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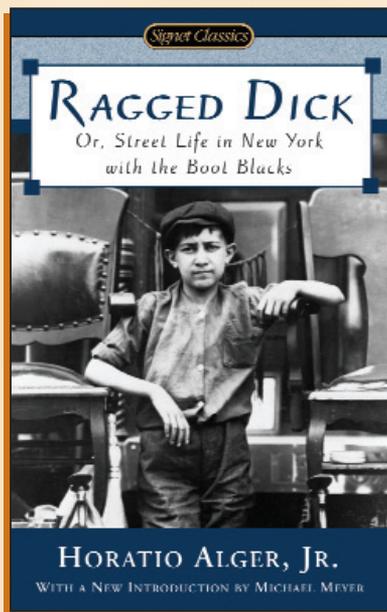
A TEACHER'S GUIDE
TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

HORATIO ALGER, JR.'S

RAGGED DICK

OR, STREET LIFE IN NEW YORK
WITH THE BOOT BLACKS

By JEANNE M. McGLINN AND JAMES E. McGLINN



S E R I E S E D I T O R S :

W. GEIGER ELLIS, Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, EMERITUS
and

ARTHEA J. S. REED, Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, RETIRED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
List of Characters.....	3
Synopsis of the Novel.....	3
Teaching <i>Ragged Dick</i>	6
Prereading Activities.....	6
I. Building Background Knowledge.....	6
II. Genre Study.....	9
III. Initial Exploration of Themes.....	10
During Reading Activities.....	14
I. Noting Initial Reactions.....	14
II. Reader Response.....	14
III. Focusing on the Elements of Fiction.....	16
IV. Discussion Questions.....	17
V. Vocabulary Development.....	19
After Reading Activities.....	19
I. How Initial Reactions Change.....	19
II. Deepening Understanding.....	20
III. Group and Individual Projects.....	20
IV. Extending Reading.....	23
V. Literature Circles.....	24
References.....	25
Professional Resources.....	25
About the Authors of this Guide.....	25
About the Editors of this Guide.....	25
Click on a Classic.....	26
Free Teacher's Guides.....	27

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INTRODUCTION

In 1867 Horatio Alger's story of *Ragged Dick* began as a twelve-part serial in the magazine *The Student and Schoolmate*, but it became so popular that he eventually published it as his first novel. Alger went on to write over a hundred novels in the second half of the nineteenth century using the formula he worked out in *Ragged Dick*. While he never achieved the literary fame he sought, his stories struck a chord in the dreams of the American people. Edward Stratemeyer, who started an influential syndicate of children's series books in 1883, read Alger's novels as a young boy and set out to write similar stories that continue to be highly popular even today (Johnson 33). Recently, E. D. Hirsch included Alger's work in his list of ideas that form part of our cultural heritage in "What Literate Americans Know," and the "rags to riches" theme shows no sign of losing its attraction. Like an archetypal fairy tale, Alger's story of how a poor boy can move from the fringes to become a respected member of society lives on in young adult stories, contemporary films, and the consciousness of Americans as the American Dream.

High school students are in a unique position to appreciate Dick's "Cinderella" transformation since they are facing many of the same issues in their lives: searching for identity, determining life's goals, thinking about their responsibility to others. This guide aims to assist teachers in planning to teach the novel in ways that will make it accessible to the range of readers in contemporary classrooms. To this end, there are suggestions for preparing students to read the novel with sensitivity toward Alger's setting and themes. During-Reading activities are included which will facilitate a critical reading of the novel. Post-reading activities encourage students to more deeply explore the content of the novel as well as make connections with other literary works. The variety of activities presented here can be used selectively by teachers in addressing their goals for teaching the novel and responding to the needs of their students.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Ragged Dick (Dick Hunter): bootblack boy and the hero of the story

Henry Fosdick: another bootblack boy who lives with Dick and becomes his tutor

Mr. Whitney: a man visiting New York who befriends Dick

Frank: Mr. Whitney's nephew, who gives Dick advice about how to change his life

Mr. Greyson: a gentleman who befriends Dick

Johnny Nolan, Mickey Maguire, Tom Wilkins: New York City street boys

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

LEARNING ABOUT DICK'S LIFE AND CHARACTER

CHAPTER 1: RAGGED DICK IS INTRODUCED TO THE READER

Dick is a homeless boy of fourteen who sleeps on the street in a wooden box and makes money by shining shoes. His character and personality are described in this chapter. Dick is enterprising, honest, frank and straightforward, but also extravagant. He has a sense of humor and a witty way of talking to his customers. He has acquired the vice of smoking and sometimes gambles away his hard-earned money. He is no model boy, but he has innate virtue.

CHAPTER 2: JOHNNY NOLAN

Johnny, who is lazy about business and never has enough money, is contrasted with Dick. Dick is happy that he is much more enterprising and has the money to do the things he likes, such as going to the theatre and buying quality cigars.

CHAPTER 3: DICK MAKES A PROPOSITION

The reader gets a taste of Dick's life with its pitfalls and lucky breaks. When Dick tries to change some money for one of his customers, he is accused of passing a counterfeit bill. However, the gentleman confronts the clerk who finally admits that he pocketed the cash, and Dick gets an extra tip for his trouble. Next, Dick overhears a gentleman and his nephew discussing their plans for the day, and he offers his services as a guide to the young man. The uncle agrees, and they take Dick to the Astor House hotel, so he can clean up and get some second-hand clothes. Through this makeover, Dick appears to be a young gentleman.

TOUR OF NEW YORK CITY**CHAPTERS 4-6: DICK'S NEW SUIT / CHATHAM STREET AND BROADWAY / UP BROADWAY TO MADISON SQUARE**

Dick guides Frank around the city, pointing out the sights and teaching Frank about the ways of city life, including con artists. They walk towards Chatham Street, crossing Broadway and the Park with its important public buildings. Dick talks about his aspirations to become an office boy, to "grow up 'spectable,'" and Frank believes that Dick can pull himself up if he gets an education and spends his money wisely. Frank tells the story of Dick Whittington, a very poor boy who became the mayor of London. Dick is inspired by the story and Frank's advice. He says no one ever encouraged him before to make anything of himself.

CHAPTER 7: THE POCKET-BOOK

A con man tries to hustle the boys to pay for a wallet stuffed with paper, saying that they will realize a large reward from the owner. Dick knows all about this type of scheme. He pretends to pay for the wallet but hands the con man bogus bills. The man returns and threatens Dick, who refuses to give back the wallet. Dick says he knows about the ways of city life, having lived there all his life.

CHAPTER 8: DICK'S EARLY HISTORY

Dick explains that he is an orphan; his mother died when he was three and his father was lost at sea. Dick has had to fend for himself since the age of seven. He worked as a newsboy and sold matches, but no matter how desperate he was, he never stole. Frank encourages Dick to get an education and to work hard "in the right way" to gain success.

CHAPTER 9: A SCENE IN A THIRD AVENUE CAR

Next the boys decide to take a horse-car to Central Park and take seats next to a middle-aged woman who is unhappy that the boys are crowding her. When she can't find her purse, she accuses Frank of theft and Dick as an accomplice. Frank, extremely embarrassed by the charge, asks the conductor to search him. Neither Frank nor Dick have the purse, so the woman is advised to recheck her pocket. She finds her purse but refuses to apologize to the boys.

CHAPTER 10: INTRODUCES A VICTIM OF MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

Frank compliments Dick on his cheery disposition, but Dick says he becomes lonely and depressed from time to time by his hard life. Frank says he wants to be Dick's friend, so he doesn't have to feel alone again. The boys head back to the hotel and then on to Wall Street. There they meet a young man who has lost \$50.00 to a swindler. A bit later they board the Wall Street Ferry to Brooklyn and Dick recognizes the swindler.

CHAPTER 11: DICK AS A DETECTIVE

Dick approaches the man and warns him not to get off the ferry, as the police are waiting to arrest him. Believing Dick, the con man passes the money back to Dick who then returns it to the poor boy from the country.

Dick and Frank return to the Astor House where Mr. Whitney advises Dick that he too can rise from his current station in life through hard work, education, frugality, and determination. Dick can make himself anything he wants to be if he is willing to work hard to achieve his goals. With this advice and a tip of \$5.00, Dick leaves Frank and his uncle and heads back out to the streets.

DICK'S TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER 12: DICK HIRES A ROOM ON MOTT STREET

Having determined to begin his transformation, Dick decides not to squander his money on entertainment, but instead looks to rent a room.

CHAPTERS 13 & 14: MICKY MAGUIRE & A BATTLE AND A VICTORY

Dick, keeping Frank's advice in mind, now makes the resolution to live in a more "respectable" way. He even hopes to save some money rather than living from day-to-day which had been his usual custom. Rather than spend the money he has left, Dick gets to work shining shoes and soon makes enough money for a hearty breakfast. The next day Dick opens a savings account. Dick's new appearance and decent clothing cause comments from the other bootblacks, particularly from a ruffian named Micky Maguire who thinks he is putting on airs. Mickey takes offense and attacks Dick, who defends himself admirably.

CHAPTERS 15 & 16: DICK SECURES A TUTOR / THE FIRST LESSON

Dick, being "scrupulously honest," looks for Mr. Greyson to whom he owes some change. Mr. Greyson is so impressed with Dick's honesty that he invites him to attend his Sunday School class. That evening Dick encounters another bootblack, twelve-year-old Henry Fosdick, who is having a difficult time making it on the streets. Dick invites Fosdick for supper and to share his room for the night. He then strikes a bargain with Fosdick, offering him lodging in exchange for reading and writing lessons. The boys immediately start on the first lesson, using a weekly newspaper. Henry soon realizes that Dick has not exaggerated about his lack of reading ability, but Dick is quick and not easily discouraged.

As they prepare for bed that evening, Dick sees Henry praying and decides to learn how to pray too. Dick is well into his program of self-improvement; he is learning to read, he is saving money, he is staying in at night, and he has begun to develop an idea of religion.

CHAPTER 17: DICK'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN SOCIETY

On Sunday morning Dick and Henry join Mr. Greyson and his family at church. Afterwards he invites the boys to lunch so that they can return for Sunday School. Dick is shy about his table manners and "profession," but the young daughter of the family is attracted to his "frank and handsome face."

CHAPTER 18: MICKY MAGUIRE'S SECOND DEFEAT

Maguire comes after Dick a second time, throwing a stone at his head. Dick chases Maguire, knocks him down, and tells him not to continue his attacks. Fosdick says that he knows Maguire is the head of a gang of boys from Five Points.

Dick's life now enters a routine: work during the day and study in the evening. He no longer wastes money on entertainment. He also makes excellent progress in his studies. He is grateful to his tutor Henry and wishes Henry could get a better position since he has such a good education. When Henry laments that he doesn't have decent clothing for an interview, Dick offers his savings.

CHAPTER 19: FOSDICK CHANGES HIS BUSINESS

Now that he has proper clothing, Fosdick applies for a position in a store. Mr. Grayson, happens to pass by and is able to give Fosdick a strong recommendation. Fosdick is hired, much to the chagrin of another boy who considers himself superior because he is a gentleman's son.

DICK'S NEW LIFE AND COMPLICATIONS

CHAPTERS 20-23: NINE MONTHS LATER / DICK LOSES HIS BANK-BOOK / TRACKING THE THIEF / TRAVIS IS ARRESTED

Henry has been successful in his job at the store while Dick continues to have lots of customers. Together they live so frugally that they have been able to save a good sum of money. Dick has improved greatly in both reading and writing, and he has gained knowledge in a wide variety of

subjects. Fosdick says that Dick has an education equal to his own and that he should think about a professional position and leave his bootblack work behind.

A few days later Dick encounters another boy, Tom Wilkins, whose mother faces eviction. Dick readily offers to cover the rent and get money from his savings account. But when he arrives home, he can't find his savings book. Fosdick and Dick question the landlady to find out if anyone has gone into their room. Immediately she suspects another tenant, Jim Travis, who lives in a room opposite the boys and has a bureau with a similar lock. Travis stops by that evening to see if the boys have discovered their loss.

Early the next morning, Dick arrives at the bank to prevent Travis from stealing his money. The cashier assists Dick in confronting Travis. A policeman stops Travis when he tries to run out of the bank. Dick is able to withdraw \$2.00 to help Tom Wilkins and his mother. Dick feels gratified by his generous act and reflects that he is repaying Mr. Whitney's gift.

CHANGING FORTUNES

CHAPTERS 24-27: DICK RECEIVES A LETTER / DICK WRITES HIS FIRST LETTER / AN EXCITING ADVENTURE / CONCLUSION

Dick receives a letter from Frank Whitney, who describes his life at boarding school and asks Dick to write. That evening Fosdick encourages Dick to write even though he has never written a letter before. When he is finished, Fosdick approves of the letter's tone because it sounds like Dick's true voice. After posting his letter, Dick runs into Johnny Nolan, who is surprised that Dick is able to write a letter. The author comments on the difference between Johnny and Dick, saying Johnny is not "adapted to succeed in life."

Dick continues to work as a bootblack in the mornings and search for a position in a store and counting-house in the afternoons. One day, Dick and Henry are taking the South Ferry when a child falls into the river. Dick, who is a good swimmer, readily jumps in to save the child who is about to go under for the third time. Dick is able to save the child, and the father promises to reward him admirably. The next morning Dick goes to the offices of Mr. Rockwell, the father, to reclaim his clothing. There Mr. Rockwell asks Dick about his past and future prospects and hires him as a clerk at a salary of \$10 per week. Dick is overjoyed with his sudden turn of fortune. He and Fosdick decide to leave Mott Street, and Dick turns over his bootblack business to the less fortunate boys. He determines to keep his shoeshine kit to remind him of his change in fortune, and he adopts a new name to fit his new circumstances: Richard Hunter, Esq., "a young gentleman on the way to fame and fortune."

TEACHING RAGGED DICK

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

These activities are designed to strengthen students' background knowledge of 19th century American history while deepening their understanding of literary genres and elements of fiction, particularly as they relate to *Ragged Dick*. Choose the activities that best fit the themes you plan to teach or match your goals for students' learning. (Note: Consult other Teacher's Guides to Signet Classics; they contain ideas that can be adapted to your goals as you prepare students to understand and enjoy the novel.)

I. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

PROBLEM SITUATION

Following are three brief situations to help students think about poverty, survival, and success. Choose one or more for students to read and respond to the questions. The students can share their answers with a partner and discuss them with the class.

1. As you walk down a street in a large city, a boy, about fourteen, looks at your scuffed shoes, approaches, and asks to shine your shoes for \$2.00. The boy's face and hands are streaked with dirt; his clothes are worn and ragged.

How do you feel about the boy approaching you with this request?

How do you respond? Why do you respond in this way?

2. You are on your own at the age of fourteen, living on the streets in a big city. You are basically uneducated and too young for most regular jobs.

If you do not receive support from a social service agency or a quality education, how might you survive?

How can you earn money to buy food?

Where would you sleep?

What are the dangers you might encounter?

What are your chances of surviving on your own?

3. Dan and Don are two boys of high school age who have similar ambitions to earn money and succeed in life. Dan comes from a poor family. He has moved many times and has been frequently absent from school and has not done well in his grades. Don comes from a wealthy family who has sent him to an expensive boarding school. After high school, they plan to send Don to a prestigious college.

If Dan expects to achieve the same level of financial success as Don, what personal qualities, personal actions, and help from others will he need to progress towards this goal?

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Students should first answer the questions true or false under the Pre (pre-reading) heading. Then conduct a class survey to see how students answered and why. After reading the novel, have students indicate how the author would have answered the questions. Also, have them mark their own post-reading answers. Follow up with a class discussion to see if students changed their answers to any of the questions.

Pre Author Post

___/___/___ 1. Virtue is its own reward.

___/___/___ 2. The most important things in life are free.

___/___/___ 3. All you need to succeed in life is common sense and hard work.

___/___/___ 4. For success in the business world, the most important thing is who you know.

___/___/___ 5. Without the kindness of strangers, we would not get ahead.

___/___/___ 6. You have to dress for success.

___/___/___ 7. It's not what you say but how you say it that's important.

HORATIO ALGER'S BIOGRAPHY

Context for reading the novel can be gained by reading about Horatio Alger's life. An excellent biographical resource, which also describes the complexity of Alger biographical studies, is available on the Web at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cinder/bio.htm>

Another thoughtful essay is available at the following web site:

http://www.city-journal.org/html/10_4_urbanities-the_moral.html

The definitive biography, cited by most Alger critics, is *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* by Gary Scharnhorst and Jack Bales. Students can read the following chapters on Alger's life:

"The Odds against Him: 1832-1860" details Alger's undergraduate days and his early writing career;

"Bound to Rise: 1860-1866" describes Alger's European tour, his Civil War poetry and other writing, and his appointment as minister at the First Unitarian Church in Brewster, Massachusetts;

"Adrift in New York City: 1866-1873)" describes Alger's days in New York City when he tried to support himself exclusively from his writing and the publishing success of *Ragged Dick*.

Assign one of the web essays or a chapter in the Scharnhorst and Bales biography. Ask students to work with a partner and create a chart listing five central events of Alger's life. Students who read individual chapters in the book-length biography can provide significant details about events chosen by other students who have read the shorter web biographies. As a class, compare the charts and why students consider certain events central to the life of the author. Discussion: Do any of the events in Alger's life suggest the type of books he will write?

Another excellent website on Horatio Alger is Horatio Alger Resources at:

<http://www.washburn.edu/sobu/broach/algerres.html>

STUDYING THE LANGUAGE OF THE NOVEL: DIALECT

Alger tries to reproduce the speech of an unlettered, unsophisticated boy of the streets. In order to identify the main features of his dialect, use the dialogue on pp. 19-26 to compare and contrast the speech patterns of Frank and his Uncle to Dick's. Have students read the dialogue aloud in small groups with members of each group assuming different roles. One member of the group should make notes about Dick's speech—patterns, vocabulary, and grammar—as it differs from the dialect of Frank and his Uncle. Afterwards students should confer and identify attributes of Dick's unique dialect.

As a class, complete a chart with the three headings: Speech Patterns; Vocabulary; Grammar. List items students have identified in their small groups.

Discussion: How does Dick's dialect differ from the dialect of Standard English? What is the reason the author gives Dick a particular dialect? How important is Dick's dialect if he wants to change his current status? Do people judge others by their language? Do you think it is important to use Standard English all the time or at certain times? Do you have a dialect? Do you like your dialect and why? Do you change your speech patterns in certain circumstances? Why? Is one dialect better than another? Why are certain dialects valued?

VISUALIZING THE SETTING OF THE NOVEL

To enable students to visualize the setting in the novel, have them look at two views of New York City from the 1860s:

Broadway, Spring Street 1860 at www.jimandellen.org/trollope/show.na.html
and a Stereoscopic View of Broadway, New York City, c 1860 at
www.scienceandsociety.co.uk/results.asp?x9=US

Ask students to write a descriptive journal response with two parts: first, list concrete and sensory details you see in these pictures; second, describe what it would be like to be a part of the crowd walking down this street. Share these writings in small groups and create a chart, listing as many words as possible that describe the city experience.

Ask students to research who made up the teeming crowds on New York's streets during this period. How many city-dwellers were immigrants? How many young left their family farms and the country to make their fortunes in the city? How many people were homeless? How many lived in lodging houses with strangers?

STUDYING WORKS OF ART

John George Brown (1831-1913) is an American artist whose favorite subjects were the shoeshine boys of New York City. He painted his first bootblack studies in the 1860s but did not focus on this subject until 1880. From then until 1910 he created hundreds of studies of bootblack boys.

Below are web sites for Brown's paintings and engravings:

The Shoe Shine Boys, 1893: www.philaprintshop.com/images/brwnshoe.jpg

Perfectly

Happy,

1885:

www.butlerart.com/pc_book/pages/john_george_brown_1831.htm

Business Neglected, 1884: www.neartexchange.com/jgbrown.jpg

Create a Power Point slide show of these paintings to present to the class. Ask students to brainstorm their reactions as they view the paintings: How do you feel as you look at the paintings? What is the feeling the artist is trying to evoke in the viewer?

After discussing their reactions, ask the students to think about the life of a homeless person today. Perhaps students have seen individuals with a sign indicating that they are homeless and need a job or food. What is the reality of the lives of the homeless? How does this reality compare to the depiction of the street boys in Brown's paintings? Why did Brown project this image of the shoeshine boys? Why were these images popular with his patrons? Why would it be appropriate to label Brown's paintings sentimental?

EXPERIENCING THE NOVEL

Shining Shoes

Contemporary students may have no experience shining shoes and may not appreciate the hard work involved in giving a good shoeshine. Have students experience one of the following activities before reading the novel:

1. Ask students to wear leather shoes to class and provide several shoeshine kits for them to use—it makes sense to have sneaker-cleaning solutions on hand as well. Improvise a shoeshine corner in the classroom where students can shine each other's shoes; everyone must have a turn. Then ask students to write about the experience and how shining shoes made them feel. They should use all of their senses to record the experience. Students should discuss how it feels to receive this service and how it feels to be the bootblack.
2. Have a high school ROTC instructor visit your class with a group of students who have to polish boots as a part of their preparation for inspection. Have students describe how they go about getting the best shine and have the instructor explain why military personnel are so particular about all aspects of the uniform of a soldier. Ask these students why it is important that a soldier's shoes be perfectly shined?
3. Bring into the classroom a local person who gives shoe shines and have him/her demonstrate the art of shining shoes, describing the tricks of the trade.

MAKING PREDICTIONS

One way of getting students launched into reading the novel is through a Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) of the first chapter, "Ragged Dick is Introduced to the Reader." Read the first dialogue to the students (pp. 3 & 4) and ask them to paraphrase it. Then ask them to predict the kind of person Dick is. Ask students to read silently through the end of the chapter and then have them summarize the main points and confirm or revise their predictions. Based on their initial ideas, have students predict Alger's reasons for writing the novel. List these and post in a prominent location to review and revise during the reading of the novel. This list of predictions can provide students with a sense of context and purpose for reading.

II. GENRE STUDY

SERIES NOVELS

Ragged Dick was first written as a series of connected stories in the *Student and Schoolmate*, described in Alger's Preface as "a well-known juvenile magazine." Most of today's high school students have a fairly wide acquaintance with series fiction, such as Nancy Drew and Hardy Boy novels, the *Star Wars* films, and TV series. Comic books are often written as a series of stories. Many characters are written as "stock characters," or types that can be easily identified. The story is a series of events, sometimes including a mystery or challenging set of complications that must be resolved by the hero.

Ask students to brainstorm the titles of several series they have read or seen. Make a chart with three to four titles and then fill in the information to answer each of these questions:

Who is the hero of the story?

What are some of the characteristics of the hero?

What happens in the story?

Are the series of events realistic or fantastic?

What are series's special features?

What features suggest that these stories are not complete in themselves, but are part of a longer story that is unwinding over time?

For a creative writing activity, ask students to outline a contemporary series novel set in their school in the present year. Brainstorm, as a class:

Who is (are) the hero(es) of the story?

What is the plot or series of events leading to complications?

What is the moral of the story?

Students can prepare a profile of a character they have identified in the small group exercise. They should suggest a name for the character, give background information about the character's life, name the character's friends, and state how the character might act in various situations. Students can read their profiles in small groups.

III. INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THEMES

Prepare students to read the novel at a deeper level by exploring several key themes before they read the novel. These explorations create an atmosphere of inquiry, encouraging students to discuss openly their responses and attempts to develop understanding.

COMING OF AGE: DICK'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

1. The coming-of-age theme focuses on the growth of the adolescent from carefree childhood to responsible adulthood, usually emphasizing psychological growth. Young adults experience isolation, search for identity, confusion, and rebellion. They want to be independent at the same time as they are dependent on family and other adults for emotional and economic support. They want security while they forge ahead into the unknown. They seek the support of their peer group as they strive for independence, trying to discover who they are and what they are capable of achieving.

Choose a novel or film most of your students know (*The Outsiders*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Star Wars*, a Harry Potter novel, a recent teen movie) and as a group explore the condition of the main adolescent character and the changes he/she goes through over the course of the novel or film. List the traits of the main character's personality at the beginning of the story. Identify when the character begins to change and why. List the traits of the character's personality by the end of the novel or film.

Discussion: How does the character's identity change in the process of growth and maturation? What are the stages through which the character passes on his/her way to forming a new identity? List these stages on chart paper so that while students are reading *Ragged Dick*, they can fill in details showing the stages of Dick's growing sense of self.

2. The search for identity is even more complicated when adolescents have no parents. In the works listed above, the protagonists have either lost one or both parents. Using these works, or other similar works, list the complications that occur for the orphaned protagonist.

Discussion: How does the loss of a parent affect a young person's development? How is the search for identity more difficult when a person doesn't know his/her parents or when the

parents are no longer living?

RAGS TO RICHES/THEME OF SUCCESS

1. How do you define SUCCESS? Have students create a graphic organizer with a partner by writing the word “success” in a central circle and then brainstorming ideas associated with success on lines radiating out. After students have worked together, create a class graphic representation of success.

Discussion: Do ideas/definitions of success differ? Why? What affects your consideration of success? Is there a standard of success that is universally recognized? How does culture or socio-economic status influence one's definition of success?

2. Have students think about their own success by making a list of their goals for the future. The following questions may assist them in defining and evaluating their goals: Where and what do you want to be in 20 years? What kind of work do you want to do? How much money per year do you want to make? How do you plan on attaining these goals? What will you need to do in order to make these goals a reality?

Here is a variation on this exercise:

According to their own point of view, ask students to organize the following list of goals from the most to the least important

- Wealth
- Good Health
- Happy Family
- Strong Friendships
- Good Looks
- Good Job
- Good Car
- Good Home
- Free time to relax and travel

Then have students explain in writing why they chose their top three goals and what these goals indicate about what they value in life. Ask students to share their ideas with a partner.

Class discussion: What are important goals for life? Why do you value certain goals over others?

3. One of the components of the American Dream is the idea that you can make yourself into anything you want to be through hard work, perseverance, and good luck. Discuss with the class: Do Americans still believe that you can make yourself into anything you want to be? What are examples of this rags-to-riches philosophy in contemporary society? Think of politicians, sport heroes, Hollywood stars, *Survivor*, and makeover shows on television. What do we value in the self-made man/woman? Do we value ethical behavior, accomplishments, or celebrity status? Do Americans believe that good luck is a shortcut to success?
4. Assign partners two to three quotes to read and analyze about success. Students should discuss the meaning of the quote and list the implied qualities required of the person who will follow the advice. (Teacher's Note: There are many quotes about success; a quick Google search will give you multiple options. The following site lists quotes that range from Demosthenes to Vince Lombardi: http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_success.html)

Sample Quotes:

“I say you ought to get rich and it is your duty to get rich. Money is power and you ought to be reasonably ambitious to get it. You ought because you can do more good with it than you could without it. Money printed your Bible, money built your churches...I say, then, you ought to have money. If you can honestly attain unto riches, it is your Christian and Godly duty to do so. It is an awful mistake of these pious people to think you must be awfully poor in order to be pious.” Russell Conway

“Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value.” Albert Einstein

“I know the price of success: dedication, hard work, and an unremitting devotion to the

things you want to see happen.” Frank Lloyd Wright

“I have learned, that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.” Henry David Thoreau

“If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right.” Henry Ford

“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” Robert Kennedy

“You have reached the pinnacle of success as soon as you become uninterested in money, compliments, or publicity.” Thomas Wolfe

“There's no success like failure/ And...failure's no success at all.” Bob Dylan

Following the discussion, assign students to compose their personal quote about success and write it on a strip of paper to be posted on a bulletin board. Students can reflect on their quotes as they read discussions about the nature of success in the novel.

5. Give student copies of the short poem about success by Emily Dickinson. Read the poem aloud to the whole class and then ask students to read the poem to a partner.

Success is counted sweetest

By those who ne'er succeed.

To comprehend a nectar

Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host

Who took the flag to-day

Can tell the definition,

So clear, of victory!

As he, defeated, dying,

On whose forbidden ear

The distant strains of triumph

Burst agonized and clear!

Have students write their reactions to the poem, using the following questions: How do you feel as you listen to the words of the poem? What is the most important word in the poem?

After students have a chance to read their responses to each other, discuss as a class what Dickinson says about success.

6. Ask students to find and share 3 or 4 pictures of successful people. Divide the class into small groups to discuss with each other why they chose the particular pictures. Then ask students to organize the pictures into categories of different types of success. They can use any categories they wish, as long as they can explain what the category means. Then have students post their pictures with a label indicating the type of success represented.

Class discussion: Who do we identify as successful? What traits do they have? What distinguishes them as a success? Who are the truly successful and why?

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. What do we owe to others in our community? Ask students what is the “greatest commandment.” Some students will know that according to St. Matthew's Gospel Jesus was asked, “Which is the great commandment?” He replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:36-40, King James Version). Ask students what it means to love your neighbor as yourself? What is the challenge of this teaching?

This teaching is also called the “Golden Rule” and it appears in the teachings of all the major religions of the world. You can find a chart showing the different religious expressions of the golden rule at <http://www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html>

Discuss with your students: What principles for community living are implied in the Golden Rule? Are these valid principles to live by? What does the Golden Rule mean in terms of your

life as a high school student?

2. Assign students to read the essay at <http://www.homeless.org/do/Home> about homelessness in the United States, and then survey two of the links to other sites listed at the end of the article. Ask them to list five things they learned about the condition of the homeless and what is being done to help them.

In class, students can work in small groups to create posters on homelessness today. They can use magazine pictures to create a collage. After students display their posters, ask them to write on the following journal prompt: What is your responsibility to the homeless in your community? Discuss student ideas in class.

3. What is the responsibility of those who have great wealth? How should they manage their funds and how should they distribute their money? What duties do the wealthy have to the rest of society? How should the wealthy conduct their lives? How should they view their wealth? Assign students to read Andrew Carnegie's essay, "Wealth," which was published in the *North American Review* in 1889, and later became known as "The Gospel of Wealth." This essay is available at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5767/>

Class discussion: How does Carnegie answer the questions posed above? What does he see as the role of the wealthy in the community?

Have students make a list of Carnegie's arguments for the uneven distribution of wealth in one column under the heading PRO. Then in small groups brainstorm opposing ideas to Carnegie's points. List them in a column labeled CON. As a whole class, discuss the strength of Carnegie's arguments and decide if student generated con-arguments provide sufficient counter positions. After this discussion, ask students to write briefly in response to the following prompt: It is the right of the wealthy to have unlimited control over their wealth because what they do benefits society in general. Provide examples for your point of view.

The Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation is a visible instance of modern philanthropy. Direct students to the website at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>. Ask students to list some of Gates's philanthropic focuses and comment on the scope of these undertakings. In what ways is this different from American philanthropy in the nineteenth century?

Ask students to consider the Trickle-Down Economics that became public policy during the Reagan presidency. Do the rich have responsibilities to improve the condition of the poor through government programs and taxes? Do such programs remove incentives for the poor to improve their own fortunes? Would Alger support Trickle-Down Economics?

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

1. Discuss with the class: What does it mean to dress for success? Are there rules about what to wear and when? Have you ever had the experience of not being dressed to fit the occasion? How did you feel? What did you do? Do you think people judge each other according to what they wear? In school, do some groups—punk, goth, nerd, prep, jock, hip hop—show differing attitudes to the dress for success code? Do they hold a different set of values, or is this just fashion? Is there something to be gained for dressing appropriately for a particular situation or position? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about what you will wear and why?
2. Ask students to think about their experiences applying for a job. Discussion: Is it a good idea to wear "proper attire" when interviewing for a job? Are you careful about what you wear when interviewing for a job? Do you think that what you wore affected whether or not you got the job? Are you required to wear a certain outfit or uniform at work? Why? Should you be required to dress in a certain style for work or at school? Remind students that they should have reasons and examples for their answers.
3. Does what you wear affect how you act? Does what you wear affect how people react to you? Ask students to prepare a role-play that will explore the effect of personal presentation.

Role-Play Directions for Students:

Improvise your actions to show what you would say and do in the following situations. Be aware of how you would present yourself and what speech patterns you would use. You will have time to prepare a brief skit. You can use dialogue or have a narrator or both. All the members of the group must be a part of the skit. Make sure you rehearse several times.

- a. Your high school football or soccer team is about to play an important rival for a chance to go to the state championships. How will the girl's/boy's team prepare for the big game?
- b. It's prom season and you are going to the store with a group of friends to shop. You are very excited about going with the person who has invited you (this situation applies to both males and females). What will you be looking for?
- c. You are running for an office on the Student Council and you are going to address the whole school. How will you present yourself?
- d. You have been called to the principal's office with your parents to discuss an infraction of school rules; you want to persuade the principal that you are innocent.

After each group presents its skit, use the questions above to discuss the impact of a person's appearance. Ask the class what choices the actors made in terms of their appearance and how their appearance would affect the outcome positively or negatively. Why?

DURING READING ACTIVITIES

The following reader response prompts and discussion questions should encourage a more in-depth analysis of themes and ideas already considered in the pre-reading activities. Other activities are designed to help students develop vocabulary and analyze the art of the novel.

I. NOTING INITIAL REACTIONS

1. Students can note their responses to the story in a double-entry journal for each section of the novel. Have students divide their paper in half with a vertical line. On one side, they should write one or two quotes they find interesting. On the other side they answer these questions: Why did you choose the quotes? What do they mean? How do they further your understanding of the novel's characters or events?

II. READER RESPONSE

1. Give students an opportunity to express initial reactions to their reading by asking open-ended questions or letting them choose a particular element of the story to explore. Here are some possible prompts:
 - A. Choose an event you reacted to strongly and tell why.
 - B. Select a "striking quote" from the novel and write about your reaction to it.
 - C. What was the most important word, phrase, or sentence in this section? Why was it the most important?
 - D. Describe the image that comes to mind when you think about a particular character.

Ask questions that require students to support their opinions with details from the story. Avoid questions with one-word answers, such as "Did you like the story?" When they say, "No," it's too difficult to engage them again. However, if students write their reactions, even when negative, they are critically analyzing the novel. They can then share their written responses in small groups, or you can begin a class discussion using their responses to initiate conversation.

2. Students can also respond to selected quotes from the novel. Quotes can be used for free writing, journal entries, or discussion starters. These quotations may lead to rich responses:

"His [Dick's] nature was a noble one, and had saved him from all mean faults." (8)

"Now, in the bootblacking business, as well as in higher avocations, the same rule prevails, that energy and industry are rewarded, and indolence suffers." (10)

"It is often the case that the young vagabond of the streets, though his food is uncertain, and his bed may be any old wagon or barrel that he is lucky enough to find unoccupied when night sets in, gets so attached to his precarious but independent mode of life, that he feels discontented in any other." (12)

"When Dick was dressed in his new attire....He now looked quite handsome, and might readily have been taken for a young gentleman, except that his hands were red and grimy." (24)

"I should like to see you getting on. There isn't much chance of that if you don't know how to read and write." (39)

"I don't see why rich folks should be so hard upon a poor boy that wants to make a livin'." (54)

"There've been a great many boys begin as low down as you, Dick, that have gawn up respectable and honored. But they had to work pretty hard for it." (55)

"All labor is respectable, my lad, and you have no cause to be ashamed of any honest business; yet when you can get something to do that promises better for your future prospects, I advise you to do so." (77-78)

"For seven nights he [Dick] was sure of a shelter and a bed to sleep in. The thought was a pleasant one to our young vagrant, who hitherto had seldom known when he rose in the morning where he should find a resting-place at night." (86)

"[Dick] was a thorough democrat, using the word not politically, but in its proper sense, and was disposed to fraternize with all whom he styled 'good fellows,' without regard to their position." (90)

"Micky misunderstood Dick, and judged from the tenor of his speech that he would be an easy victim. As he knew, Dick very seldom was concerned in any street fight—not from cowardice, as he imagined—but because he had too much good sense to do so." (94)

"Dick was not naturally irreligious. If he had lived without a knowledge of God and of religious things, it was scarcely to be wondered at in a lad who, from an early age, had been thrown upon his own exertions for the means of livings, with no one to care for him or give him good advice." (111)

"I went to a fortun' teller once, and she told me [Dick] I was born under a lucky star with a hard name, and I should have a rich man for my particular friend, who would make my fortun'. I guess you are going to be the rich man." (126)

"Dick had gained something more valuable than money. He had studied regularly every evening, and his improvement had been marvelous. He could now read well, write a fair hand, and had studied arithmetic as far as Interest....our hero was very much in earnest in his desire to improve. He knew that, in order to grow up respectable, he must be well advanced, and he was willing to work." (137)

"In order to give Tom the additional assistance he had promised, Dick would be obliged to have recourse to his bank-savings. He would not have ventured to trench upon it for any other reason but this. But he felt that it would be selfish to allow Tom and his mother to suffer when he has it in his power to relieve them." (142)

"Wealth is comparative, and Dick probably felt as rich as many men who are worth a hundred thousand dollars. He was beginning to feel the advantages of his steady self-denial, and to experience the pleasures of property." (147)

"Tom thanked our hero very gratefully, and Dick walked away, feeling the self-approval which always accompanies a generous and disinterested action." (162)

"[Johnny Nolan] was not adapted to succeed in the life which circumstances had forced

upon him....To succeed in his profession, humble as it is, a bootblack must depend upon the same qualities which gain success in higher walks in life." (175)

"You're a plucky boy, or you wouldn't have dared to jump into the water after this little chap. It was a risky thing to do." (179)

"My lucky stars are shinin' pretty bright now. Jumpin' into the water pays better than shinin' boots; but I don't think I'd like to try it more'n once a week." (182)

"When, in short, you were 'Ragged Dick.' You must drop that name, and think of yourself now as 'Richard Hunter. ESQ.," said our hero, smiling. "A young gentleman on the way to fame and fortune." (185)

III. FOCUSING ON THE ELEMENTS OF FICTION

READING FOR SETTING

1. Alger's story is set against the backdrop of the vast variety of life on the streets of New York City in the late nineteenth century. *Ragged Dick* is proud of his knowledge of city life and people. Students can create a fictional map delineating different neighborhoods of New York City while they are reading the novel. The map should show Dick's movements throughout the City and his tour with Frank.

Also ask students to make a list of the people Dick encounters in each neighborhood. Discussion: Is there a difference between the people he meets in one part of the city versus another part? What does this suggest about social stratification in the city? Is there a divide between the social classes? How do social classes interact? Are the rich, middle-class, and poor as rigidly divided today as they were in *Ragged Dick's* world?

2. *Ragged Dick* progresses from sleeping on the street in a wooden box, to a room in a house in a poor part of town, to having the means to move to a nicer quarter of the city. Students can draw a picture of each of these settings and write answers to the following questions at the bottom of each drawing: What is his level of wealth? What is the quality of his life? How does his life change as he moves from one place to another?

READING FOR CHARACTER

1. Assign one of the four main boy characters (*Ragged Dick*, Henry, Mickey, and Johnny Nolan) to pairs of students—make sure each of these characters is represented by one-fourth of the class. Have students prepare a "graphic organizer" on poster paper by putting the name of the character in the center. As they read, students should look for details about the character, including physical descriptions, what is said about the character, how others respond to the character, and what the character says and does. These details are noted on lines (spokes) radiating out from the central circle. Post the charts for reference during discussions. Also, point out the various details noted by different pairs. Discuss with the class how different readers notice different details.
2. Female characters play minor roles in the novel. Ask students to watch for three women: Mr. Greyson's daughter, Ida; Mrs. Moony, the landlady; and the Lady on the bus. Have students create a three-column chart on which they list the behaviors of each of these women and quotes of what they say and what is said about them. Use these charts as a beginning point for discussion of how the author wants us to feel about the women in the story. Discussion: How do the boys in the novel react to the women? What do women represent in the world of boys and men? Are women from different social classes treated differently and why?
3. Have students create a timeline, tracing the changes in Dick's values and goals from the beginning to the end of the novel. Students can list Dick's actions below the line and identify the values represented by the actions above the line. Have students write an entry in their journals, following each of the sections of the novel, about the state of Dick's physical and psychological development.
4. As students read each section of the novel, ask them to draw cartoons of key scenes in the novel. Post these pictures around the room as visual reminders of the plot.

READING FOR THEME

1. Pre-reading activities were meant to develop students' understanding of *Ragged Dick's* predominant themes: the search for identity; success and the self-made man; social responsibility; appearance vs. reality, or "dressing for success." Assign small groups of students to follow one of these themes. Have each group prepare a graphic organizer, listing their ideas about the theme's meaning. Ask students to include at least three concrete examples of the novel's themes as they relate to personal experiences. For example, the group explaining success might list some moments of personal success, or times when they judged themselves successful even when they appeared to fail. They might also include their own definition of success. Groups should present their graphic organizers to the class.

As students read the novel, each group should list quotes or details, as they related to a theme, in a reading log. They should then share these lists with the class. You can also call on group members to start the discussion of a particular theme by reading a quote they have recorded and explaining why they chose it.

2. Alger includes frequent discussions of how a person can change his life through hard work and perseverance. Ask students to set aside a section of their reading log in which they can list the pages where such discussions occur. Students can create a class collage of Alger's sayings about success by writing key words from these passages on strips of colored paper and pinning them to a bulletin board.
3. Give students post-it-notes so they can mark every time Dick talks about his appearance. Discussion: How does Dick's attitude about his clothing and appearance change throughout the novel?
4. Various gentlemen help Dick throughout the story. Have students make a list of every person who helps Dick. Discussion: What is his/her social status? What does he/she do for Dick? Why does he/she help him? How does the help benefit Dick?

IV. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Students can deepen their personal responses to the novel through small group and class discussion. The goal of these discussions is to help students determine how a character's words and actions might develop into a theme.

Below are thought-provoking questions, organized by the sections identified in the Synopsis.

LEARNING ABOUT DICK'S LIFE AND CHARACTER: CHAPTERS 1-3

1. What does it mean to have a "noble nature"? Are humans born with a tendency to do good or evil or is goodness learned?
2. How are Dick and Johnny Nolan different? Why doesn't Johnny work harder to earn more money?
3. What are the main difficulties faced by bootblacks trying to make a living in New York City?
4. Mr. Whitney thought that Dick looked honest and could be trusted. Do you think that honest people have a certain look that can be detected by others?

TOUR OF NEW YORK CITY: CHAPTERS 4-11

1. Dick encounters several swindlers on the streets of New York. What attributes make people vulnerable to swindlers? Why is Dick able to avoid being swindled?
 2. Frank tells Dick that he is "none the worse for being a bootblack" (39). What clues has the author given to support or contradict this statement?
 3. What does the story about the Irishman who fed his horse wood shavings say about low-paying jobs? What does the story indicate about Irishmen?
 4. What is the moral of the story about Dick Whittington, Lord Mayor of London? Did he gain his wealth through ability or luck? Explain your answer.
 5. Frank tells Dick what he must do to grow up respectable and honored. Is being respected by
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others a worthy goal? What must a person do today to be respected by others?

6. Why does the lady on the horse-car accuse the boys of robbing her even though their appearance suggests they are upper class? How does Alger use this incident to comment on class issues?
7. Dick and Frank meet a young man when they are leaving the Custom House. What does the appearance of the young man suggest about his level of sophistication?
8. Dick calls the young man who was swindled “a baby.” Why do you think he judges him so harshly?
9. How does Dick treat the swindler he confronts on the boat? What does this show about Dick's character?
10. Why does Mr. Whitney give Dick a five-dollar bill?
11. How does Dick feel about Frank? Why has Frank made such an impression on Dick?
12. In what way might Chapter 11 mark the turning point in the novel?

DICK'S TRANSFORMATION: CHAPTERS 12-19

1. Dick has developed a “new vision of respectability,” owing to his acquaintance with Frank. How has Frank motivated Dick to advance in the world?
2. Micky Maguire resents Dick's wearing good clothes. What do good clothes and cleanliness represent to Micky? Why is he resentful?
3. What does the word “democrat” mean in Chapter 13? Does the author hold a “democratic” view of the work of the bootblack? Defend your answer.
4. What does the fight between Micky and Dick reveal about the personal qualities of each of the boys?
5. How is Dick helped on his journey towards respectability by Mr. Greyson? What does Alger imply about the advantages of being helped by the kindness of strangers? What does the presence of swindlers indicate about the dangers posed by strangers?
6. How is Dick's relationship with Fosdick mutually beneficial?
7. What does Dick find respectable in both Frank and Fosdick?
8. Is there a difference between respectability based on one's life-station and respectability based on one's personal character? What is the relationship implied by the author between the two sources of respectability?
9. Why does Ida Greyson make Dick feel bashful and embarrassed?
10. If it is not a dishonorable occupation, why is Dick embarrassed when he admits that he is a bootblack?
11. What motivates Dick's generosity in giving Fosdick money? Does he think that Fosdick will help him in turn when Fosdick is wealthy? Explain.
12. List all the factors that enable Fosdick to rise above being a bootblack and getting a position as a clerk in a hat store.

DICK'S NEW LIFE AND COMPLICATIONS: CHAPTERS 20-23

1. What is Dick's chief pleasure with his growing wealth? What does Alger imply about individual capitalism?
2. Jim Travis who steals Dick's money is motivated to improve his station in life. What is the major difference between Jim and Dick?

CHANGING FORTUNES: CHAPTERS 24-27

1. In Chapter 24 when Dick has to wear his old clothes, he is ashamed of his appearance, while at the beginning of the novel he gave little thought to his appearance. Why has his feeling changed? Is this a positive or negative development in his character?
 2. What qualities does Dick demonstrate in his rescue of the child who had fallen off the Ferry?
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What are his motives?

3. Frank Whitney is being sent to a boarding school by his father and from there he will be sent to college. Dick has none of these advantages. Why doesn't Dick feel any resentment towards this "inherited" inequality between him and Frank?
4. While Dick seems to be making progress in gaining financial capital and social respectability, Johnny Nolan is not making any progress at all. Why? What is the difference between the two boys?
5. Give some examples of ways Dick's speech reveals his lack of education. Discuss how the use of colloquial speech and formal English may best serve our intentions in different situations.
6. What is significant about the first gift Dick receives from the father of the boy he saved?
7. Why is Dick "rather pleased" at the loss of his ragged suit of clothes?
8. Why does Dick keep his box and brush? What do they represent for him and how will they serve him in his changed circumstances?

V. VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Even though *Ragged Dick* was published in 1868, Alger's language and style make it accessible to contemporary readers. Because of the low density of difficult words, most readers will not be frustrated by the language; however, there are enough unfamiliar words to allow students to expand their vocabularies. For example, in just the first few pages, students will find the following: affected injuriously (8), self-reliant (8), vagabond (12), fastidious (7), vile (8), aristocratic (9), complacency (10), indolence (10). Students can use either a vocabulary journal or self-collection strategy in order to identify and learn new words.

1. VOCABULARY JOURNAL

Students can keep a vocabulary journal as they read the novel. Have them collect three to five unfamiliar words each and copy the sentence or clause with the embedded word. After looking up the word in a dictionary, they should provide a brief definition or synonym of the word fitting its context. Every fifth day, students can pair up and teach each other five words to be added to the other's list.

To provide accountability, circulate among the students and give them credit for completed work while they are teaching each other their words.

2. VOCABULARY SELF-COLLECTION STRATEGY

After reading and discussing a section of the novel, have students—in teams of two or three—identify a word they think is important to understanding. Selected groups can be called on to present their word to the class by reading a part of the section containing the word, giving their team's definition of the word, and explaining why they think the class should learn the word. You can teach the strategy by first modeling it for students.

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

After reading the novel, students are ready to discuss the novel's themes in greater depth and to engage in activities that will help them make connections between *Ragged Dick* and the greater world of literature and media.

I. HOW INITIAL REACTIONS CHANGE

Ask students to refer to their journals, lists, charts, and timelines for general reactions to the novel's plot, characters, and themes.

1. Compare and contrast Dick and Johnny Nolan. How do their personalities differ and how do these differences affect their chances of changing? Is Dick right to be so judgmental about Johnny Nolan?
 2. What makes Dick attractive to other boys as well as the adults he meets? How does this
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attractiveness help him? How does this idea of physical attractiveness create part of the mythic quality of the story?

3. How does Dick change when he becomes a “capitalist”?
4. Why is Frank’s advice so powerful for Dick?
5. Dick is always ready to take advantage of an opportunity. Why is the ability to see and act on opportunities a necessary trait for someone who wants to improve his or her place in society?
6. What do you foresee as Dick’s future? What will he gain? Has he lost anything?
7. Of all Dick’s characteristics which, do you think, is most important for achieving success and why?

II. DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

The following activities and questions build on students’ initial reactions and lead them back to the novel to make connections and to analyze more deeply. These questions can be used for class discussion, small group discussions, or as essay topics.

1. For whom do you think Alger is writing this book: the boys he claims to write for or someone else? In order to think about this question, consider Ragged Dick’s rise from bootblack to young gentleman. How much of his progress was due to his personal qualities and actions, and how much was due to the providential support of wealthy gentlemen? Use your analysis to make a case about the “intended audience” of the book.
2. Alger gives the reader a view of three different settings in which young boys grow up: the streets of New York City experienced by Dick, the country as described by Johnny Nolan, and the boarding school described by Frank Whitney. How are these three settings different? Identify the skills and attitudes important to succeed in each environment.
3. Identify Dick’s goals at the beginning of the novel and at the end of the novel. Describe how his goals and values have changed and analyze why this change has occurred. Do you think this has been a positive development for Dick? Why or why not?
4. Think about Alger’s description of what it takes for a bootblack to succeed in New York City. Compare or contrast the image that Alger creates with the portraits of boot-blacks created by John George Brown (for example, Perfectly Happy at www.butlerart.com/pc_book/pages/john_george_brown_1831.htm). To what extent do you think Alger sentimentalizes his hero? Use details from the story to support your thesis.
5. The value system called The Protestant Work Ethic teaches the goodness of work and how work benefits the human condition. Some believe that prosperity resulting from hard work is a sign of God’s favor. The Pilgrims, the French Huguenots, and many of America’s earliest settlers held this belief. Describe how the Protestant Work Ethic operates in the story of Ragged Dick.
6. To what extent does Dick’s story resonate with contemporary readers? How might its themes apply to your life or to the lives of people you know? Describe in detail. If not, describe why not.
7. At the beginning of his critical study of Alger, Gary Scharnhorst quotes Nathanael West and Boris Ingster: “Only fools laugh at Horatio Alger, and his poor boys who make good. The wiser man who thinks twice about that sterling author will realize that Alger is to America what Homer was to the Greeks” (1940). Discuss in what ways Alger’s story of Ragged Dick defines American culture and values. What is the pattern of Ragged Dick’s life and how does it represent an ideal for Americans?

III. GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

The projects described here are designed to deepen students’ initial responses and develop their understanding of the novel and issues generated by reading the novel. Some may be assigned for individual work; others are group projects. Choose among these suggested activities according to your students’ needs and abilities. Adapt these activities to your goals.

1. Benjamin Franklin describes his plan for achieving moral perfection and conducting his life to achieve success in his *Autobiography*. Have students read a few pages from Franklin's *Autobiography* wherein the author expounds on "industry" and how it can lead to wealth, distinction, and virtue. These meditations are available at:

<http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/autobiography/page37.htm>

<http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/autobiography/page38.htm>

Class discussion: Franklin believes that virtue will lead to success in all the affairs of life. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Defend your position. Are ethical persons more likely to be successful in business today? Use current events to help support your opinion. Based on your own experiences, does virtue lead to rewards? Why or why not?

Have students create a table of virtues for Dick, based on Franklin's model, found on page 39 of *Autobiography*. Students should consider what qualities Dick would need in order to achieve a properly virtuous life?

In an alternate activity, students can design a table of virtues for his or herself, starting with Franklin's list of virtues and making revisions according to their own definitions of success and its characteristics.

2. Have students write a moral for the novel on a large index card. In small groups they can share their "morals" and discuss why or how they arrived at this statement of the main idea of the novel. After hearing these explanations, each group can choose the moral that best represents Alger's purpose in writing the novel.
3. More advanced students can benefit from exploring critical analysis and response to *Ragged Dick* and Alger. Students can begin their exploration by reading the "Introduction" by Michael Meyer in the Signet Classics edition. Meyer comments on the novel and Alger's reputation as a novelist. Ask students to summarize Meyer's views about the novel's strengths and determine if they are supported in other critical commentary. In addition to books of criticism that may be in the school library, there is an extensive collection of criticism about Alger and his writing at Questia: <http://www.questia.com/search/horatio-alger>. This site lists books about and by Alger, as well as 141 journal articles concerning the author. Students can choose to read one of the articles or several chapters from critical books.
4. Carol Nackenoff's *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse* (1994) sees Alger's story not only as a metaphor for our national preoccupation with individualism and socio-economic status but also as an allegory of the dangers facing the nascent republic. Nackenoff says, "The adolescent of the Republic is the adolescent Republic. In this story, the young Republic faces dangers that threaten its moral fiber, strength, purpose, and identity. The real optimism of the Alger story lies in this story more than in that about wealth." (11).

Ask students to create a timeline of key events taking place in the United States in the period between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the 19th century. They can refer to a standard U.S. history textbook. Then ask them to take the outline of the events of Dick's movement from "rags to riches" and superimpose it over the historical events where appropriate. Discussion: What parallels do you see between the obstacles faced by the hero and historical events taking place in the United States? What dangers beset both the country and *Ragged Dick*? How does each overcome these obstacles?

In what ways do you agree/disagree with Nackenoff's thesis?

5. What is enduring about *Ragged Dick*? Students can use the on-line collection of criticism, listed above, and their own reading of the novel to make a case for *Ragged Dick* as a classic.
 6. Students can create a "found poem" using lines and phrases from the novel. They should underline key words, phrases, and sentences or write out a list on note cards. Then they can organize these lines into a free verse poem. They can share these poems with the class or post them in the classroom.
 7. Students can create a dramatic presentation of scenes from the novel. Scenes with lots of
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opportunity for improvisation include the following: Frank is accused of stealing a woman's purse (58-64); a country boy is swindled (69-76); Micky Maguire fights Dick (91-96); Travis steals Dick's bank book (147-161); Dick rescues the boy (177-181). Students will need time to plan and rehearse their dialogue and actions before presenting to the class.

8. Ask students to create a diary entry for the day after Dick rescues the young boy from drowning. How does he react to his change in fortunes? What does he think about his progress during the past year? What are his hopes for the future?

For a variation on this activity, ask students to write a letter from Dick to Frank, describing the events of the past few days, his changed fortunes, and his hopes for the future.

9. Students can create dramatic monologues, using lines from the novel, from the point of view of Dick, Fosdick, Frank, or one of the gentlemen who helped Dick. First review with students several famous dramatic monologues, such as Hamlet's "To be or not to be" or Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess." Then, once students select the character, they can skim the novel to find passages reflecting the character's reactions and state of mind. Using some of these lines and their sense of what the character might reveal about his values and motives, students can write and then present their dramatic monologues.
10. Have students write a newspaper story for an imaginary New York City daily describing one of the adventures of *Ragged Dick*. Students should reread appropriate sections of the story and jot down words, phrases, and information they want to include in their news story.

For a whole class project, small groups of students can research information about places and events occurring in New York City in the late 19th century. For example, the building of Central Park, the rise of Wall Street and the financial districts, Broadway theater, the Five Points Mission, the Children's Aid Society, and the Newsboys' Lodging House. Using their research, students can write stories and create a newspaper with a lead story about Dick's daring rescue.

11. As a group brainstorm a list of heroes, real or fictional, young or old. Then each student should perform each of these steps: (1) Select one hero to research, using web resources. (2) Prepare a profile of the hero in which you outline the main events of the hero's struggle and ultimate victory. (3) Analyze and list the personal qualities that enabled the hero to succeed. (4) Share your profile with the group. Finally, the group can create a Power Point presentation in which you present images of each hero with a list of important personal qualities the group has determined are necessary to success in life.
12. *Gangs of New York* (2002) is set in New York City in 1863 and tells the story of Amsterdam Vallon, a young man who returns to Five Points to seek revenge on his father's killer. The film creates a picture of life in New York City, from the 1840s through the Draft Riots of 1863; it shows the chaos of slum life dominated by gangs and power-hungry politicians. Have students watch several scenes from the film in which the director creates the atmosphere of this riotous time in New York City (Note: You will have to preview the film to choose appropriate scenes without sexual or violent content.). Places named in Alger's novel are also mentioned or seen in the film, such as The Bowery, Mott Street, and Barnum's. There are scenes showing the plight of immigrants, the homeless, and children-workers as well as the efforts of reformers.

After students view scenes from the film, they can discuss how the scenes in the film add to their understanding of Alger's story. Discussion: What would it be like to live in Five Points in the 1860s? How does Scorsese create New York City's atmosphere? Ask students to look for details and examples that create this atmosphere. Compare and contrast Scorsese's New York City with the one Alger created in *Ragged Dick*.

13. Students can read an essay, available on line at <http://www.herbertasbury.com/gangsofnewyork>, by Frances Carle Asbury, explaining how the *Gangs of New York* recreates history and is loosely based on historical figures and events.

Alger is also creating a fictional history of the lives of the boys he encounters on the streets. Discussion: How realistic is Alger's portrayal? Is he presenting an accurate depiction of the lives of homeless boys or is he changing details in order to tell his story? What has he changed in his creation of *Ragged Dick* and why? Why do you think the story is realistic/unrealistic?

- How does your sense of the realism of the story affect how you feel about the characters, especially Ragged Dick?
14. In 1943 Abraham Maslow published his theory of a Hierarchy of Needs. Students can see the list of needs and the values present in the highest stage of self-actualization at <http://www.deepermind.com/20maslow.htm>. As a class, discuss what Maslow means by a hierarchy of needs. Then ask students to determine where Dick is on this scale at the beginning of the novel, after he gets \$5.00 from Mr. Whitney, and at the end of the novel. Have students draw a picture of Dick at each of these points in the novel, identify his stage on the hierarchy of needs, and list the values he has at this particular stage. Share these as a class and discuss Dick's progression through the hierarchy. Post students' pictures. Discussion: How does using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs help us understand the changes Dick goes through in the novel?
 15. Have students research the Horatio Alger Association on the Web, looking for answers to the following questions: When was it founded? What is its mission and goals? What individuals has it recognized? Students can conduct more detailed research on one award winner and plan a brief presentation focusing on how the life of this individual parallels the life of Ragged Dick. Students should try to describe how Dick and the award winner are similar and different.
 16. America in the nineteenth century was ablaze with self-education. Crowds flocked to public lectures; workers formed study circles in their union halls; merchant seamen hefted bags of works of philosophy, history, and literature each time they took to sea; great numbers read multiple newspapers and magazines in their free time. One of Dick's admirable qualities is how he finds his own teachers and his dedication to learning. Ask students to explore self-directed free learning options available in their community today. Being aware of the sacrifices in time, hard work, and expense involved in committing to self-education, is there a subject of interest to them to which they want to commit?

IV. EXTENDED READING

Alger created a mythic rite of passage in which he connects the achievement of success with the development of good character. This idea of success continues to inspire writers of adolescent fiction. The hero's rise through the ranks has become an allegory of success.

Assign students to read a rags-to-riches novel that outlines the hero's passage from poverty to success, as well as the hero's growth of character. Students should consider the following questions: What elements of the hero's personality make him/her eligible for success? What is the system of morality followed by the hero? Who helps the main character and how? What does the character identify as success and why? Students can make a list comparing and contrasting the changes that occur in the personality of Ragged Dick and the main character.

The following novels are excellent for independent reading or literature circles in which groups of students read different novels, focusing on a similar theme. (Note: You will need to preview and read the novels in order to present them to the class in Book Talks so that students can make their selections.)

An Na. *A Step from Heaven*. Asheville, N.C.: Front Street, 2001.

Da Chen. *China's Son: Growing Up in the Cultural Revolution*. New York: Delacorte, 2001.

Jimenez, Francisco. *Breaking Through*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Lu Chi Fa with Becky White. *Double Luck: Memoirs of a Chinese Orphan*. New York: Holiday House, 2001.

Mar, M. Elaine. *Paper Daughter: A Memoir*. Perennial, 2000.

Mikaelsen, Ben. *Red Midnight*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.

Namioka, Lensey. *An Ocean Apart, a World Away*. New York: Delacorte, 2002.

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic, 2002.

Shea, Pegi Deitz. *Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story*. New York: Clarion Books, 2003.

Son, John. *Finding My Hat*. New York: Orchard Books, 2003.

Yen Mah, Adeline. *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*. New York: Random House, 1999.

V. LITERATURE CIRCLES

Book Clubs or Literature Circles can be created for a period of two to four weeks for students to engage in reading, responding to, and discussing self-selected novels from the list above. Book Clubs are designed to give students:

- the opportunity to choose a work of literature they want to read,
- control over the pace of the reading,
- opportunities to respond to a novel and discuss it in detail,
- choices for how they will contribute to the discussion,
- opportunity to develop vocabulary and skills of literary analysis,
- time to develop independent thinking, and
- time to engage in creative group projects.

Instructions for students:

1. Choose a book.

You will have an opportunity to survey each book, using a “Book Pass-Around” strategy. When the novel is passed to you, look it over and read several pages. After you have reviewed each novel, list your first and second choice. Groups will be established according to your selection. Most of you will get your first choice.

2. Plan the Reading.

When the group meets for the first time, decide how members want to read the novel (independently, in pairs, groups, silently, aloud) and the pace of the reading (how many chapters per day). Your teacher will give you a deadline for completion of the novel and the projects designed to extend your background knowledge and show your responses to the reading.

3. Choose roles.

In *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*, Harvey Daniels gives the following titles to the roles of group members: Discussion Director (develops questions for the group discussion), Vocabulary Enricher (chooses several important words in the reading that may be new or puzzling), Literary Luminary (chooses several key sections of the novel to read aloud to the group), Connector (makes connections between students' experiences and the novel), Summarizer (prepares a brief summary of the day's reading), Illustrator (draws a picture related to the reading), Travel Tracer (describes where the action takes place), and Investigator (looks up background information on any topic related to the book). Since most groups will be no larger than five students, some of the roles, suggested by these labels, can be combined. The teacher will explain the role of each group member. Your group will be counting on you to contribute to the group's effort.

4. Set goals.

During each group meeting, students need to accomplish the following:

- A. Discuss the reading thoroughly, using questions prepared by group members.
- B. Work on vocabulary.
- C. Work on a creative project (usually assigned by the teacher; see suggestions in After Reading Activities).

5. Evaluate.

As a group, assess the work of the group and its members. How effectively did group members work together? Did you keep to your schedule? What can you do to improve the quality of your reading circle?

- Johnson, Deidre. *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate*. New York: Twayne, 1993.
- Hirsch, E. D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Nackenoff, Carol. *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Stefan Kanfer: http://www.city-journal.org/html/10_4_urbanities-the_moral.html
- Scharnhorst, Gary. *Horatio Alger*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.
- Scharnhorst, Gary, & Bales, Jack. *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles. Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom. 2nd Edition*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2002.

Teacher's Guides to other Signet Classics Editions on the Web: www.penguin.com/academic.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE

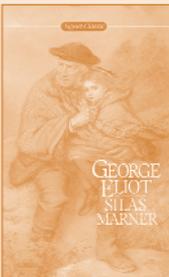
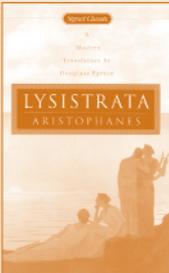
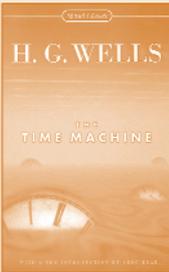
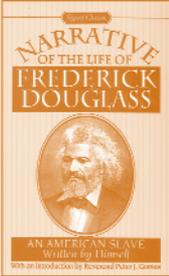
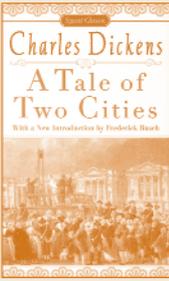
JEANNE M. McGLINN, Director of Humanities and Professor in the Department of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, teaches Children's and Adolescent Literature and directs the field experiences of 9-12 English licensure candidates. She is a Board member of NC English Teachers Association and the Children's Literature and Reading SIG of the IRA. She has written a critical book on the historical fiction of adolescent writer Ann Rinaldi for Scarecrow Press Young Adult Writers series.

JAMES E. McGLINN, Professor of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, teaches methods of teaching and reading courses. He has taught high school English, and his research interests currently focus on motivating and increasing the reading achievement of students in middle and high school.

ABOUT THE EDITORS OF THIS GUIDE

W. Geiger Ellis, Professor Emeritus, University of Georgia, received his A.B. and M.Ed. degrees from the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and his Ed.D. from the University of Virginia. His teaching focused on adolescent literature, having introduced the first courses on the subject at both the University of Virginia and the University of Georgia. He developed and edited *The ALAN Review*.

Arthea (Charlie) Reed, Ph.D. is currently a long-term care specialist with Northwestern Mutual Financial Network and senior partner of Long-Term Care and Associates. From 1978 to 1996 she was a professor of education and chairperson of the Education Department at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She is the author or coauthor of 15 books in the fields of adolescent literature, foundations of education, and methods of teaching. She was the editor of *The ALAN Review* for six years and president of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN). She is currently co-authoring the 5th edition of *A Guide to Observation, Participation, and Reflection in the Classroom* (McGraw-Hill 2004). She has taught almost every grade from second grade through doctoral candidates. She lives in Asheville, North Carolina with her husband Don, two dogs, and a cat.



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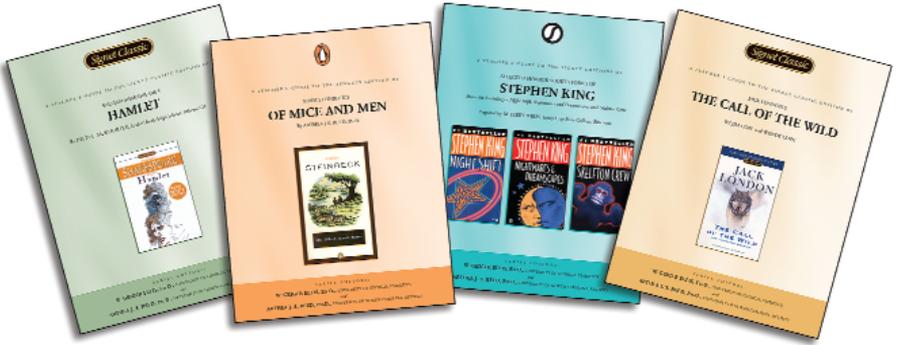
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