**Teaching Guide**

**TEARS OF A TIGER**  
By Sharon M. Draper

**Introduction**

Andy Jackson and his friends thought it would be fun to celebrate their basketball victory with a night out and a few beers. When Andy's car started weaving on the interstate, they thought it was hilarious. But when the car crashed into a retaining wall and burst into flames with Andy's best friend trapped inside, their laughter died quickly as their world was turned upside down.

The death of Rob Washington, captain of the Hazelwood High basketball team and fun-loving friend to all, affects the entire school. But perhaps the person most profoundly impacted is Andy, who cannot come to terms with his friend's death and his role in it. Tormented by feelings of guilt and sorrow, Andy withdraws from everyone who cares for him: family, friends, teachers, his girlfriend. Hiding his pain behind a mask of laughing antics, he finds himself unable to reconcile the past, cope with the present, or envision a future.

This first book of the Hazelwood High trilogy is a beautifully crafted, heart-wrenching story of despair and impossible atonement, friendship and hope.

**TEARS OF A TIGER**  
**Discussion Topics**

- *Tears of a Tiger* begins with a tragic accident -- a fatal car crash caused by drinking and driving. The story is then told from the point of view of the group of friends involved. How does this method of telling the story affect the reader's response? What advantages and disadvantages does this method of narrative offer?

- Many teenagers drink and then drive without thinking about the consequences. How is Andy like many young people today? How is he different? What makes this book more than just a moral warning to readers about drinking and driving?
• Andy's parents loved him, but they seemed preoccupied with their own lives and were helpless to see his pain. Andy could talk to his younger brother, Monty, but the six-year-old was unable to help with Andy's problems.

How can families learn to cope effectively with tragedy and difficulties? How could Andy's family have dealt more successfully with Andy's situation?

• Andy's parents send him to see a psychologist to help him "talk through" his problems -- to deal with the guilt and trauma caused by Rob's death. How successful are the efforts of the psychologist, and how was Andy able to convince the psychologist that he was effectively dealing with his problems? What serious psychological issues are raised through Andy's conversation with Dr. Carrothers?

• Describe Andy's gradual decline. Discuss all of the factors that contributed to Andy's suicide. Could Andy's death have been prevented? How? How do the reactions of Andy's friends to his death demonstrate that life is always a better solution than death?

• The teenagers in the novel are honest, realistic, and able to express themselves comfortably to each other and to the adults around them.

• Do teenagers speak two "languages" -- one for themselves and one for adults? What is the effect of the use of slang in the conversations of the young people in the story? What is the effect of the conversational style of narration, which eliminates the use of traditional quotation marks as they speak to each other?

• Explain the title of the novel. What references can be found to "tears" and to "tigers"? Does the title have more than one possible interpretation? Why?

• Many people have asked the author why Andy was allowed to die at the end of the novel. What would have been the effect on the novel if Andy had lived? Is tragedy more memorable and more powerful than happiness in a novel? Why or why not?

• Imagine Monty in ten years, when he will be the age that Andy was when he died. How will Monty's life be different? The same? How will Monty's parents' attitudes toward him change? Will their family have been strengthened or completely destroyed by Andy's death?
• Visualize the next ten years for Keisha, Gerald, and B.J. How will their lives be affected by the events of that year in high school? Create a scene in which they meet at a ten-year reunion. What will have happened to them and why?

Suggested Activities

• You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.
  --Andy's trial
  --Rob's funeral
  --Andy's funeral
  --The session with the grief counselor at school

• Investigate the organization called S.A.D.D. (Students Against Driving Drunk). What has been its effect in high schools? How have students been using positive peer pressure to stop the problem of teenage drinking and driving?

• Investigate recent laws concerning drivers under the age of eighteen who are involved in traffic fatalities. What is the usual punishment? Is Andy's punishment realistic or no longer true in many states? What do you think should be the punishment for young drivers who drink and cause the death of another person?

• Investigate the problem of teenage suicide. What steps can be taken by schools to prevent this problem? How can friends help other friends who seem to be depressed or suicidal?

• Consider a career as a psychologist. Find out how much college education is needed, and what is required to become a doctor of psychology. What other fields might offer counseling to young people? What are the requirements for those fields?

• Create a scene in which the following two characters meet. What would they say to each other?
  --Keisha and Andy just before Andy's death
  --Andy and Rob's mother at the hospital
  --Andy's coach and Andy's dad
  --Andy and Rob after their deaths
• Pretend you are a student at Hazelwood High School. Write a poem, a letter, or a journal entry on one of the following topics:
  --Death at an early age
  --It's tough to be a teen
  --Forever friends

**FORGED BY FIRE**
Introduction

After his drug-addicted mother leaves him alone for the day, three-year-old Gerald accidentally starts a fire and barely escapes the flames that destroy his home. Six years later, Gerald has settled into a happy life with a loving aunt when his mother re-enters his life with a new husband and daughter in tow.

Gerald adores his sister, Angel, from the start, but he soon discovers that he must protect this fragile beauty. Together, the two endure the indifference of their mother and storms of fury and violence from their mother's husband, Jordan. Together, they send Jordan to prison. Together, they build a new life. Together, they must find the strength to overcome their past -- especially after Jordan is released from prison with reconciliation in his smile and vengeance in his mind.

The second book of the Hazelwood High trilogy is a thought-provoking, stirring look at physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and the courage it takes to survive.

**FORGED BY FIRE**
Discussion Topics

• The first chapter of *Forged by Fire* was originally written and published as a short story. What elements enable this chapter to stand alone as a complete story? What elements in the story become thematically developed concepts in the novel? What is the effect of seeing the events of chapter one develop through the eyes of a child? How does this method of telling the story affect the reader's response?

• At the end of chapter one, what assumptions or predictions might be made about Gerald? His future? His mother? Would those predictions be the same if chapter one is read only as a short story that ends with Gerald curled up behind the sofa and seeing "colors with his eyes closed"?
Discuss the use of music and color as images in the story that expand into thematic ideas. How is music laced into the lives of Gerald and Angel, and how does music allow Angel moments of release from her pain? Show how the use of color, or the lack of it, clarifies the lives and Angel and Gerald.

Many young people live in homes where abuse is a secret, silent pain. Discuss how realistically the lives of Gerald and Angel are portrayed and how these characters can become a voice for young readers who are afraid to speak out.

Discuss the socioeconomic level at which Gerald's family lives. Discuss abuse as a family problem, not merely a problem of a certain level of society. How might the story have included a broader base of society to demonstrate that the problem of abuse is found at all social and economic levels?

How are Gerald and Angel like many young people today? How are they different? What strengths do they possess that help them survive the situation in which they live?

Gerald’s mother Monique had numerous problems. She loved him, but seemed to be consumed with her own troubles. Why was Monique not willing or able to see Jordan's abuse of Angel? How realistic do you think Monique's reaction is?

Monique is abused as well -- physically and emotionally. What relationship do you think there is between domestic violence and child abuse? Why do you think this relationship exists?

How can families learn to cope effectively with tragedy, pain, and adversity? When is it necessary to seek assistance from someone outside the family?

Why did Angel let Jordan's abuse continue? Why didn't she tell someone about it? What effect did Jordan's abuse have on Angel's life? What long-range consequences might result from such abuse?

Discuss the character of Jordan Sparks. Does he have any redeeming qualities, or is he purely a negative character? What might have made Jordan the person he is?
• Discuss the character of Aunt Queen. What are her limitations? What are her strengths? How does the memory of Aunt Queen's strength affect and influence the rest of Gerald's life?

• Describe the gradual buildup to the final confrontation between Jordan and Gerald. What makes this inevitable? How is fire an important image in the concluding action between them? Why is this significant? Could the novel have been resolved without the death of Jordan? Explain.

• Explain the title of the novel. Define the word "forged." What references can be found to "fire?" How is fire an image of pain as well as release for Gerald and Angel? Why does the title have more than one possible interpretation?

Suggested Activities

• You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.
  --The fire at Gerald's apartment at the beginning of the book
  --The fire at Gerald's apartment at the end of the book

• Investigate child abuse and/or domestic violence. Call the phone numbers at the back of the book and ask about the best place to go for written information. (Do not tie up their lines -- they are for people in crisis.) Find out how you can best help in your community.

• Investigate recent laws in your community concerning those who are convicted of child abuse or domestic violence. What is the usual punishment in your community? Is Jordan's punishment realistic or unrealistic? What do you think the punishment should be for adults convicted of child abuse?

• Create a conversation between Aunt Queen and Gerald, or Aunt Queen and Angel. What would she say to them during the worst of their problems with Jordan and Monique? What would she say to them at the end of the book?
DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN
Introduction

Darkness before Dawn is the third book in a trilogy that includes Tears of a Tiger and Forged by Fire. Sharon M. Draper says that the reason she wrote the third book was because of the hundreds of letters she received from young readers who had embraced the characters in Tears of a Tiger and Forged by Fire. "What happened to Keisha? "Did she ever find happiness? And what about Gerald and Angel? How did they cope after the fire? Did Rhonda and Tyrone stay together or break up?"

Darkness before Dawn answers all of these questions and more. Keisha, Rhonda, Tyrone, Gerald, and B.J. are all seniors this year. Gerald's little sister Angel and Rob's younger sister Kiara are both ninth-graders, excited to be in the first year of high school. Rhonda and Tyrone are still together and trying to deal with the closeness of their relationship. Keisha, lonely and still trying to cope with the loss of Andy, envies what they have.

Several new characters add mystery, excitement, and humor to the school year. Jalani, a transfer student, is tall, lovely, and drives her own bright red BMW. Gerald admires her from afar. Leon, the class clown, hides a secret, and Jonathan Hathaway, the principal's son and the new student teacher, becomes much more than the track coach.

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN
Discussion Topics

• Darkness before Dawn begins at the end and then takes the reader back to April of the characters' junior year in high school. It is told in first person, from Keisha's point of view. What is the advantage of having a story told in first person? What is the disadvantage?

• A motif is a word or image that is repeated throughout a novel that helps to highlight or unify a central idea. Trace the references to the use of the word of "silver" in the novel, and explain how silver is important to the development of the story.

• Even though Keisha is intelligent and mature, she is easily entangled in Jonathan Hathaway's trap. Explain how this occurs, and discuss whether you think Keisha's mistakes are believable.
Discuss the role of Edna. Why is she significant, even though she is a very minor character? What does she teach Keisha and Jalani about people who are homeless and/or needy? What is meant by her statement, "Yo spirit is a shinin' silver star, chile. Can't nobody take that away from you"?

Discuss the character of Jonathan Hathaway. Does he have any redeeming qualities, or is he purely a negative character? What might have made Jonathan the person he became?

Discuss the character of Leon. What makes him a positive character? Why is he good for Keisha, and why does she initially reject him? How did his background affect his personality?

Discuss Joyelle and what you thought about her name change. What was the effect of her name change on how she dealt with the problems she faced? Did changing her name really make a difference? Explain how she managed to crash her father's car, and why you think she did it.

Discuss the characters of Rhonda and Tyrone. Discuss how they manage to control their emotions, as well as their reactions to those feelings, in spite of the intensity of the feelings they have for each other.

In chapter fourteen of *Darkness before Dawn*, the kids are at Rhonda's house doing homework on poetry. Summarize their discussion, then write a poem about some aspect of one of the three books. Analyze the poem at the very end of the book. How is it effective for the message Keisha wants to give?

Keisha is searching for "a real man -- someone who is mature and sophisticated" throughout the story. What qualities are found in "a real man"? Discuss each of the male characters in the story (include students as well as adults) and tell how they fit your qualifications.

Keisha says at the end of *Darkness before Dawn*, "We, the members of this graduating class, are joined together forever in a circle or friendship and memories. Because of our unusual difficulties, we have become stronger. Our shared tears have become the glue that has bound us together in love." Explain what she means. How are difficulties in life sometimes useful for making people grow closer together?
• Explain the title of the novel. What was the "darkness" in the lives of not just Keisha, but all of the characters? Why did it have to come before the "dawn" in their lives? How would you describe the "dawn"? Explain how the title might apply to a real-life situation.

Suggested Activities:

• You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write a story for your newspaper.
  --The first day of school in any American high school
  --Graduation day in any large American high school

• In diary form, write the life of Edna for several months. Include details about how she managed to live her life.

• Friendship is extremely important in Darkness before Dawn. Discuss the friendships of the following people:
  --Keisha and Rhonda
  --Joyelle and Angel
  --Leon and Keisha
  --Jalani and Gerald
  --Monty and Keisha
  --Jalani and Rhonda

• Write a magazine article about Jalani. Include her life in Africa, her relationship with her parents and her new stepmother, the death of her mother, and her relationship with her new friends. Include drawings of Jalani’s clothing designs if you like.

• Write a biography of Jonathan Hathaway, focusing on his childhood. Include details about his mother, his father, and his thoughts while growing up.

DARKNESS BEFORE DAW
FORGED BY FIRE
TEARS OF A TIGER

Discussion Topics

Lauded by critics, the award-winning books of the Hazelwood High trilogy offer a compelling look at issues affecting teenagers today. Beautifully written and emotionally moving, the trilogy introduces engaging, realistic characters whose lives and voices are interwoven; the actions of one impact the lives of others, resonating through the trilogy as events are described.
from different perspectives. The questions raised in the books are the questions of a generation, ranging from issues such as premarital sex and the anxiety of choosing a college, to the devastating effects of drunk driving, physical and sexual abuse, attempted rape, and suicide. Together, the books form an engrossing, memorable trilogy with an emotional impact that will linger, just as the characters will live on in readers' hearts and minds long after the books are closed.

• In each of the three novels, different details of the same events are given -- for example, Andy's death and the reactions of others to it. Make a chart of the following events and how they are differently told in the three novels. Discuss the effect of these differences.
  -- The car accident in which Rob is killed
  -- Andy and Keisha's breakup
  -- Andy's death
  -- The reaction of others to Andy's death
  -- Rhonda and Tyrone's growing relationship
  -- The difficulties in Gerald and Angel's life
  -- B.J. and his friendship with the others

• All three novels take place basically in Hazelwood High -- a large, fictional high school. What do you know of Hazelwood from the descriptions given in the text? How would you describe the building itself, the teachers, the students, the administration, the "feel" of the school? How is it like schools in your community? How is it different? From the descriptions given, would you like to go to Hazelwood High School? Explain why or why not. Why is a high school a good place to discuss serious issues?

• Several new characters are added in Darkness before Dawn. What is the overall effect of the addition of Jalani, Leon, and Jonathan? Why are these new characters needed?

• Sports activities are very important in all three books. How are sports important in the lives of young people? What positive as well as negative results can sports have in the life of a teenager? Discuss how basketball, track, and dancing are important to the development of the characters in the stories. Discuss how sports are important for you.

• Describe the relationship between the friends in the books. How do the events of the trilogy affect each of the young people and their relationships with each other? Is friendship enough when situations become monumental and overwhelming to young people?
• How is humor used in each of the three novels? Give examples of humorous situations in each book, and explain how the humor helps the movement of the story.

• Angel's medical condition is called anorexia. Look up the physical and emotional aspects of the problem and show how Angel's life, as shown in *Forged by Fire* and *Darkness before Dawn*, contributed to her illness.

• Discuss the family lives of each of the main characters -- Keisha, Gerald, Rhonda, Leon, and Jonathan. Discuss how the family and home life of each character affects how he or she copes with difficulties and problems.

• In *Tears of a Tiger*, what do the poems and essays written by the various students reflect about their lives and personalities? In *Forged by Fire*, what does Angel's love of ballet reflect about her life, her pain, and her personality? Why are poems, essays, and dancing an easy way to explain complicated feelings? How can self-expression be used as a tool for helping or healing?

• These books deal with some very serious issues. What are the problems created by discussing the issues of teen suicide and death, or physical and sexual abuse in a novel for young adults? What dangers and what positive influences can result? What is the effect of Monty's final words to Andy in the last chapter of *Tears of a Tiger*?

• Minor characters are often overlooked, but are very important to the development of a story. Discuss the importance of the following minor characters to the three stories and tell why they are significant.
  --Edna in *Darkness before Dawn*
  --Mr. Washington in *Forged by Fire*
  --Monty in *Tears of a Tiger*

• At the end of *Darkness before Dawn*, all of the characters from all three books have a fairly clear future defined. Trace the development of the main characters throughout the three books and tell how, by the end of the third book, each of them had grown and matured, ready for their futures.
Awards:

ALA Best Books For Young Adults  
CBC/NCSS Notable Children's Book in Social Studies  
Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award