

William and Mary

Navigator

A novel study guide for

An Angel for Solomon Singer

by Cynthia Rylant

*Paintings by
Peter Catalanotto*

Navigator Developer: Ruth E. Beeler

*Center for Gifted Education
School of Education
The College of William and Mary
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Introduction

This Navigator is a collection of questions and activities intended to support group or independent study of the novel *An Angel for Solomon Singer* by Cynthia Rylant. It is one of a series of Navigators developed by the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary as a language arts resource for teachers and students.

Novel studies should encourage advanced readers to develop their skills at analyzing and interpreting literature through structured questions and activities that highlight themes and concepts, literary elements, and real world connections contained within the books. In addition, novel studies are opportunities for students to develop their own vocabulary and writing skills by exploring and emulating the language and style used by authors.

What are the goals of the Navigator?

The Navigator addresses the following learning goals:

- To develop analytical and interpretive skills in literature.
- To develop understanding of selected literary themes.
- To develop linguistic competency through vocabulary and language study.
- To develop skills in written and oral communication.
- To develop higher level thinking and reasoning skills in language arts.
- To develop research skills.

Who is the audience for the Navigator?

This Navigator is intended for readers of *An Angel for Solomon Singer* by Cynthia Rylant, a novel appropriate for strong readers in the primary grades. This novel meets many of the criteria identified by Baskin and Harris (1980) for books for gifted readers, including *rich, varied language; open-endedness, with capacity to inspire contemplative behavior; complexity; and role models*. The novel also meets criteria identified by Miller-Lachman (1992) as considerations for multicultural literature, *including general accuracy, avoidance of stereotypes; integration of cultural information; balance; and multidimensionality*.

How should the Navigator be used?

The Navigator may be used as an instructional tool by a teacher or as an independent study guide by a student or group of students. The central intent is for teachers to use the Navigator to support a novel study with a group of students, selecting questions and activities to assign as desired, given the context. However, teachers may also choose to make the Navigator available to students at a learning center, with expectations specified for students as to which items they should complete.

The Navigator incorporates several types of questions related to the novel. Some of these, identified as “while you read” questions, are specifically intended to be used for reflection and prediction as students progress through the novel. Other questions are intended for response after the reader has completed the novel, while still others may be answered either during or after reading. All of the questions of the Navigator may be used for writing and/or discussion.

Additional activities beyond the discussion and reflection questions are included in the Navigator. Some of these activities support further development of the language arts skills identified in the goals, while others provide interdisciplinary connections and research applications.

What are the prerequisites for students using the Navigator?

Students using the Navigator should be able to complete the novel itself independently and should be familiar with the literary and reasoning terms utilized in questions. In addition, students will be asked to complete activities that utilize several specific teaching/learning models: the **Literature Web**, the **Hamburger Model for Persuasive Writing**, and the **Vocabulary Web**. If these terms and models are new to students, teachers may wish to conduct mini-lessons on them either prior to or during use of the Navigator. Some guidance for using the teaching models is provided below.

The Literature Web

The Literature Web is a model designed to guide interpretation of a literature selection by encouraging a reader to connect personal response with particular elements of the text. The web may be completed independently and/or as a tool for discussion. Recommended use is to have students complete the web independently and then share ideas in a small group, followed by a teacher-facilitated debriefing. The web has five components:

- **Key Words:** interesting, unfamiliar, striking, or particularly important words and phrases contained within the text
- **Feelings:** the reader's feelings, with discussion of specific text details inspiring them; the characters' feelings; and the feelings the reader infers the author intended to inspire
- **Ideas:** major themes and main ideas of the text; key concepts
- **Images and Symbols:** notable sensory images in the text, "pictures" in the reader's mind and the text that inspired them, concrete symbols for abstract ideas
- **Structure:** the form and structure of the writing and how they contribute to meaning; may identify such features as use of unusual time sequence in narrative, such as flashbacks, use of voice, use of figurative language, etc.; style of writing

The Hamburger Model for Persuasive Writing

The Hamburger Model uses the familiar metaphor of a sandwich to help students construct a paragraph or essay. Students begin by stating their point of view on the issue in question (the top bun). They then provide reasons, or evidence, to support their claim; they should try to incorporate at least three supportive reasons (the "patties"). Elaboration on the reasons provides additional detail (the "fixings"). A concluding sentence or paragraph wraps up the sandwich (the bottom bun).

The Vocabulary Web

The Vocabulary Web is a tool for exploring words in depth. It asks students to investigate a single word in detail, finding its definition, synonyms and antonyms, and etymological information. With this information, students then identify "word families," or other words using the same meaning-based stems as the original word; and they provide an example of the word, which may be a sentence or analogy using the word, a visual or dramatic representation, or another creative form.

In addition to the models discussed here, Navigator developers also used Paul's (1992) Elements of Reasoning in preparing questions and activities. This model for critical thinking emphasizes the following eight elements: *issue, purpose, point of view, assumptions, concepts, evidence, inferences, and implications or consequences*. Teachers may wish to introduce these terms to students, using a familiar issue such as something being discussed in the school or community; teachers should then encourage the use of the terms and the model in approaching problems and issues.

The Navigator also contains research assignments that are issue-based as well as discussion questions about the novel. Students should be encouraged to explore multiple points of view and use human and organizational as well as print resources in their investigations of these real-world issues.

Several resources are listed at the end of the Navigator that may be useful to students and teachers in exploring these models further.

How long does the Navigator take?

Duration of study depends on teacher preference and number of activities and questions assigned.

How does the Navigator address standards for language arts?

The Navigator was designed with an eye to addressing key standards for language arts identified by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996) as well as standards from several state-level education departments. Specifically, the Navigator reflects standards in the following areas:

Standards Emphases	Navigator
- Use of strategies to understand, interpret and evaluate text	- Provides the student with an organized understanding and critical analysis
- Use of writing strategies and writing process elements	- Provides writing prompts, a writing model, and emphasis on steps of the writing process
- Use of spoken and written language for particular audiences and to accomplish particular purposes	- Incorporates activities for writing and speaking that emphasize persuasive, reflective, information, and narrative communication
- Knowledge of vocabulary, language structure, and language conventions and analysis of how they are demonstrated in text	- Encourages in-depth word study of advanced vocabulary, including emphasis on etymology and usage of words
- Research on issues and areas of interest, with emphasis on utilizing a variety of technological and informational resources to gather data, interpret results, and communicate findings	- Provides several issue-based research assignments for students, emphasizing data collection from print, non-print, and human resources; analysis and synthesis of data; and written and oral communication of findings
- Participation as members of literacy communities	- Encourages discussion within and beyond the classroom about the specified text and invites similar exploration of other texts
- Emphasis on reading a wide range of literature selections to build understanding of the human experience	- Encourages in-depth study of the specified text as well as comparisons to other selected works; suggests specific titles for further reading

How should the Navigator activities be assigned?

Teachers should specify expectations for students around number and type of activities and questions to be completed, as well as expectations for quality of work. Teachers may choose to assign Navigator questions and activities using a combination of required and optional items. Several sample organizations of assignments appear below.

Sample 1 (Teacher-led emphasis):

- Teacher-led discussion of higher-level questions; 1-3 questions assigned for journal response.
- Required assignments: Literature Web, persuasive essay OR book review, one Vocabulary Web, one research assignment
- Choice assignments: student choice of THREE remaining activities
- Oral presentation of one completed piece

Sample 2 (Small-group emphasis):

- Small-group discussion of higher-level questions, with 4-5 questions completed in writing for teacher review
- *Group* assignments: Character detective OR concept map, two Vocabulary Webs, one research assignment with group presentation
- *Individual* assignments: Literature Web, persuasive essay OR book review, student choice of TWO remaining activities

Sample 3 (Individual emphasis):

- Written responses to student choice of 2-3 discussion questions per category
- Required assignments: one research assignment; student choice of THREE additional activities, of which one must be a completed writing piece; oral presentation of one assignment

How should the Navigator activities be assessed?

Teachers should assess student progress based on the quality of individual products and achievement toward the goals of the Navigator. Decisions around which activities to require students to complete should be based on how the selected activities support multiple learning goals.

Question responses should be assessed based on demonstration of insight and ability to use text to support inferences. Writing activities should be assessed based on clarity and insight, and may also be assessed for writing style and mechanics as desired. Oral presentations of completed work should be assessed based on coherence, content, and clarity of the presentation. Teachers may provide rubrics for students related to the required assignments or work with students to develop rubrics for assessment.

Completed Navigator activities should be collected into a folder for assessment, and final assessment may include self-evaluation by the student.

What additional resources are required to use the Navigator?

Most of the activities in the Navigator require only the novel itself and regular classroom supplies. Vocabulary activities will require the use of a good dictionary, including etymological information on words. Recommended dictionaries are *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*. Interdisciplinary and research activities may require additional supplies and access to library and Internet resources. The *Guide to Teaching a Language Arts Curriculum for High-Ability Learners* (Center for Gifted Education, 1998) provides guidance in the use of the literature, persuasive writing, and vocabulary study models used in the Navigator as well as other guidelines for language arts with high-ability populations.

A listing of additional resources and suggestions for further reading appears at the end of the Navigator.

Technological Connections

Several opportunities for technological connections and development of technical skills are incorporated in the Navigator. Based on the resources available in your classroom or media center, consider the following uses of technology:

- Access to the Internet for research projects. Key web sites are listed in the resources section.
- Use of word processing and/or publishing software for writing assignments.
- Use of presentation software for presenting research findings and completed activities.
- Use of *Inspiration* software or similar for creation of concept maps.

About the Book

An Angel for Solomon Singer tells the story of how a poor, friendless man wanders the streets of New York City, missing the rural life he led growing up and wishing for beauty and meaning in his life. Things begin to change for Solomon Singer when he finds a special café “where dreams come true.”

NOTE: Page numbers used in the Navigator refer to the First Orchard Paperbacks edition of the text, ISBN: 0-531-07082-4

Questions about the book

While you read

- Read the title and look at the cover of the book. What do you predict the story will be about? Why?
- How does Solomon feel about himself? How does he feel about his life? How do you know?
- Why does Solomon wander at night? (p. 7)
- What do you think the words on the menu about the Westway Café mean? (p. 13)
- Why doesn't Solomon say his dream out loud when he gives his dinner order? (p. 15) What might happen if he did?

Exploring the story

- What is the problem in the story? How is it resolved?
- What do you think Solomon was hoping to find as he wandered the streets?
- Compare and contrast the setting of New York City with the Indiana setting Solomon imagines.
- How much time do you think passes in the story? How does the author use the illustrations to help us know that time is passing?
- How did the streets become like fields, the buildings like stars, and the voices like crickets? (p. 20-21) Did these things actually change, or did something else change?

Meeting the characters

- What do the illustrations tell you about Solomon that the author does not? How does he carry and hold himself? What does he look like? What does he wear?
- What kind of person is Angel? How do you know?
- Why do you think the author chose the name Angel?
- In what ways does Solomon take a journey in the story? In what way is his journey external, and in what way is it internal?

Understanding the ideas

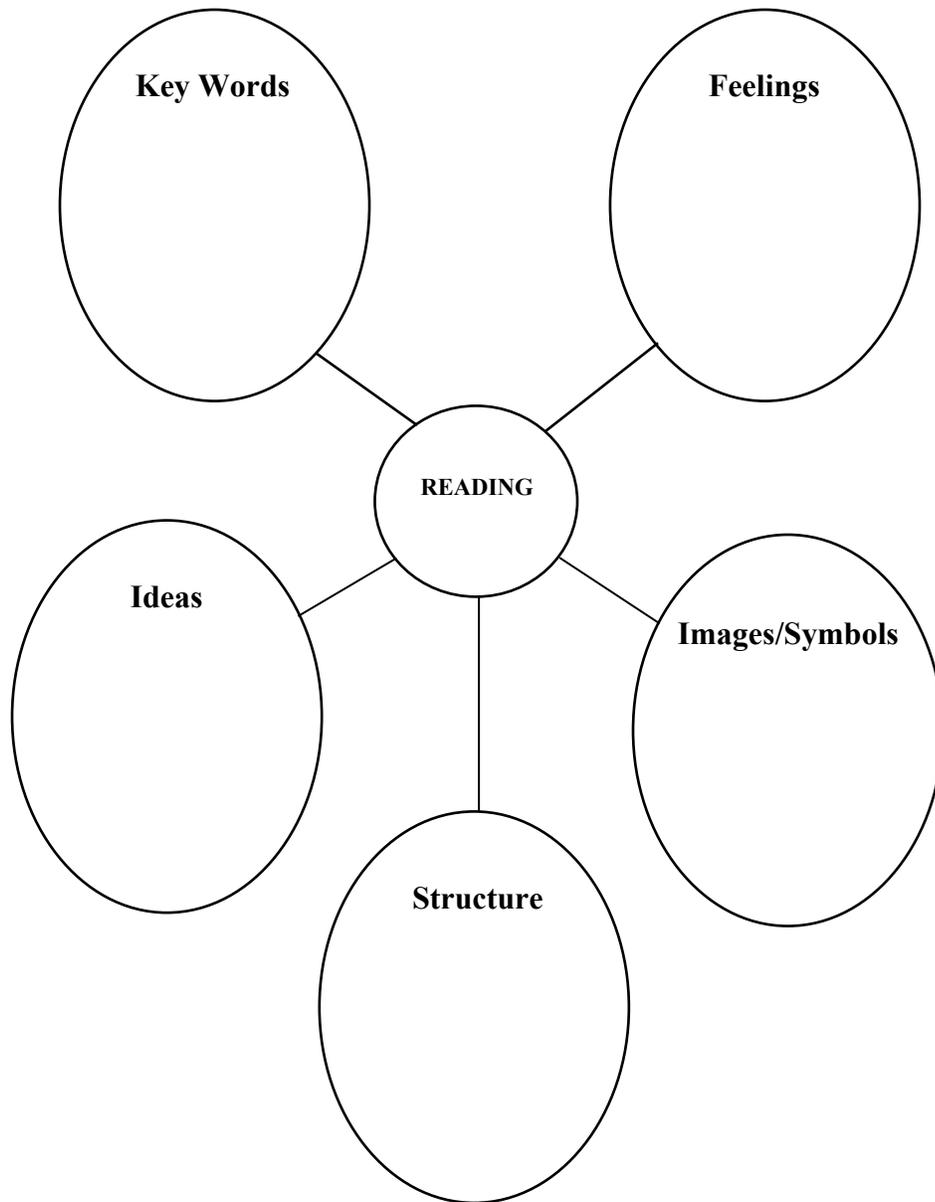
- What are Solomon Singer's dreams? What do all of his dreams have in common? How do his dreams make him feel?
- Why does Solomon become happier by the end of the story, even though most of his dreams have not come true?
- Do dreams really come true at the Westway Café? Explain your answer.
- What does this story tell you about the idea of home?

Connecting to you

- What does it mean to be "a wanderer by nature?" (p. 8) Do you like "wandering?" Describe a time when you wandered. Explain where it was, why you wandered, and how you felt.
- Describe some of your dreams. Why do you have these dreams? Do your dreams make you feel happy or unhappy, or both? Why?
- Describe a time when you felt lonely. What did you do to feel better? Did it work?
- How do you feel about where you live? Explain why you feel the way you do.

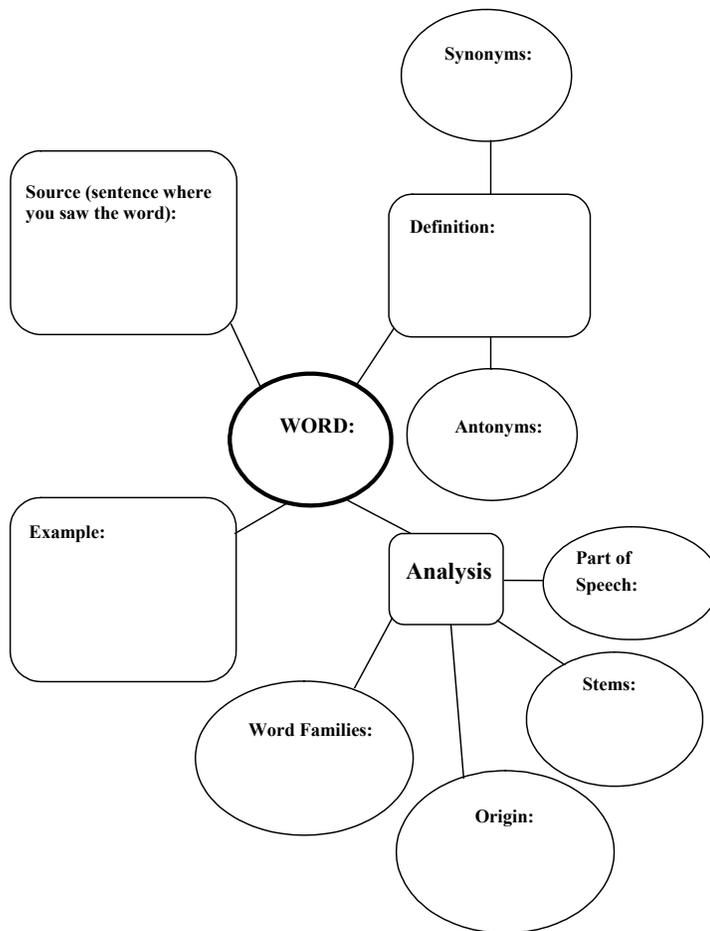
Selected Activities

- Complete a **Literature Web** about the book. Fill in responses to each of the bubbles, using the questions as a guide.



Vocabulary Web

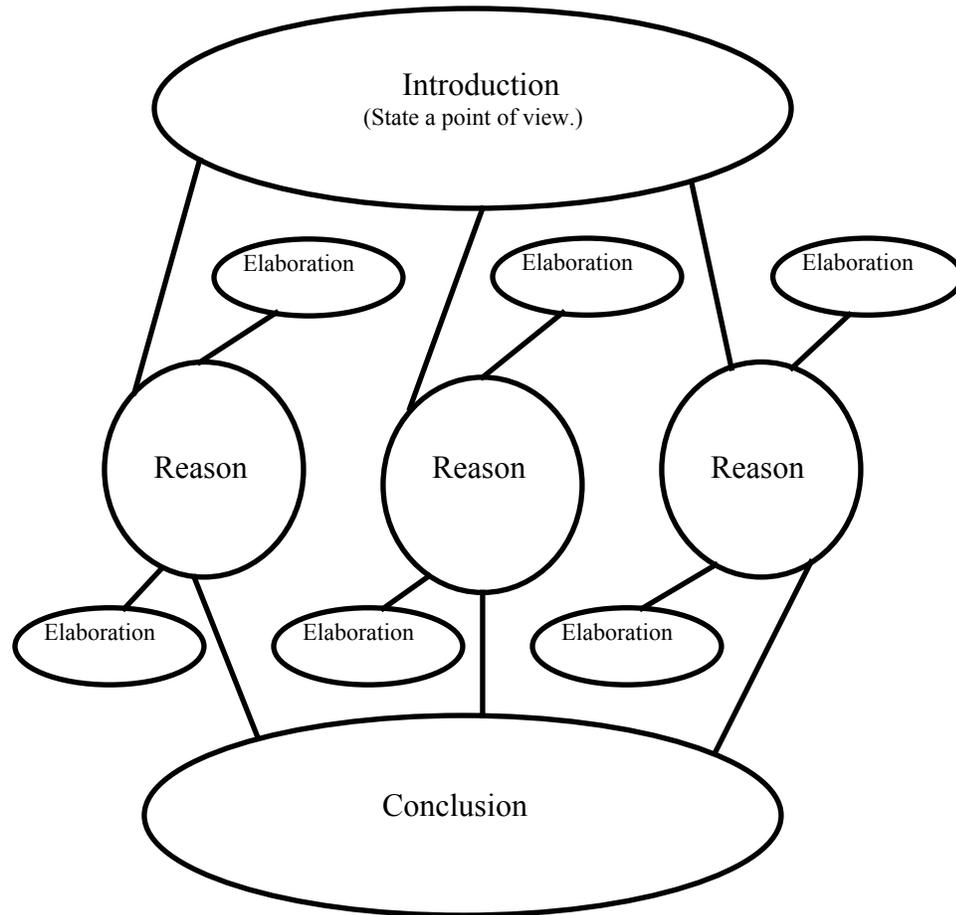
Use the Vocabulary Web as a guide to help you organize your responses to the following activity.



➤ Do a “word study” of one or more of the vocabulary words from the book (listed below). Find out the definition of the word, synonyms and antonyms, and word stems and origin. Then find at least three other words that use one or more of your word's stems, and create an example to explain your word (a sentence, an analogy, a visual representation, etc.) Use the Vocabulary Web to organize your responses.

absolutely	greeted
conversations	instead
familiarly	journeyed
gazed	rounding
sneaked	wandered

Hamburger Model for Persuasive Writing



- Write a book review on *An Angel for Solomon Singer*. In your review, state and explain your point of view about the book. Give specific details about why you would or would not recommend this book to other students your age. Use the Hamburger Model as a guide, and follow the steps of the writing process to review and revise.
- The author writes, “It is important to love where you live” (p. 8). Do you agree or disagree? Write a persuasive paragraph about what you think. Use the Hamburger Model as a guide, and follow the steps of the writing process to review and revise.

More Activities

- The author uses a lot of imagery and figurative language in the story, to help you see pictures in your mind. Some examples include “smiling-eyed waiter” and “quiet like Indiana pines in November.” Make a list of three or four examples of this kind of language in the book. For each one, draw a picture to show the image you get in your mind from reading the words. Choose your favorite of the examples, and share your picture of the image with the class.
- Solomon was not allowed to have a cat or dog, or to paint his walls. Why do some homes have these rules? Contact a real estate office and find out: What homes have these rules? Why are they in place? What homes do not have these rules and why? Make a chart to show your findings. Write a paragraph telling what you can conclude, or learn, from your findings.
- Use the food pyramid to put the foods Solomon orders in the restaurant into groups. Use the pyramid, a book, or website to determine which of his food choices were healthy or not, and list them in two columns. What are some other foods Solomon should eat according to the food pyramid? Create a one-day menu for Solomon, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Be sure to include a balance of healthy foods for each meal. Design a cover for your menu by hand or on a computer. Present and explain your menu to the class. Be ready to answer questions about why your menu would be a good one for Solomon.
- Read another book by Cynthia Rylant. Compare Solomon Singer with the main character in the other book, using a Venn diagram. Write a paragraph explaining which character you liked better, and why. Other books by Cynthia Rylant include *Missing May*, *All I See*, and *Soda Jerk*.

Books and Internet sites

Some Other Books You Might Enjoy

For further reading – some other books by Cynthia Rylant:

Missing May

All I See

When I Was Young in the Mountains

Soda Jerk

For further reading – some other books you might enjoy:

26 Fairmount Avenue by Tomie DePaola

The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush by Tomie DePaola

Nine Days to Christmas: A Story from Mexico by Marie Hall Ets and Aurora Labastida

The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flournoy

A Chair for My Mother by Vera Williams

Useful websites

Maps of New York City

1) <http://local.msn.com>

Click on New York under “Metropolitan top 40” (on the left) and then click on “Maps and Directions” (top middle left). Then type in New York as the City and New York as the State. This will pull up a map of New York that can be zoomed in and out of and manipulated. Also use this site to access other maps.

2) <http://www.nyctourist.com/map1.htm>

The Food Pyramid for Kids

http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/pyramid.html

Information about Mother Teresa

<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9709/mother.teresa>

Information about Nobel Peace Laureates

<http://www.nobel.se/peace/>

Information on Housing Laws

http://apartments.about.com/library/legal/bl_us.htm

<http://www.fairhousing.vipnet.org/>

About the Author and Illustrator

<http://www.cynthiarylant.com>

<http://www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-rylant-cynthia.asp>

http://www.visitingauthors.com/authors/catalanotto_peter/catalanotto_peter_bio.html

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

www.m-w.com

Glossary of Literary Terms

www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm