



**Classroom Guide for**  
**NIGHT GOLF**  
by William Miller  
illustrated by Cedric Lucas

### **Reading Level**

Interest Level: Grades 2-5

Reading Level: Grades 2-3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 2.3/.5

Lexile Measure®: 550

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 3.5

### **Themes:**

Sports, African Americans, History, Self-Esteem, Intergenerational Relationships, Discrimination, Friendship, Young Adult

### **Synopsis**

The story of NIGHT GOLF was inspired by African American caddies who learned to play golf at night because of “whites only” rules at most private and public golf courses before the 1960s. Under the cover of darkness but with the light of the moon, African American golfers would practice the swings that they observed as caddies during the day. In his note at the beginning of the book, the author mentions in particular Charlie Sifford, an African American who worked his way from caddy to the PGA (Professional Golfers’ Association) tour in 1962.

NIGHT GOLF tells the story of a young African American boy who becomes a caddy because of his desire to learn to play golf. An older caddy teaches the boy how to play during moonlight sessions long after the white players have left the course.

### **Background**

Although the origin of golf may go back to the ancient Romans who played a game called “paganica,” the first organized golf club—and the first set of written rules for the game—did not exist until centuries later when they were established in Scotland in 1744. In the United States, golf did not appear until the late 1800s, and the PGA was

formed in 1916. A similar organization called the UGA (United Golf Association) for African American players was established in 1926. However, because it offered little prize money and received scant publicity, the UGA became known as the “peanut circuit.” It wasn’t until the 1940s that serious protests against the racial barriers of the PGA were raised. One avid golfer who lent his voice to the protest was the champion boxer, Joe Louis. In 1948 two UGA golfers gained admittance to the PGA’s open tournaments through an out-of-court settlement. The response from the PGA was to change its tournaments to “invitational” events, thus excluding people of color. By the late 1950s the NAACP took cases to the Supreme Court to open public courses to everyone. Finally, in 1961, the PGA was officially integrated. Charlie Sifford was the first African American to win the Hartford Open in 1967 and the Los Angeles Open in 1969. Since that time, the caddy system has largely been replaced by golf carts.

**Teacher Tip**

NIGHT GOLF is an ideal book to use during the spring months as students’ thoughts turn to outdoor sports. You might also recommend it for summer reading.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing NIGHT GOLF to students, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What do you know about golf? Have you ever played it? Have you watched someone play it?
2. Who are some well-known golfers? What do you know about them?
3. When you want something really badly, how do you go about getting it? What characteristics do you think someone needs to achieve a difficult goal?
4. How do you feel about excluding certain people or groups from participating in a game or sport? Why?

**Exploring the Book**

Hold up the book and read aloud the title. Ask students what they think the title means. Talk about why someone might play golf at night. Do students think it is like baseball game played at night, or could there be another explanation?

Point to the author’s name on the book cover and ask students if they have read any other books by him. If so, talk about the kind of books William Miller writes.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Have students write down three questions they hope to have answered by reading the book. You might give an example such as: Is the boy on the cover playing golf at night as an adventure?

Point out that the book has won the Parents’ Choice Gold Award, as well as many other children’s book awards. As they read the story, ask students to look for reasons why the book has been honored.

**Vocabulary**

This book contains many words that have special meanings in golf. They include:

club	course	caddy	round	tee (teed)
driver	wood	bunker	hole	water hazard
fairway	green	slice		

Have students identify both a golf meaning and where applicable, another meaning, for each word or term. You might follow up by having students make alphabetized golf glossaries. Encourage students to add more golf terms that they know or discover through research about the game.

**READING AND RESPONDING****Discussion Questions**

Use questions such as these to help students enhance their understanding of the book's message. Encourage students to refer to places in the story and illustrations to support their responses.

1. Why doesn't James's father encourage his son to play golf?
2. Why does the man at the golf course assume that James is there about the dishwasher's job?
3. What gives James the courage to speak up to the man at the golf course?
4. How would you describe the attitude of the golfers toward the caddies? Why do you think the golfers acted the way they did?
5. Why has Charlie been a caddy for 20 years?
6. What secret does Charlie share with James?
7. How does Charlie help James? Why do you think Charlie does this?
8. What events are important for James getting a chance to play golf in the daylight?
9. How do you think life might change for James in the future? Will it change for Charlie too?
10. How does playing golf at night help James's game?

**Literature Circles\***

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide to help group members explore the text.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines that expose the feelings of the different characters.
- The **Illustrator** might draw pictures to show other activities at the golf course during the day.

- The **Connector** might find and share more information about players like Charlie Sifford.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the text or pages that the group is discussing.
- The **Investigator** might research other information about the breakdown of racial barriers in golf.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Two such books you may wish to refer to are: *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 1994) and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they are reading. Suggest that students respond in reader's notebooks or in oral discussion.

1. James really wanted to play golf. What are the things you really want to do? What obstacles do you face achieving success? How will you try to overcome them?
2. How do the illustrations in the book add to your understanding of the story?
3. What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
4. Why do you think the white characters in the book were prejudiced? How does the story affect your attitude toward prejudice?

### Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities.

1. Think about the ending of the book. How believable are the last events in the story when James gets a chance to hit the ball and a crowd gathers to watch him play? Explain your response.
2. NIGHT GOLF is about racial barriers that a boy faces in golf. Think about an injustice that you feel is taking place today. Write a persuasive paragraph explaining what this injustice is and how you think it should be addressed.
3. Pretend you are James. Write a letter to Charlie telling him how you feel and thanking him for helping you.

### ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Use real objects or photographs to help students identify concrete nouns from the book such as club, ball, soda, sweater, garbage can, moon, cow, and so on.
2. Read aloud a sentence and have students repeat the sentence after you, pointing to each word as they speak.

3. Ask English speakers to act out parts of the book as you read them aloud. Repeat aloud verbs for the actions students are portraying.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

#### Social Studies

Remind students that golf was the last major sport to be officially integrated. Have students make a chart comparing the steps toward racial equality in golf and another major sport such as baseball or basketball. Students may use the timeline at the end of the story ("African Americans in Golf: In Brief") as a starting point for information about golf.

#### Science

Point out that James and Charlie play golf by moonlight. Discuss the different phases of the moon. Then have students figure out how often James and Charlie might be able to play during the summer months of June, July, and August, depending on the amount of moonlight available.

#### Art

Share with students some facts about golf courses.

- Most courses have 18 holes that are numbered.
- Each hole has a tee, a fairway, a green, and usually a hazard such as a sand trap or small pond.
- Most courses are designed as a loop so that players end up near the point where they began after each set of nine holes.
- Each hole begins at a tee where the golfer takes the first stroke. The stroke should send the ball along a fairway. At the end of the fairway is a green with grass that has been mowed very closely. Each green has a hole marked by a flag.

Have interested students research further the design of golf courses and then challenge them to design their own 9-hole or 18-hole golf course. Student may also wish to include a clubhouse on the edge of the course, and even a design for a new or innovative golf cart.

#### Teacher Tip

If a golf pro is available in your community, you might invite him or her to come to school and talk to students about the game.

#### Sports

1. Have students research the rules and technical aspects of playing golf. Then have teams of students give golf demonstrations to the class. Some students might display the different kinds of clubs and explain when each is used. Others might demonstrate (on playground grass) how to swing a golf club. Still others might tell the class about various protocols that golfers follow as they play.
2. Students might research and compile biographies of African American golfers such as Lee Elder and Tiger Woods. Students may also expand their collection of biographies to include other people of color who have become prominent in golf.

- Interested students might follow golf news and report on the tournaments taking place. Most of the major men's and women's golf championships take place during the spring and summer: the Masters (April), United States Open (June), the British Open (July), and PGA (August) for men; the LPGA (June) and United States Women's Open (July). Many other important golf tournaments take place during this time as well.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**William Miller** is the author of numerous award-winning books for young people, including *ZORA HURSTON AND THE CHINABERRY TREE*, *FREDERICK DOUGLASS: THE LAST DAY OF SLAVERY*, *RICHARD WRIGHT AND THE LIBRARY CARD*, *THE BUS RIDE*, *THE PIANO*, and *RENT PARTY JAZZ*. Among them Miller's books have won several major children's book awards, from organizations such as Reading Rainbow, SMITHSONIAN magazine, Cooperative Children's Book Center, International Reading Association, and the Parents' Choice Foundation. Of his first three picture books Miller has said, "My purpose is to inspire young readers and encourage them to know more about [Zora] Hurston, [Frederick] Douglass, and [Richard] Wright."

Miller was raised in Anniston, Alabama, and now lives in York, Pennsylvania, where he teaches creative writing and African American literature at York College.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Cedric Lucas's** first picture book was Miller's *FREDERICK DOUGLASS: THE LAST DAY OF SLAVERY*. To make the illustrations authentic, Lucas did a great deal of research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. Lucas illustrated *NIGHT GOLF* in 1999 and has illustrated a new cover for the paperback edition published in 2002.

THE NEW YORK TIMES has said about *NIGHT GOLF*: "The lessons of perseverance and pragmatism come through clearly and are nicely underscored by Cedric Lucas's impressionistic pastel-and-colored pencil illustrations, which tell the story simply."

Lucas is a native New Yorker who teaches art to middle school students in the Bronx. He received his bachelor's degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts and his masters from Lehman College. He lives with his family in Yonkers, New York.

### Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Night Golf*

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/87/hc/night\\_golf](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/87/hc/night_golf)

### Other Books by William Miller, illustrated by Cedric Douglas

*Frederick Douglass: The Last Day of Slavery*

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/slave.html>

### Other Books by William Miller

*Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree*

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/136/hc/zora\\_hurston\\_and\\_the\\_chinaberry\\_tree](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/136/hc/zora_hurston_and_the_chinaberry_tree)

*Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* in Spanish

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/163/hc/zora\\_hurston\\_y\\_el\\_arbol\\_sonador](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/163/hc/zora_hurston_y_el_arbol_sonador)

***Richard Wright and the Library Card***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/99/hc/richard\\_wright\\_and\\_the\\_library\\_card](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/99/hc/richard_wright_and_the_library_card)

***Richard Wright and the Library Card*** in Spanish:

[www.leeandlow.com/books/158/hc/richard\\_wright\\_y\\_el\\_carne\\_de\\_biblioteca](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/158/hc/richard_wright_y_el_carne_de_biblioteca)

***The Bus Ride***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/27/hc/the\\_bus\\_ride](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/27/hc/the_bus_ride)

***The Piano***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/90/hc/the\\_piano](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/90/hc/the_piano)

***Rent Party Jazz***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/98/hc/rent\\_party\\_jazz](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/98/hc/rent_party_jazz)

***Joe Louis, My Champion***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/70/hc/joe\\_louis\\_my\\_champion](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/70/hc/joe_louis_my_champion)

**BookTalk with William Miller on *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree***

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/miller.mhtml>

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