

At a Glance – “Cassius Clay Clouds”

- **Lesson Objective:** Analyze how the narrator reveals her role and potential conflicts.
- **In the Novel:** The novel opens with Delphine (the narrator, though her name is not used until Ch. 2) and her two sisters, Vonetta and Fern, on a turbulent plane ride from Brooklyn to Oakland. Throughout the chapter, Delphine takes care of her sisters, ensuring they are well-behaved and not afraid of the flight.
- **Key Questions:** Questions 2, 4, 7, and 10 are the most important questions of the day and should not be skipped.
- **Words to Watch For:**

Page	Word	Meaning in Context	Page	Word	Meaning in Context
1	jab	a quick, sharp blow	5	holy rollers	(<i>slang, often offensive</i>) church goers who worship with frenzied excitement
1	Boeing 727	a type of airplane used in the 1960s	5	revival meeting	Christian religious service held to inspire converts
4	pity	a feeling of sadness or sympathy for the troubles of others	6	snappy	stylish and neat
5	riots	violent conflicts	7	muumuu dress	long, loose, brightly colored dress
5	shrill	high-pitched and piercing			

Homework Options:

- Developmental Writing (attached)
- Knowledge Organizer review
- Questions from the lesson that were skipped for time

Agenda:

- Do Now (10 minutes)
- Explicit Vocabulary and Active Practice (10 minutes)
- Introduce *One Crazy Summer* (1 minute)
- Cycle 1 – Read Aloud: Novel Pages 1-2 (20 minutes)
- Cycle 2 – Control the Game or Read Aloud: Novel Pages 2-5 (20 minutes)
- Cycle 3 – AIR: Novel Pages 5-7 (20 minutes)

- Exit Ticket (10 minutes)

Lesson Plan

Do Now (10 minutes)

- Give students 6-7 minutes to read the article and answer **Q1**. Review using **Cold Call**, **share out**, or a **brief discussion**.
 - **Q1: Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali...**
 - **because** he had joined the Nation of Islam and wanted to signify his new identity.
 - **but** many people were angry about his decision and continued to use his old name.

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes) – Spectacle, Turbulent

- Teach each word to students, one at a time.
- Read or ask a student to read the example sentence that includes the vocabulary word.
- Shift focus to how the picture demonstrates the word (*while projecting the image*).
- Lead Active Practice questions.

Introduce the Novel (1 minute)

- **Frame:** Before beginning to read, give students a 1-2 sentence explanation of the new novel. You may choose to use or adapt the following language:
 - *I'm excited to introduce to you our new novel, One Crazy Summer, by Rita Williams-Garcia. This novel is set in 1968, a very turbulent time in American history, and tells the story of a girl named Delphine and her sisters as they spend the summer in Oakland, California.*

Cycle 1 (20 minutes) – Pages 1-2

- **Read:** **Read Aloud** pages 1-2 (pausing after “if it were dangerous” on pg. 2) Prepare where you will **drop in implicit vocabulary** definitions.
- **Write:** Ask students to **Turn and Task** to respond to **Q1**, noting any initial observations about the characters and narration.
- **Discuss:** Invite 2-3 students to **share out** their annotation and observations. You may also wish to **Show Call** exemplar annotations.
 - **Q1: Who are Vonetta and Fern? Underline any evidence that shows what the relationship between these characters and the narrator is like.**

- **Potential Annotations**
 - *Still I anchored myself and my sisters best as I could* (p. 1)
 - *"It's just the clouds bumping," I told my sisters.* (p. 2)
 - *They listened to me.* (p. 2)
 - *I had to tell my sisters something.* (p. 2)
 - *That's mainly what I do. Keep Vonetta and Fern in line.* (p. 2)
 - Vonetta and Fern are the narrator's sisters. They seem to trust her and look up to her; the narrator seems to be responsible for them and appears to be the oldest.
- **Write:** Ask students to write responses independently to **Q2**.
- **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q2**.
 - **Q2a: What is literally happening in this line? Challenge: Include a vocabulary word in your response.**
 - The girls are flying on a plane that is experiencing **turbulence**. The plane is bouncing through the clouds, scaring the sisters as it jerks from side to side.
 - **Q2b: An allusion is a reference to a significant historical or literary figure. Why might the narrator allude to Cassius Clay the line above?**
 - The narrator may allude to the famous boxer Cassius Clay to show how powerfully the clouds are "punching" the airplane or how intense the turbulence is. Given the controversy associated with Cassius Clay's decision to change his name to Muhammad Ali, this may also be a hint at personal turbulence or changes to come.
 - **Q2c Challenge: Consider the word "anchored." How might we interpret this line in multiple ways? What could it reveal about the narrator's character?**
 - While "to anchor" literally means to hold or secure something in place (and Delphine is literally securing her sisters during the plane's turbulence), it may also mean to provide emotional strength and support. This line might mean that the narrator protects her sisters from anything that frightens or endangers them; she's responsible for Vonetta and Fern, and she always tries to be ready for the next challenge ("bracing" them against obstacles to come).
- **Write:** Ask students to respond in writing to **Q3-Q4b** and **Turn and Talk** to respond to **Q4c**. **Note:** For pacing, you may wish to make **Q3** a **Turn and Talk** instead of a written question.
- **Discuss: Share out** responses to **Q3** and lead a **brief discussion** to review **Q4**.
 - **Q3: What do you notice about the narrator in these lines? Note any differences between her feelings and her actions.**
 - Even though the narrator feels afraid, she doesn't reveal it through her actions. She says, "I kept my whimper to myself" in order to "sound like myself." It seems like her outward self is always calm and

reassuring, so even when she doesn't feel calm on the inside, she has to find a way to keep those feelings hidden. She tries to control her emotions in order to put on a brave face for her sisters.

- **Q4a: What does the narrator mean when she says, "I kept on spinning straw"**
 - She means she makes up stories and explanations out of nothing to distract/comfort her sisters and "make everything all right." Even though she doesn't know about these things "for a fact," she spins reassuring, calm explanations because she knows hearing these stories can help her sisters calm down.
- **Q4b: What do you notice about her role in the family? Why might this be?**
 - She seems more like a mother than an older sister to the other two girls. She's in charge of them, responsible for keeping them calm, and trying to "make everything all right." It seems like they're alone on the plane (Pa and Big Ma aren't there) so maybe since she's the oldest she has to take charge.
- **Q4c: What might the narrator mean by a "grand Negro spectacle"? Why might she be worrying about this potential spectacle?**
 - She might mean a big display or show that other people (particularly white people) would look at with curiosity or disapproval. It seems like she and her sisters might be some of the only black people on the plane, and she's aware of how white people on the plane might perceive them. She's trying to keep her sisters under control to avoid being a "spectacle" that the other people on the plane would stare at.

Cycle 2 (20 minutes) – Novel Pages 2-5

- **Read: Read Aloud** or use **Control the Game** to read from "They halfway believed me" on p. 2 through "proved Big Ma right" on p. 5. While reading, ask students to **annotate** anything we learn about a character named Cecile and consider how she's introduced in the text.
 - **Potential Annotations**
 - *Even though it had been his idea that we fly out to Oakland to see Cecile, Pa'd never once said how exciting our trip would be. He just said that seeing Cecile was something whose time had come. (p. 3)*
 - *"[T]his isn't right [...] putting these girls on a plane so Cecile can see what she left behind. If she wants to see, let her get on an airplane and fly out to New York." (pp. 3-4)*
 - *Cecile will never be anything other than Cecile. (p. 4)*
 - *I certainly didn't forgive Cecile. When Cecile left, Fern wasn't on the bottle. Vonetta could walk but wanted to be picked up. I was four going on five. (p. 4)*
 - *Big Ma had plenty of judgment for Cecile. (p. 4)*
 - *Either Cecile wouldn't come back to Brooklyn or she wasn't welcome. (p. 5)*
 - **Notes:** It seems like Cecile was part of the family (most likely the girls' mother) but left when the sisters were still very small. Big Ma and the narrator seem very angry/full of judgment for her

actions. The mentions of her are vague and not direct – we have to piece the clues together to figure out what’s going on. Even her role in the family is ambiguous; she seems to be the girls’ mother, but it’s not plainly stated.

- **Write:** Ask students to write responses to **Q5-Q6** independently.
- **Discuss: Show Call** sentences for **Q5** and **share out** responses to **Q6**.
 - **Q5: In one artful sentence, explain why the girls are on a plane. Where are they traveling from? Where are they going? Why?**
 - The girls are traveling on a plane from Brooklyn, NY to Oakland, CA to see a person named Cecile who left the family when the sisters were very small.
 - **Q6a: Consider what we learned about Muhammad Ali in the Do Now. Why might it suggest that Big Ma continues to call him Cassius Clay?**
 - Big Ma might continue to call him Cassius Clay because, like many people at the time, she disagrees with his choice to join the Nation of Islam and change his name. Big Ma may dislike change and prefers to use his original name. (Also, she is a devout Christian who “read her Scripture daily” so she may be upset that Muhammad Ali converted to Islam.)
 - **Q6b: Why might the narrator “slide back and forth” between the names Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali? What might this reveal about her character?**
 - The narrator says she “slides back and forth” based on the picture that comes to mind: the Cassius Clay clash she hears in the sounds of his name or the Muhammad Ali mighty mountain she pictures in her mind when she hears that name. It seems like the narrator might be more flexible and open to change than Big Ma, but still torn between consistency/stability and change.
 - **Q6c Challenge: Annotate any examples of alliteration in the excerpt. How might this alliteration impact the narrator’s perspective on each name?**
 - **Alliteration:** Cassius Clay clash / Muhammad Ali mighty mountain
 - The narrator mentions that she uses both names because of the picture she “hears” in the name; the alliteration in these examples may be part of why she associates each name with different images.
- **Write:** Give students time to respond to **Q7** and **Q8**. **Note:** *Students should use the embellishment on p. 8 of the student packet to support their responses to Q8.*
- **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q7** and **Q8**.
 - **Q7a: Consider the sentence in bold. What does the pronoun “it” refer to? Why might Pa think “it had to be done”?**

- The pronoun “it” refers to visiting Cecile. He might think it “had to be done” because it had been too long since Cecile saw her daughters, and they needed to see her too, even though he doesn’t have high expectations for the trip.
- **Q7b: What conflict might these lines be predicting? Challenge: Contrast Pa’s perspective on the trip with the girls’ perspective in the next paragraph.**
 - This might be foreshadowing that the reunion with Cecile will be difficult or challenging. When something “has to be done” it usually means that even though you may not want to do it, it’s for the best or it’s important/necessary for some reason (even though it’s not easy). The girls are very excited about the trip and are dreaming about Disneyland and movie stars; the juxtaposition of these two paragraphs makes it seem like the girls are in for a disappointment.
- **Q8a: Explain Big Ma’s perspective on change. How is this perspective reflected in her use of names?**
 - Big Ma has no pity for change, or no sympathy or sadness for things constantly changing. She prefers everything to remain as it was, and once she “stamps” something in her mind or forms an opinion about it, that’s how it remains. She continues to use the names Idlewild and Cassius Clay because those were the names before they were changed.
- **Q8b: What do you notice about Big Ma’s perspective on Cecile?**
 - Big Ma only has “judgment” for Cecile. She has no pity for her and no interest in hearing how she’s changed. It seems like she has a negative impression of Cecile (probably for leaving the girls) that isn’t likely to change. This is another hint that the character Cecile will be a source of conflict or cause of turbulence in the novel.

Cycle 3 (20 minutes) – Pages 5-7

- **Read:** Ask students to use **AIR (Accountable Independent Reading)** to finish the chapter, reading from “How can you” on p. 5 through “remembers Cecile kindly” on p. 7. Before students begin to read, you may wish to review the embellishments on p. 9 of the student packet. While students are reading, ask them to **annotate** any moments of potential foreshadowing or additional allusions in this section.
 - **Potential Annotations**
 - **Foreshadowing:**
 - *“How can you send them to Oakland? Oakland’s nothing but a boiling pot of trouble cooking.” (p. 5)*
 - *I knew she worried we’d be mistreated in some way and sought out a grown, brown face to look out for us. (pp. 5-6)*
 - *A flash of memory told me Cecile wasn’t one for kissing and hugging. (p. 7)*
 - *At least Uncle Darnell remembers Cecile kindly. (p. 7)*

- **Allusions:**
 - “Army boots and basic training four days later” – allusion to the Vietnam War (p. 5)
 - “One lady dressed like Jackie Kennedy” (p. 5)
 - “Negro Jackie Kennedy” (p. 6)
- **Write:** After reading, ask students to respond to **Q9** and **Q10**.
- **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** to unearth the following key ideas. **Note:** You may wish to **Cold Call** students who have arrived at some of these understandings to support pacing.
 - **Q9: Who does the narrator mean by “us” and “them”? Based on this line (and additional evidence from this scene), what can we infer about this time?**
 - “Us” seems to refer to African Americans (or “Negros,” the term used in the narration) and “them” refers to white people. It seems that black and white communities were relatively separate at this time, and there seems to be tension between races. Racial relations seem negative/hostile/challenging, and there appear to be proper ways of behaving when interacting with people of a different race. Delphine notices white people “staring” and wants to avoid becoming a “grand Negro spectacle,” indicating that she wants to avoid the attention of whites. Big Ma looks for a “grown, brown face” to watch out for the girls, trusting another black person to keep them safe while she warns them to “act right” in front of the white people staring.
 - **Q10: Why might this “be the last time in a while for kissing and hugging”? What might this moment be foreshadowing?**
 - Big Ma knows she’s sending the girls to a person who doesn’t do much hugging/kissing/physical “loving.” Delphine remembers that Cecile doesn’t like to do those things. This might be foreshadowing that the relationship with Cecile will be turbulent or difficult.

Exit Ticket (10 minutes)

- **Q1a: What does this line show about the narrator of the novel?**
 - The narrator is responsible and takes care of her sisters no matter what. She tries to anticipate problems and protect them from difficult experiences. She’s their “anchor,” keeping them safe and secure in turbulent moments.
- **Q1b: What might this line be foreshadowing?**
 - This line may be foreshadowing that the narrator will need to protect her sisters from “whatever came next.” We know they are visiting Cecile, and there may be “trouble brewing” there, both in race relations in Oakland and in the relationship with this person.

Homework Answers

1. Potential Sentences:

- a. Pa decided the girls should see Cecile **because** it was time for them to see her again.
- b. Pa decided the girls should see Cecile, **but** he doesn't really want them to go or think they will have a fun time.
- c. Pa decided the girls should see Cecile, so he put them on a plane from Brooklyn to Oakland.

2. Potential Sentences:

- a. Big Ma told Fern and Vonetta to "act right" and avoid causing a spectacle on the plane.
- b. **Even though** Big Ma told Fern and Vonetta to "act right," the narrator must keep correcting their behavior on the plane.
- c. Big Ma told Fern and Vonetta to "act right" **since** she doesn't want the white people on the plane to stare at or judge them.