 ends with the question: "How do we proceed?" What should be done about their dilemma?

Journal Writing: Walt Whitman is quoted on page 54: “Nothing can happen more beautiful than death.” What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree?

### Vocabulary

Strident (page 46): Loud; shrill, piercing, high-pitched; rough-sounding;

Recoiled (page 46): flinch: draw back, as with fear or pain

Emanating (page 48): proceed or issue forth, as from a source

Kudzu (page 54): fast-growing vine from eastern Asia having tuberous starchy roots and hairy trifoliate leaves and racemes of purple flowers followed by long hairy pods containing many seeds; grown for fodder and forage and root starch; widespread in the southern United States

Harrumphed (page 58): An expression of disdain, disbelief, protest, or dismissal; a huff, grunt, or snort; to dislike, protest, or dismiss

## **Chapters 10-12**

### Questions:

1. Why do you think that House doesn't want to tell Cleebo about going to see Mr. Boyd every day?
2. What do you think House will find in the library?

Journal Writing: Mr. Boyd requests that there be no funeral. How would you plan your funeral?

### Vocabulary:

Gait (page 65): pace: the rate of moving (especially walking or running)

Veritable (page 71): True, factual; correctly referred to as being such

Clangor (page 82): make a loud resonant noise

Athwart (page 82): Across. Transversely

## Chapters 13-15

### Questions:

1. Why did Norwood Boyd quit playing baseball even though he loved it?  
Would you have done the same?
2. How do you think Norwood knew House's mother?
3. What treasure did Mr. Boyd give to House?

Journal Writing: Write a paragraph putting Walt Whitman's poem into your own words. Interpret what you think it means.

### Vocabulary:

Gloaming (page 94): twilight: the time of day immediately following sunset

Camaraderie (page 98): People have camaraderie when they are comfortable with each other and spend a lot of time together

Incomprehensible (page 100): inexplicable: incapable of being explained or accounted for

## Chapters 16-18

### Questions:

1. What does House tell Cleebo? What does he not tell him?
2. Who does Cleebo compare Mr. Boyd to and why?
3. What do you think the news articles and radio news flashes add to the book?  
Why were they included?

### Vocabulary:

Crevice (page 104): a long narrow depression in a surface

Jazzed (page 116): Excited or happy. Modern equivalent is psyched.

Tethered (page 119): confined or restricted with or as if with a rope or chain

Hunkered (page 119): hunker - squat: sit on one's heels

Pyrotechnics (page 119): brilliance of display

## **Chapters 19-21**

### Questions:

1. House comes up with a plan. What is it and how has he come up with it?
2. How does talk of Mr. Boyd change throughout these chapters?
3. What note does Finesse read aloud? What does it mean?

### Journal Writing:

Write about a time you had to do something that you did not want to. Or write about a time when you had to make a compromise and meet someone half way.

### Vocabulary:

Divined (page 128) being or having the nature of a god

Stoicism (page 131) an indifference to pleasure or pain

Dyspeptic (page 131) a person suffering from indigestion

Snuffled (page 137) snuff: sniff or smell inquiringly

## **Chapters 22-24**

### Questions:

1. How does Cleebo act in chapter 22? What is his motivation for acting this way?
2. What does Finesse think is House's opinion of her? Is this accurate?
3. What do the kids decide to do by the end of this section?

Journal Writing: "He loved a man he had hardly known, but somehow, he had known him well." (Page 144) What do you think this quote means? Have you ever felt this way about someone?

### Vocabulary:

Prestigious (page 149) esteemed: having an illustrious reputation; respected

Verbosity (page 149) The excess use of words, especially using more than are needed for clarity or precision; long-windedness

Guffawed (page 139) a burst of deep loud hearty laughter

## **Chapters 25-27**

### Questions:

1. Who gave House the box of baseball cards?
2. What is said of Mr. Norwood in the newspaper clipping?

### Journal Writing:

Dr. Dan has a huge influence on this little town and the people in it. Who has the most influence in your life and why?

### Vocabulary:

Organic (page 155) simple and healthful and close to nature

Sonorous (page 155) heavy: full and loud and deep

Bass Profundo (page 155) a very deep bass voice

Amalgamation (page 156) Consolidation or amalgamation is the act of merging many things into one

Infectious (page 158) the communication of an attitude or emotional state among a number of people

Frenetic (page 170) frantic: excessively agitated; distraught with fear or other violent emotion

## Chapters 28-30

### Questions:

1. What does Finesse look like when she comes to visit House? Why do you think she looks this way?
2. What does the poem in chapter 29 mean?
3. Write down some of the baseball lingo in chapter 30, research their meanings and write it down.

### Journal Writing:

House makes a step by step list of how to swing a bat. Make a similar list telling someone step by step how to do a certain activity.

### Vocabulary:

Muster (page 179) gather or bring together

Blithe (page 180) lacking or showing a lack of due concern

Stodgy (page 188) excessively conventional and unimaginative and hence dull

Colanders (page 189) A perforated bowl made of metal or plastic that is used to strain foods

Thespian (page 194) actor: a theatrical performer

## Chapters 31-33

### Questions:

1. What effect is this game and pageant having on the community?
2. Summarize how the game is going.

### Journal Writing:

If you were in House's shoes, would you continue to play baseball in the game? Why or why not?

### Vocabulary:

Renaissance (page 203) rebirth: the revival of learning and culture

Kaput (page 204) Out of order; not working; broken

Innovation (page 216) the act of starting something for the first time; introducing something new

Conglomeration (page 216) That which consists of many previously separate parts

Rollicking (page 217) carefree, merry and boisterous

## **Chapters 34-36 and Extra Inning**

### Questions:

1. Who did you think the pinch hitter was before his identity was revealed?
2. Did the ending surprise you in any way?

### Journal Writing:

What do you predict will happen in the futures of each of these characters?

### Vocabulary:

Dregs (page 224) a small amount of residue

Vigil (page 225) watch: a purposeful surveillance to guard or observe

Funereal (page 226) mournful; depressingly sad or gloomy

Irrevocably (page 231) incapable of being retracted or revoked

Voluminous (page 231) large in volume or bulk

## **Interdisciplinary Activities**

1. Look at the map in the front of the book. Pretend that one inch equals half of a block. How far is Cleebo's house from House's house? How far is Mr. Norwood's house from the baseball field? How far is Sunshine cleaning from Miss Mattie's store?
2. Create a poster advertising the game and the pageant.

## **Other Works by Deborah Wiles:**

*Each Little Bird that Sings*

*Freedom Summer*

*Love, Ruby Lavender*

*One Wide Sky*

## **Related Reads:**

*Each Little Bird that Sings* by Deborah Wiles

*Love, Ruby Lavender* by Deborah Wiles

*Walt Whitman: Words for America* by Barbara Kerley

*The Boy Who Saved Baseball* by John Ritter

*Edward's Eyes* by Patricia MacLachlan

*Mr. Strike Out* by Anastasia Suen

*We Are the Ship* by Kadir Nelson

*Walden Then and Now* by Michael McCurdy

*Henry David's House* by Steven Schnur

## **Additional Websites:**

<http://www.newportlibraryri.org/images/AuroraCountyDiscussionGuide.pdf> -  
Discussion guide for the book

<http://www.ilfonline.org/clientuploads/YHBA/Aurora%20CountyAll%20Stars.pdf>  
– Great unit for the book – questions, activities, related websites, etc.