

The Family Under The Bridge

by Natalie Savage Carlson

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Kathy Sammis

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SYNOPSIS

Chapter One: Armand is an old hobo who chose the carefree life of a tramp in Paris many years ago. He pushes all his worldly possessions around in an old baby buggy, wears all the ragged clothing he owns on his back, and moves from one hidey-hole to another as the mood strikes. One cold December day Armand decides to move back to his refuge under a bridge on the Seine River. Along the way, he encounters his friend Mireli; she and her fellow gypsies are spending the winter in Paris, as usual. She predicts an adventure for Armand today. When Armand says he cannot stand children (whom he calls "starlings"), Mireli replies that's only because Armand is afraid they will steal his heart. Armand admits to himself this is true—children mean homes and responsibility and regular work, all things Armand gave up years ago. To his horror, when Armand arrives at his favorite spot under the bridge, he finds it occupied by three little red-headed children.

Chapter Two: The children are Suzy, Paul, and little Evelyne Calcet. They, and their dog Jojo, are hiding together under the bridge while their mother is at her regular job. They can no longer afford to pay rent since their father died. Their mother has the children stay out of sight during the day so no one will take them away to a home for poor children. Families have to stick together, says Suzy. The children beg Armand to stay with them and be their grandfather. Armand grumbles, but unpacks his buggy and shares his evening meal with the children. When Mrs. Calcet arrives home from work, she is very unaccepting of the dirty old tramp and emphasizes that they are not beggars and that she has a job. The next day when Mrs. Calcet has gone off to work, Armand decides he will take the children to see his friend Father Christmas at the Louvre department store.

Chapter Three: The little procession ambles across Paris, with Armand steering the hungry children past all the street vendors and tantalizing food odors. Inside, the Louvre store is like a fairyland with its Christmas decorations. When the children meet Father Christmas, they ask him to bring them a house for Christmas, but he replies that his little donkey cannot carry a house on his back. Armand turns aside his friend's suggestion of an available job, and the children leave the store saddened by what Father Christmas has told them.

Chapter Four: Outside, Armand shows the children the animated musical Christmas display in the store's window. Inspired, Armand has the children sing Christmas songs to the music, then successfully begs for alms among the sympathetic hol-

iday shoppers. On their way home, Armand buys the children some of the food they had longed for on the way to the store. Mrs. Calcet is furious, however, that Armand has used her children for begging and forbids them to have anything more to do with the old tramp. Haughtily, Armand leaves the refuge under the bridge. The children cry. "He's our grandpa," sobs Evelyne.

Chapter Five: In another bridge shelter now, Armand worries all night about the children, although he tells himself he is just fretting about being evicted from his favorite spot. When he goes back to the Calcets' shelter, he finds the children crying. Some women have found them and are going to return with officials to take them away. Armand quickly decides to take the children to stay with his friends the gypsies. They cross Paris, go through the Halles, and arrive at a courtyard where the gypsies are camping. The children are entranced with the gypsies' colorful clothes and warm welcome. They are especially entranced with the gypsy girl Tinka's home—a house on wheels. Father Christmas's donkey could pull such a house to them!

Chapter Six: Armand goes back to the bridge to meet Mrs. Calcet when she gets back from work, tells her what happened, and brings her to the children. She shrieks when she discovers they are at a gypsy camp, but changes her mind when she sees how kind and generous the gypsies are, refusing to take any money for their stay. The Calcet children ask Armand to ask Father Christmas to bring them a house on wheels.

Chapter Seven: On Christmas Eve, Armand takes the Calcets to the Christmas Eve party and dinner the people from the Notre Dame church give for all the homeless people of Paris. At the dinner party, Armand tells Suzy that Father Christmas is having a house built for them; it will be finished after the holidays. At midnight mass on the quay by the cathedral, Armand asks God to fix his lie and begs Him to find a roof for the homeless Calcet family.

Chapter Eight: Several days after Christmas, a police officer comes to the gypsy camp looking for Nikki. Everyone assumes the worst; the gypsies pack up camp and leave Paris hastily. Armand tells the children there will not really be a house (the builders will not allow children and dogs, he says). Now where will the Calcets live? Suzy thinks Paul has run off with the gypsies, but he has just gone down to the Halles to try to get work. He has been rejected because he is so little, but his attempt to find work shames Armand. "I'm going to get a steady job," he declares. Then he and Mrs. Calcet together can rent a place to live. The prospect frightens Armand.

Chapter Nine: Mrs. Calcet, after some persuasion, agrees with Armand's proposal. She and Suzy get him cleaned up, with

a trimmed beard, and he goes to ask about the job his friend Father Christmas had mentioned. It turns out to be a concierge (caretaker) position in an apartment building, complete with a small three-room apartment. The owner of the building is delighted to find that Armand is a family man, with grandchildren and a dog. "I can see by your appearance that you are sober and industrious," says Monsieur Brunot. The family can move in immediately, the day before New Year's Eve. Proudly, Armand returns to collect his brood and bring them to their new home. "He straightened his shoulders in the mended coat. He wasn't a hobo any more. He was a workingman of Paris."

TIME LINE OF THE ACTION

- December 20** Armand moves back to his usual spot under the bridge and discovers that the Calcets are now living there.
- December 21** Armand takes the children to the Louvre department store; Armand leaves the Calcets that evening for another camping spot.
- December 22** Armand returns to the bridge and takes the children, and then Mrs. Calcet, to live at the gypsy camp.
- December 24** Armand takes the Calcets to the party for the homeless next to Notre Dame.
- December 30** The gypsies leave Paris. Armand finds a job and a place for himself and the Calcets to live.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Natalie Savage Carlson is the author of more than forty novels and picture books for children and young readers. She was born in 1906 in Kernstown, Virginia, and spent much of her early childhood on a farm in Maryland. Her mother's family was French Canadian, and Carlson drew on this background for some of her later writings. Her first published work appeared on the children's page of the *Baltimore Sun* when she was just eight years old; it cemented her ambition to spend her career as a writer. In 1917 the Savage family moved to California, where Carlson attended high school and worked as a newspaper reporter. She married naval officer Daniel Carlson in 1929 and began a service wife's life of constant relocations. She gave birth to two daughters in the 1930s. As she read to them, she decided to become a children's writer.

Carlson's first published work was *The Talking Cat and Other Stories of French Canada*, based on the family stories she had heard growing up. As her first three books won awards, Carlson gained favorable critical attention and a growing readership. During one of her husband's assignments, the family lived in Paris for three years. During this time, Carlson wandered the streets of Paris absorbing the flavors and rhythms of daily life, and also worked with French orphans, taking notes all the while for future books. One result was *The Family Under the Bridge*, which is rich in local Parisian color. Another result was her acclaimed and popular *Orpheline* series, about the happy residents of a French orphanage.

When the Carlsons returned from Paris, they lived for a while in Rhode Island. After Daniel retired, they settled in Florida. By 1974, Carlson felt "written-out" for the older group of readers and turned to a new challenge, picture books, starting with *Marie Louise and Christophe*. A popular group of Carlson picture books is the *Spooky* series, featuring a cat once owned by a mean witch.

CRITICS' CORNER

Carlson's first two books won the *New York Herald Tribune* Children's Spring Book Festival Awards, and her next two were Honor Books at that festival. Critics have continued to honor Carlson's writing, admiring her gentle humor, warm style, realism, light touch, skillful dialogue, and the authentic flavor of her diverse settings. *The Family Under the Bridge* is a good example of Carlson's ability to capture the ambiance, places, and details of her setting, in this case, Paris. The *Chicago Tribune* admired the book in these terms: "The Paris the tourist seldom sees, the Paris of the poor and the homeless, is the setting of a story as wonderfully warm, as unabashedly sentimental as ever tugged at a reader's heart" - just as the Calcet children tugged at Armand's heart. *Horn Book* decided, "With its touches of wry humor and Christmas atmosphere, the story makes a fine pre-Christmas read aloud, for adults too will enjoy the flavors and scenes of Paris." *Booklist* found it to be "a charming and memorable story ... told with warmth and humor." Many reviewers also mentioned the charm of the Garth Williams illustrations. *The Family Under the Bridge* was a Newbery Honor Book.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the causes of, experience of, and responses to homelessness
2. To consider the importance of family
3. To analyze the issue of responsibility—whether taking responsibility is always necessary or desirable, when it is necessary to step up to responsibility, how doing so affects people
4. To discuss the degree to which forming emotional attachments is important or desirable for a person, and the ways in which such attachments are formed
5. To notice the ways in which a writer can make an unfamiliar setting seem familiar and believable
6. To gain an understanding of gypsies and traditional gypsy life

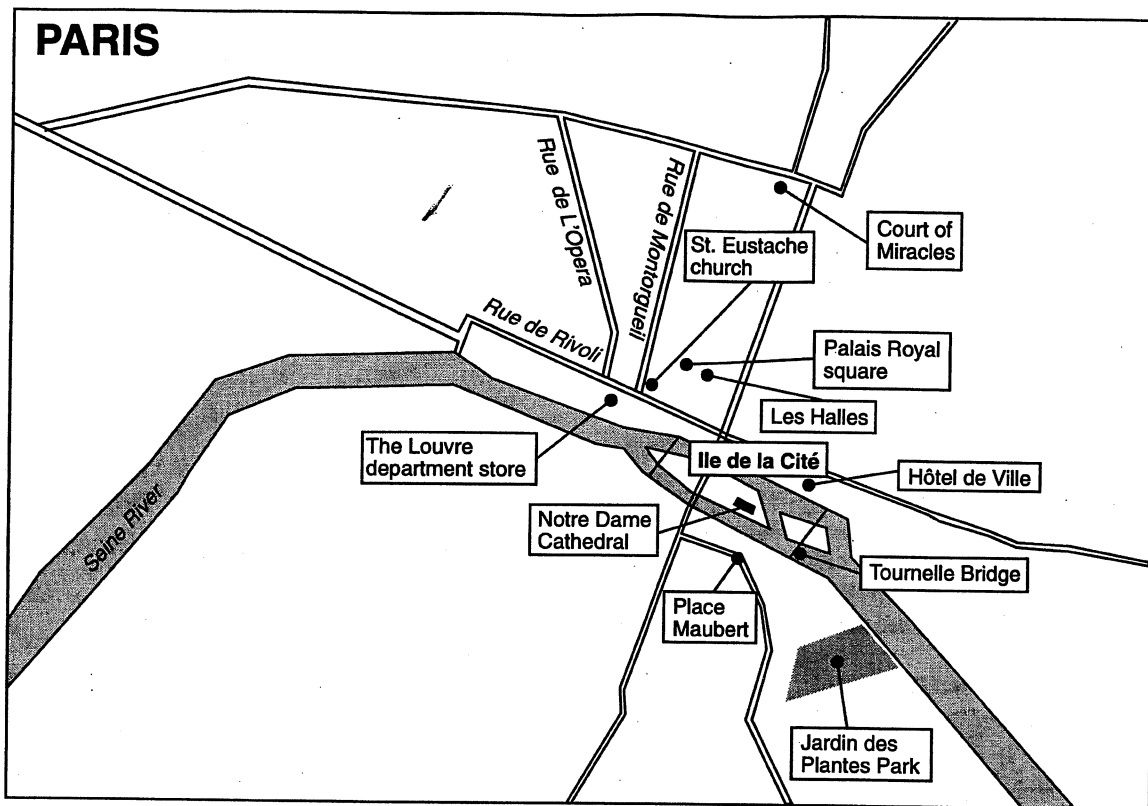
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the reason why Armand has told himself he wants nothing to do with children
2. To see the ways in which contact with the Calcet children changes Armand, and why this happens
3. To examine the expressions of prejudice found in the novel
4. To consider the different ways in which homelessness had affected Armand and now affects the Calcets
5. To identify the examples in the novel of families sticking together
6. To analyze the significance of the novel's title
7. To look at the ways in which the author uses humor in the novel
8. To note the details about Paris life that the author fills the novel with in order to create an authentic setting

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

extended metaphor: a metaphor is a comparison between two things that on the surface are not alike, without using like or as to make the comparison. An extended metaphor



carries a comparison between one thing and another throughout a novel or story. In this novel, the metaphor of the Calcet children as birds (specifically, starlings) is carried throughout. Alternate Assessment 4 asks students to trace the use of this children-as-birds metaphor through the course of the novel.

local color: showing in detail the places, dress, customs, food, and ways of speaking and thinking that are special to particular region or city. Critics often praise Natalie Savage Carlson's deft use of local color, which is apparent in this novel as she brings to life the unique qualities of life in Paris, France. Alternate Assessment 1 asks students to make a list of many of these details.

mood (or atmosphere): the general tone of a written work. The mood of this novel is warm, gently humorous, and sentimental, with the holiday atmosphere of Christmas in the air as well.

theme: a controlling idea expressed through a work's events. *The Family Under the Bridge* contains interconnected themes of family, responsibility, emotional attachment, and homelessness.

third-person narration: a story told from the vantage point of a single observer who stands outside the scope of the story. The characters within the story are referred to as "she," "he," and "they." A third-person narrator may be all-knowing about the novel's events. Or a third-person narrator may have a limited point of view, as in this novel. We only know the inner thoughts, feelings, and reactions of Armand. We know about other character's thoughts and actions from their dialogue and what they do.

SETTING

The setting of this novel is Paris, France, specifically the downtown area around which Armand can walk easily within a single day. We visit many streets, bridges, alleyways, courtyards, mar-

kets - the places frequented by the homeless and the gypsies, the poor people of Paris. Places of particular importance in the novel include the Seine River and its bridges, the Rue de Rivoli, Les Halles, the Louvre department store, Notre Dame cathedral, the Tournele Bridge, and a byway off the Rue de l'Opéra.

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Natalie Savage Carlson's *The Family Under the Bridge* should include these aspects.

Themes

- importance of family
- taking responsibility
- forming emotional attachments
- homelessness

Motifs

- the flavors and scenes of Paris
- hobo life
- gypsy life and customs
- Christmas time
- "starlings" and bird imagery
- the presence of the dog Jojo

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, and sentences that have a particular meaning in this novel. Explain the meaning of each as it relates to the book. Use the chapter and page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context.

1. an old hobo (Chapter 1, p. 1), funny old tramp (Chapter 1, p. 6)

(Armand, the main character in the novel, is a hobo, or tramp—a homeless and usually penniless person who wanders around from place to place on foot and has no means of support. Armand has deliberately chosen this type of life for himself so he can be free of home, responsibility, and

- regular work.)
2. Armand touched his black beret to the stocky woman. (Chapter 1, p. 2)
(A beret is a cap without a visor, usually made of wool, with a tight headband and a soft full flat top. Many Frenchmen wear berets, as Armand does. He tips his beret to the stocky woman to thank her for the scraps of discarded flowers and broken branches he has helped himself to from the pile swept away from the woman's flower-selling stall.)
 3. The gypsy woman's dark face beamed under the blue scarf. (Chapter 1, p. 4)
(This is Armand's friend Mireli. She is a gypsy—one of a dark-skinned Caucasian people who came originally from India to Europe in the 14th or 15th century and who continue to maintain a nomadic, migratory way of life there and in the United States. Gypsies have traditionally favored bright-colored clothing, as with Mireli's blue scarf, and as with the gypsy women and children the Calcets meet at the camp in Chapter 5. The gypsy children on page 62 of Chapter 5 are further described as having "long black hair cut in bangs over their beady [black] eyes.")
 4. flying buttresses (Chapter 1, p. 5), roguish gargoyles on the cathedral (Chapter 1, p. 7)
(Students may be familiar with these from the Disney film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Flying buttresses are arched bridges that receive the thrust of a roof or vault of a cathedral and transfer it to a solid pier, or buttress, that rises outside of and alongside the cathedral wall. They serve an engineering purpose and also add to the graceful appearance of a Gothic cathedral. These cathedrals had rain spouts which were carved as gargoyles, which combined human and animal characteristics into grotesque creatures. The Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, which appears in the novel and is also the main setting of *Hunchback*, has both flying buttresses and gargoyles.)
 5. on the cobbled quay (Chapter 1, p. 9)
(A quay is a stretch of paved bank or landing area alongside a river which makes loading and unloading of boats easier. The Seine River in Paris is lined with quays. Armand pushes his buggy along such a quay to reach the place under the bridge where he likes to stay. Other Parisians like to walk their dogs along the quay and even drive their cars down onto the quay to wash them with Seine river water. On Christmas Eve, the Notre Dame church people give a big party and dinner for the homeless people of Paris on the quay by the cathedral. Midnight mass is also held on this quay.)
 6. They came to a big iron brazier where a man was selling hot chestnuts. (Chapter 3, p. 28)
(This is a familiar sight on city streets, although the iron brazier has been replaced with more modern cooking and warming utensils. Street vendors would cook chestnuts on a wire grill above an iron pan filled with burning coals. The children pause hungrily at the brazier, but Armand gets them to move on by telling them the nuts are wormy. Later, after they earn money by singing and Armand's begging, Armand buys the children some chestnuts from the vendor on their way home to the bridge.)
 7. Soon they were walking through the street arcades of the store building. (Chapter 3, p. 29)
(The street arcades are arched covered passageways outside the store, filled with street vendors and stalls of all sorts. Armand and the children walk through these arcades to get inside the Louvre department store. Of course, they cannot pay much attention to what's being sold in the arcades because they have no money.)
 8. "We have to go up to the mezzanine." (Chapter 3, p. 29)
An elegant floorwalker caught sight of the vagabonds. (Chapter 3, p. 35)
(A mezzanine is a low-ceilinged intermediate story between two main stories of a building; often it projects out as a balcony. In the Louvre department store, Armand leads the children and Jojo up the stairs to the mezzanine to meet his friend who is playing the part of Father Christmas at the store. On the way down, they encounter one of the store's floorwalkers, a person whose job is to oversee the salespeople and help customers. This floorwalker is haughty—he acts very proud and treats Armand and the children with disdain and in a superior way, because he sees them as vagabonds—people who lead an unsettled or disreputable life, mere tramps in his elegant store.)
 9. "Alms," Armand begged. (Chapter 4, p. 38)
(Alms are something given freely, such as money or food, as aid for poor people. Armand has cleverly had the children sing Christmas songs to soften the hearts of the Christmas shoppers who gather around to hear the music. After the children finish singing, Armand passes his beret around the shoppers for donations, asking for alms for a poor old grandfather and three fatherless children—and an orphan dog as well.)
 10. "We must go to midnight mass on the quay." An altar had been set up....The priest in his bright vestments, followed by his altar boys, had just approached the altar. (Chapter 7, p. 87)
(The Christmas Eve party and dinner for the homeless on the quay by Notre Dame cathedral is followed by the traditional Christmas Eve midnight mass, mass being the formal religious ceremony of the Catholic Church. The priest [the Roman Catholic clergyman] celebrates the mass at an altar, a table that holds the wine chalice and communion wafers. The altar boys are the priest's assistants for the mass. The priest's vestments are the formal clothing or overgarments he wears when celebrating the mass. Mrs. Calcet insists that they all stay to attend the midnight mass after the Christmas Eve dinner. During the mass, Armand is at first uneasy at being back at mass after many years, but then begs [since he has "forgotten how to pray"] God to find a home for this homeless family.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

Literal Level

1. Describe Armand and each member of the Calcet family.
(Armand is an old man with a white beard who chose long ago to live in Paris as a hobo. He pushes all his worldly

possessions around in an old baby buggy. He lives in one hidey-hole and another as he wishes. All the ragged clothing he owns is on his back. He works odd jobs occasionally when he needs some money. He enjoys his life.

The Calcet family consists of Suzy, around ten, Paul, around eight, and little Evelyne, around six. All are red-heads dressed in mismatched, patched clothes. Suzy has a lot of spirit, likes school work, and is very polite. Paul has little interest in school work and boasts of how he would take care of the family himself if he were older, but he usually does as Suzy says. Evelyne is the baby of the family and tries to be brave but often cries when things do not turn out well. Mrs. Calcet is a widow who works a regular job at a laundry but does not make enough to rent a home for her family. She is prejudiced and prideful, looking down on beggars and tramps and gypsies before she gets to know them.)

2. Describe how the gypsies live their lives.

(The gypsies are nomads, living in tents and homes that are wheeled wagons. In the winter, they live in Paris, camping where they can while the men work repairing pots and pans for the many restaurants of Paris. In the spring, the gypsies go back on the road, heading down to Provence on the Mediterranean Sea. There, they camp among the old Roman ruins and the children spend their days in the woods and streams. The gypsies wear gaily colored clothes and fill their camp with music and dancing.)

3. What things about Armand and his actions does Mrs. Calcet object to? Does she change her mind about any of these things? Why?

(Mrs. Calcet looks down on Armand because he has no job, whereas she herself has a steady job at the laundry. She objects to his begging and is furious when she finds out Armand has used the children's singing to beg for donations. When she finds out that Armand has saved her children from the women who were going to get social services to take them away, Mrs. Calcet changes her mind and says, "I apologize to you. You are a good man." She has learned to look past Armand's surface and see the man beneath the tramp's outer face.)

Then, Mrs. Calcet shrieks when she discovers Armand has taken her children to stay with gypsies; she even sobs in shame and despair. Gypsies, after all, are dishonest. But then Mrs. Calcet discovers that the gypsies are kind and generous and courteous. She changes her mind and decides she should be grateful to the gypsies [and therefore to Armand] for the shelter and food they give her and the children, freely.)

4. Armand has no job (until the end of the novel). How does he support himself and get enough food?

(When he has to, Armand works at odd jobs. When he returns to the spot under the bridge, he has just quit a job he had rag-picking. He has occasionally worked at the Halles food market. He also acquires scraps of food from street vendors and the Halles. He even sits on the sidewalk next to a restaurant and enjoys a meal by absorbing all the odors of what is cooking. Also, he begs for coins from passersby.)

Interpretive Level

5. Early in the novel, Armand tells himself that he wants nothing to do with children, because they would steal your heart

if you did not keep it well hidden. Also, children mean homes and responsibility and regular work—all things Armand had turned his back on long ago. Do the events of the novel prove the truth of what Armand has been telling himself about children? How or how not?

(The events of the novel do prove the truth of these things. Armand attempts to be gruff and grumpy with the Calcet children, but he's really soft-hearted. He shares his food with them the first night, takes them to see Father Christmas and buys them food with the money they get from begging, and takes them to stay with the gypsies so they will not be put in a poor children's home. The children have indeed stolen his heart—Armand worries about the children's lack of a home. Then, when the gypsies leave Paris, Armand realizes he is definitely caught in the "starlings" trap—he takes responsibility and goes out and gets a steady job so he and Mrs. Calcet can provide a home for the children. It is all just as Armand had predicted, but he is pleased with the outcome and proud of himself now.)

6. How are Armand and his way of life different at the beginning and at the end of the novel?

(At the beginning of the novel, Armand has no home, no responsibilities, no need for regular work. He lives where he pleases, wandering from one hidey-hole to another. He has no rent to pay, no landlords or bosses to please, no need of decent clothing or bathing, nothing to clean or maintain. He has no family, no personal responsibilities. He is a funny-looking old tramp. By the end of the novel, Armand's way of life is about to change completely. He has become a surrogate grandfather and is part of a family of five. He has accepted a regular job and the three-room apartment that comes with it. He has bathed and had a beard trim; the Calcets have cleaned and mended his clothes. Now he looks rather distinguished. Armand is no longer a beggar; in fact, he tells Mrs. Calcet, "I'm beginning to be ashamed of begging. It takes away a man's self-respect." After he gets the job, Armand walks briskly back to the Calcets' camp, with his shoulders straight, proudly telling himself that he is now "a workingman of Paris.")

7. What examples of families sticking together do you find in the novel?

(First, the Calcets stick together even though they are homeless. Mrs. Calcet has the children hide together under the bridge during the day while she goes to work so that social services agencies do not discover their poverty and homelessness and take the children away from her. The gypsies all stick together as one large, extended family, although they are willing to cheat and take money from strangers. When the gypsies willingly take the Calcets in to their camp, Armand tells a reluctant Mrs. Calcet, "We're all God's big poor family, so we need to stick together and help each other." Mrs. Calcet agrees. Then, when the gypsies leave Paris and the Calcet children are once again homeless, Armand realizes they have become a family of five—the children insist now that he is their grandpa—and that he must get a job so this new family can stick together and afford a place to live.)

Critical Level

8. What is the significance of the novel's title?

(Not a lot of the novel's action actually takes place under the bridge. But Armand's transformation into a family man begins there. The first "family under the bridge" is the Calcet family—mother and three children, plus the dog Jojo. Armand begins to become a member of that family the first night he spends with the Calcets, when Suzy draws a "room" in their "house" for Armand to stay in. By the end of the novel, this pretend family under the bridge has become a real family.)

9. Does the author use humor in this novel? In what way? For what effect? Use examples to explain your answer.
(Answers will vary. The novel has subtle and obvious uses of humor that add a lot to the novel's appeal.)

10. In what ways does the author paint the life of a Paris hobo as pleasant? What do you think would be unpleasant about it?

(Armand is a charming old man who seems to enjoy his carefree life thoroughly. Armand enjoys his lack of responsibility, his freedom from the demands of rent payments and bosses, his ability to move freely around the city at whim, even his freedom from having to clean himself or his clothing. Answers about unpleasant parts of this life will vary. Examples are: Paris is cold in the winter, and Armand is often cold. Sometimes it will be hard to get enough to eat. People look down on you; some people harass you. What happens if you get sick? Would not you miss having a family?)

Creative Level

- Write a short story describing Armand's and the Calcets' life in the months after the novel ends.
- Suppose the two women in fur coats had brought social services people to the children under the bridge before Armand could scurry the children away. What might have happened then? What might Armand have done?
- Whatever happened to Nikki's wallet and the lottery ticket?

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art

- Create a model of a gaily painted gypsy wagon.
- Draw or paint a color picture that contrasts the gypsy children's clothing and hair with the Calcet children's clothing and hair.
- Draw or create a model of some graceful flying buttresses along the side of a cathedral.

Science

- Use the picture or model of flying buttresses you created for an art project to illustrate your explanation of the engineering purpose of these parts of a cathedral.
- Design a bridge that would take traffic over a river the size of the Seine.
- Write a brochure explaining how to care for the pots of hyacinths and tulips that were for sale in the stalls around Notre Dame cathedral.

Language Arts and Literature

- Make a collection of your favorite figures of speech (similes, metaphors, and personifications especially) from the novel, noting what kind of figure of speech each example is. Then write some similar ones of your own.

- Write a title for each chapter of the novel. Share titles with classmates, and vote on a class favorite for each chapter.
- Read other books set in Paris. What similarities do you find among these books? What new things do you find out about Paris that you did not learn from *The Family Under the Bridge*?
- Read the Madeline stories to a class of younger children or at a library story hour. Or read *The Family Under the Bridge* aloud to a younger child or group of children.

Geography and Mapping

- Find a copy of a map of the streets and landmarks of downtown Paris. Highlight landmarks mentioned in the novel. Trace the routes (and likely routes) taken by Armand and the children as they walk to their various destinations.
- Find a map of France. On this, locate Paris, and also Provence and the Mediterranean. Trace the route the gypsies might have taken from Paris to Provence.

Mathematics

- On your map of France, calculate the number of miles between Provence and Paris. Also calculate the number of days it would have taken the gypsies to make this trip.
- Prepare a budget for a family of five, including housing, food, utilities, and other necessities.

Music

With classmates, learn to sing some French Christmas carols. Give a mini-concert of these songs to others in your school and/or family and friends.

Social Studies

- Research and report on the gypsies of Europe.
- Find out more about French Christmas traditions, including Father Christmas.
- Armand takes the children to the Louvre department store. But what is the Louvre museum? Create a class display of famous art works in that museum along with a written description of the importance of the museum in the art world.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Find someone who has actually visited or lived in Paris who would come to your class and give her or his first-hand impressions and experiences of the city.
- Write a job description for: Armand's new job (conciierge); a floorwalker; a hobo; a gypsy.
- Find out and report on how a homeless family living under a bridge, like the Calcets, would be handled today in your community by the social services network.
- Create and cook a "hobo stew" for family or classmates.
- Find out what kinds of jobs a young boy like Paul Calcet could get in order to earn money in your area.
- Create a class display of photographs of different places in Paris. Try to show places mentioned in the novel.
- Discuss examples of prejudice shown in the novel.
- Write an essay on this topic: The Good Things About Grandparents.
- Discuss this question: Was it really the best solution for Mrs. Calcet to keep her children living on the streets in order to keep the family together?
- Describe the most beautiful or wonderful Christmas or other holiday display you have ever seen, or draw a detailed

picture of one such display, real or one you design yourself.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Make a list of the details in the novel that tell about the settings, the lifestyles, and the traditions of life in Paris.
2. Write a summary of each scene shown in the novel's illustrations.
3. Make a list of the main characters and the important minor characters in the novel. Describe each character and that person's role in the novel.
4. Collect all instances in the novel of the use of the extended metaphor that compares the Calcet children to birds.

SELECTED OTHER WORKS

BY NATALIE SAVAGE CARLSON

The Talking Cat, and Other Stories of French Canada (1952)
Alphonse, the Bearded One (1954)
Wings Against the Wind (1955)
Hortense, the Cow for a Queen (1957)
The Happy Orpheline (1957)
The Family Under the Bridge (1958)
A Brother for the Orphelines (1959)
Evangeline, Pigeon of Paris (1960)
The Tomahawk Family (1960)
The Song of the Lop-Eared Mule (1961)
Carnival in Paris (1962)
A Pet for the Orphelines (1962)
School Bell in the Valley (1963)
Jean-Claude's Island (1963)
The Orphelines in the Enchanted Castle (1964)
The Letter on the Tree (1964)
The Empty Schoolhouse (1965)
Sailor's Choice (1966)
Chalou (1967)
Luigi of the Streets (1967)
Ann Aurelia and Dorothy (1968)
Befana's Gift (1969)
The Half Sisters (1970)
Luvvy and the Girls (1971)
Marie Louise picture books (1974-81)
A Grandmother for the Orphelines (1980)
King of Cats and Other Tales (1980)
Spooky picture books (1982-89)

RELATED READING

Bemelmans, Ludwig. *The Madeline* books
(for younger readers)
Bishop, Claire Huchet. *Pancakes-Paris*
Cameron, Ann. *The Most Beautiful Place in the World*
Clifford, Eth. *The Man Who Sang in the Dark*
Gates, Doris. *Blue Willow*
Hartling, Peter. *Oma*
Hill, Elizabeth S. *The Street Dancers*
Holl, Kristi D. *Just Like a Real Family*
Homan, Felice. *Slake's Limbo*
Magorian, Michelle. *Good Night, Mr. Tom*
Spyri, Johanna. *Heidi*

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about France and French life and culture, direct your students to these sources.

Gofen, Ethel C. *France*
Laclotte, Michel. *Treasures of the Louvre*
Milner, Cate. *France*
Munro, Roxie. *The Inside-Outside Book of Paris* (for younger readers; a visual city guide)
Perrault, Charles. *Perrault's Fairy Tales*
———. *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favorite Fairy Tales*
Regan, Mary. *A Family in France*
Tolan, Sally, and Rhoda Sherwood. *France*
(children's activities in France)

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VOCABULARY TEST

Match each boldfaced word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- | | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| a. moans | e. sellers | i. nook, corner | m. snobbish | q. shrank away from |
| b. begged | f. very cleanly | j. miserable | n. soaked | r. with much anger |
| c. replied | g. put up with | k. tramping | o. kingdom | s. staring wide-eyed |
| d. roughly | h. broken-down | l. gayly | p. drab and dirty | t. side by side |

- _____ 1. "I can't **abide** children," grumped Armand.
- _____ 2. A gray canvas was propped over the **niche** that had always been Armand's own.
- _____ 3. The little girl and the boy **cowered** deeper into the worn quilt.
- _____ 4. "What's the matter?" Armand asked **gruffly**.
- _____ 5. "Please take us, old tramp," **implored** Paul.
- _____ 6. **Vendors** behind sidewalk stands were calling out their goods.
- _____ 7. They were entering the **domain** of Father Christmas.
- _____ 8. At sight of Armand, the angry lines left the forehead of Father Christmas and **blithely** curled around his lips.
- _____ 9. The floorwalker tapped the **immaculately** white handkerchief peeping from his breast pocket.
- _____ 10. Jojo growled at the **haughty** floorwalker.
- _____ 11. Armand wanted to cheer the children because they were so silent and **forlorn**.
- _____ 12. Armand wanted to drown out the sound of the children's **laments** and the dog's howling.
- _____ 13. The fisherman pulled a **sodden** old shoe out of the river.
- _____ 14. Armand and the children crossed the street **abreast**.
- _____ 15. The children kept bumping into things because they were so busy **goggling** at the sights.
- _____ 16. Armand led them into the ancient alley with its **dingy** shops.
- _____ 17. They passed the doorways of **dilapidated** roominghouses.
- _____ 18. Suzy pointed **wrathfully** across the courtyard. "Look! He even stands like a gypsy."
- _____ 19. "God does not want everybody **traipsing** all over the country and living in tents," Armand told Paul.
- _____ 20. "You're always bragging about what you'd do if you were a big man," Suzy **retorted**.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank.

- _____ 1. Paul wishes for a house on
a) a mountain b) a bridge c) wheels d) a river.
- _____ 2. Saint Sara was a(n)
a) gypsy b) martyr c) hero d) orphan.
- _____ 3. Gypsy men are skilled at repairing
a) automobiles b) pots and pans c) clocks and watches d) locks.
- _____ 4. Armand gets a job as a building
a) inspector b) caretaker c) night watchman d) janitor.
- _____ 5. Armand keeps all the things he owns in a(n)
a) suitcase b) overnight rental locker c) secret hiding place d) baby buggy.
- _____ 6. On his head, Armand always wears a(n)
a) beret b) orange stocking hat c) scarf d) tall stovepipe hat.
- _____ 7. The Calcet children admire the gypsy children's
a) schoolwork b) blue eyes c) colorful clothes d) red hair.
- _____ 8. Suzy is anxious to find a home so she can go back to
a) work b) school c) sleep d) the kitchen.
- _____ 9. The gypsies leave in a hurry when they receive a visit from a(n)
a) social worker b) policeman c) teacher d) outlaw.
- _____ 10. The paved landing along the river is called a(n)
a) quay b) road c) bridge d) alley.
- _____ 11. The Halles, where Paul goes to look for work, is a(n)
a) library b) church c) apartment building d) food market.
- _____ 12. The word for "mister" in French is
a) sir b) madame c) monsieur d) mezzanine.
- _____ 13. The floorwalker at the department store is described as being
a) friendly b) forgetful c) ugly d) haughty.
- _____ 14. While living with the gypsies, Armand and Paul each sleep in a
a) colorful house b) tent c) nook under a bridge d) shed.
- _____ 15. The people of the Notre Dame church give a Christmas dinner for the
a) homeless b) orphans c) poor children d) religious people of Paris.

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. You will use each name only once.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|----------------|----------|---------------------|
| a. Armand | c. Paul | e. Mrs. Calcet | g. Jojo | i. Father Christmas |
| b. Suzy | d. Evelyne | f. Mireli | h. Tinka | j. Nikki |

- _____ 1. A gypsy woman in a short fur coat and full, flowered skirt.
- _____ 2. An old man who would not have lived anywhere but Paris.
- _____ 3. A red-headed boy who thinks he'd like to be a gypsy.
- _____ 4. He was dressed in a long red robe that reached his ankles, and a curly white beard covered his chest.
- _____ 5. A shaggy dog that should have been white.
- _____ 6. This girl's clothes were the brightest of all, and she wore golden rings in her ears.
- _____ 7. She had direct blue eyes and they matched her determined chin and snubbed nose and bright red hair.
- _____ 8. A woman with a steady job who still cannot afford to rent a place to live.
- _____ 9. A gypsy who loses his wallet and a winning lottery ticket.
- _____ 10. The youngest of Armand's "grandchildren."

Part III: Fill-In (20 points)

Write a word in each blank to make each statement true.

1. This story takes place in the city of _____.
2. Armand is a _____, or tramp.
3. The story happens during the _____ holiday season.
4. The bridge of the story goes over the _____ River.
5. Armand calls children "_____" a name for a type of bird.
6. The gypsies live near the old Court of _____.
7. One of Armand's favorite places to stay is under a _____.
8. The children insist that Armand is now their _____.
9. Suzy says that members of a _____ must always stick together.
10. Armand begs a lot of coins by having the children _____ in public.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any three to answer. Write a paragraph for each. Answer in complete sentences.

1. In what specific ways does Armand help the Calcet children?
2. Describe the events of the day when Armand takes the three children to the Louvre department store.
3. What part does Jojo play in the novel?
4. What does the novel tell us about families?

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank.

- _____ 1. Notre Dame cathedral is a(n)
a) library b) church c) school d) outdoor market.
- _____ 2. Jojo is the Calcets'
a) horse b) rabbit c) dog d) cat.
- _____ 3. Armand and the children visit the Louvre
a) art museum b) department store c) cathedral d) bridge.
- _____ 4. When Armand begs people for money, he asks for
a) alms b) ashes c) lira d) jewelry.
- _____ 5. Armand's last name is
a) Calcet b) Latour c) Clichy d) Pouly.
- _____ 6. On the way back to the bridge, Armand buys the children chestnuts and
a) ice cream b) oranges c) pancakes d) hamburgers.
- _____ 7. Armand finds out where to go to apply for the job by talking with the haughty store
a) cashier b) floorwalker c) owner d) customer.
- _____ 8. Father Christmas brings children gifts that are carried on the back of his
a) horse b) donkey c) reindeer d) camel.
- _____ 9. A fisherman gives Armand the mate to his missing old
a) shoe b) glove c) fur-lined boot d) fur-lined mitten.
- _____ 10. The gypsy men are very skilled at
a) automobile repair b) building houses c) woodworking d) metalwork.
- _____ 11. While they are standing by the beautiful Christmas window, Armand asks the children to
a) beg for money b) look hungry c) sing d) cry sadly.
- _____ 12. Inside the missing wallet is a winning
a) photograph b) contest answer c) lottery ticket d) treasure map.
- _____ 13. At the gypsy camp, the girls sleep in a(n)
a) elegant tent b) house on wheels c) shed d) lean-to.
- _____ 14. At the end of the novel, Armand and the Calcets are about to move in to their own
a) house b) tent c) one-room apartment d) three-room apartment.
- _____ 15. Right from the start, the Calcet children decide that Armand will be their
a) grandfather b) father c) uncle d) godfather.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. Use each name only once.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| a. Armand | c. Paul | e. Mrs. Calcet | g. M. Brunot | i. Father Christmas |
| b. Suzy | d. Evelyne | f. Mireli | h. Tinka | j. Nikki |

- _____ 1. "Have you been good children this year?"
- _____ 2. "I wish I were a gypsy. I like the way they live."
- _____ 3. "Gypsies! You have brought us to gypsies!"
- _____ 4. "I didn't save anything for you, mama. I forgot."
- _____ 5. "I've lost my wallet with all my week's earnings in it."
- _____ 6. "Your fortune, monsieur. You will meet with adventure today."
- _____ 7. "If you went to school, I should think you would have learned more."
- _____ 8. "Oh, I like school. I like to read and write."
- _____ 9. "Do you think you could get moved in by tomorrow? I'd like to be free for New Year's Day."
- _____ 10. "I'm a mean, cranky old tramp."

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

1. In what country does this story take place? _____
2. In what month of the year does this story happen? _____
3. What kind of people does Armand say he cannot stand? _____
4. What person does Armand bring the children to the big store to see _____
5. What color hair do the three Calcet children have? _____
6. What do Suzy and Paul and Evelyne ask for as a Christmas present? _____
7. Who is the author of this book? _____
8. What color is Jojo? _____
9. What is the Seine? _____
10. What does Mrs. Calcet give Armand as a Christmas gift? _____

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any three to answer. Write a paragraph for each. Write in complete sentences.

1. What things does Mrs. Calcet change her mind about in the course of the novel?
2. Describe Armand's and the Calcets' experiences during the time they stay with the gypsies.
3. Why does Armand say he cannot stand children and wants nothing to do with them? Why does he change his mind?
4. Describe each member of the Calcet family.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. g | 6. e | 11. j | 16. p |
| 2. i | 7. o | 12. a | 17. h |
| 3. q | 8. l | 13. n | 18. r |
| 4. d | 9. f | 14. t | 19. k |
| 5. b | 10. m | 15. s | 20. c |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. a | 15. a |
| 2. a | 7. c | 14. b |
| 3. b | 8. b | 11. d |
| 4. b | 9. b | 12. c |
| 5. d | 10. a | 13. d |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. f | 6. h |
| 2. a | 7. b |
| 3. c | 8. e |
| 4. i | 9. j |
| 5. g | 10. d |

Part III: Fill-In (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Paris | 6. Miracles |
| 2. hobo | 7. bridge |
| 3. Christmas | 8. grandfather |
| 4. Seine | 9. family |
| 5. starlings | 10. sing |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. c | 11. c |
| 2. c | 7. b | 12. c |
| 3. b | 8. b | 13. b |
| 4. a | 9. a | 14. d |
| 5. d | 10. d | 15. a |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. i | 6. f |
| 2. c | 7. h |
| 3. e | 8. b |
| 4. d | 9. g |
| 5. j | 10. a |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. France | 6. a house |
| 2. December | 7. Natalie Carlson |
| 3. children | 8. white |
| 4. Father Christmas | 9. a river |
| 5. red | 10. soap |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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