

# MALAGA ISLAND FRAGMENTED LIVES



## Lesson 4: Going Beyond Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy: Malaga Island Fact vs. Fiction

### Instructional Resources

Readings from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2004, Clarion Books) by Gary D. Schmidt  
Spotting Stereotypes: Descriptive Word List  
Fact vs. Fiction Comparisons Worksheet

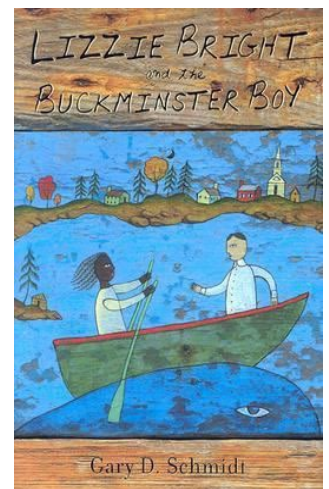
### Teacher Resources

Teaching About Stereotypes 2.0 <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/teaching-about-stereotypes-20>  
Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism, and Other Difficult Topics with Students <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf>  
Uncomfortable History  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1418/page/2082/display?use\\_mmn=African-Americans-in-Maine](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/1418/page/2082/display?use_mmn=African-Americans-in-Maine)  
African Americans in Maine  
[http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/793/page/1203/display?use\\_mmn=Malaga-Island-Descendant-Laura-Harrison-Shares-Her-Family's-Story](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/793/page/1203/display?use_mmn=Malaga-Island-Descendant-Laura-Harrison-Shares-Her-Family's-Story)  
Malaga Island Descendant Laura Harrison Shares Her Family's Story  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10xRqDNrVTI>  
Persuasive Writing Strategy Guide  
<https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/developing-persuasive-writing-strategies>

### Background Information

Gary D. Schmidt is an American author of children's books, both fiction and nonfiction, including two young adult novels. A professor of English at Calvin College, Schmidt was awarded the Newbery Honor for *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* in 2005, among other awards; it remains a popular teaching resource for both English Language Arts and Social Studies classes.

Schmidt was inspired to write this book while vacationing with his family near Phippsburg, Maine, where he heard about the community of people with diverse ethnic backgrounds who were forced from their island home in 1912. His tale is based upon factual history, but elements of it were fictionalized for dramatic effect. *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* offers an excellent opportunity to explore the distinction between fact and fiction, as well as to recognize that the challenges of segregation and prejudice were not limited to the South but were also experienced in the North, even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Note:** This lesson plan presumes that students have some background knowledge of the Malaga Island community and its history.

### Essential Questions

- What is the difference between fact and fiction? Between plot and history?
- Where is Malaga Island, and what is significant about its history?
- How do you compare historical fiction with primary sources?
- What are stereotypes, and how can we recognize prejudice in a text?
- How does the novel depict racism in early 20th-century Maine?
- How might civil action in 1912 have changed the history of what happened to the Malaga Island community?
- How do you write a persuasive letter to a government official?

### Plan of Instruction

1. Discuss the differences between **fact** and **fiction**.
2. Encourage a close literary analysis of **stereotypes** in the novel by doing the following:
  - Assign individual chapters or page ranges to different groups of students.
  - Ask the students to focus on passages about Malaga Island residents. Students should make a list of the words used to describe them. Repeat this exercise for the mainland characters. Discuss how the descriptive language differs between the two groups of characters.
3. Discuss with students how, in the early 1900s, the relationships between African American people and white people were different from today.
  - How does the book show what race relations were like in Phippsburg, Maine, in 1912?
  - How does **racism** influence the behavior of the town elders?
  - How does racism affect the behavior of islanders? What do people do (or not do) because of the prejudice that exists?
  - **Dig Deeper:** discuss in what ways racism still exists today.
4. Examine the **Fact vs. Fiction Comparisons** either as a whole class or in small groups, comparing passages and events in *Lizzie Bright* as literature with primary source documents that document what life was like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for Malaga Islanders in Maine.
5. Discuss with students what civic action means. Brainstorm with them a list of actions that could make their community a better place and help improve the lives of others (volunteering, voting, attending a protest, and helping a neighbor).
  - The PBS resource “**Acting Locally for Civic Impact**” contains a series of short videos that illustrate the different ways people help their communities every day. <https://mainepublic.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/civ23-soc-actlocal/acting-locally-for-civic-impact-storycorps/>
  - Ask students to consider: *how might things have gone differently if citizens had challenged the eviction in 1912?*

6. Assignment: Have students take on the role of a Maine citizen in 1912 and write a persuasive letter to Maine Governor Frederick W. Plaisted. Ask students to decide if their letter will support or oppose the evacuation of Malaga Island. Either way, they must describe the situation of the Malaga Island residents and outline steps for action that they feel will address the situation.

- **Additional Resources:** Persuasive Writing Strategy Guide  
<https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/developing-persuasive-writing-strategies>

**Extension Activity 1:** Consider asking students to use one or more of the primary sources as inspiration to write a new chapter for the book.

**Extension Activity 2:** Ask students to consider: When Turner plays the last game of baseball, he does not hit the last pitch, even though the community members in the audience know that he had the ability to avoid a third strike. When Willis asks him why he didn't hit the ball, Turner answers: **"Because everyone expects green shutters."** (Chapter 8, Pg. 144) What does he mean by this statement? How does the use of color on the houses relate to the themes of prejudice and "fitting in" to society?

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### Spotting Stereotypes: Descriptive Word List: **EXAMPLE**

| Page number | Words Used to Describe Malaga Islanders in <i>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</i>                     | Words Used to Describe Mainland Characters in <i>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</i>   |
|-------------|---|--|
| Pg. 13-14   |   | <b>Mrs. Cobb:</b> "... a tiny, frail bird of a woman ... reached her peak of height sometime around the Civil War and from that time on had been folding and shrinking until someday she would probably just disappear."                   |
| Pg. 17      |   | <b>Lizzie describing the men from the mainland:</b> "They wore dark frock coats, top hats they held against the sea breeze, and shiny shoes that probably hadn't walked on honest granite ever before ... dressed for a deacon's funeral." |
| Pg. 19      | <b>Deacon Hurd about Lizzie:</b> "Would you look at that monkey go?"  |  |
| Pg. 19      | <b>Sheriff Elwell talking about Lizzie:</b> "...one less colored in the world"                              |  |
| Pg. 68 "    | <b>Mr. Stonecrop about the islanders:</b> "There isn't a soul on that island who isn't a drunk or a thief." |  |
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## Fact vs. Fiction Comparisons

### Fact vs Fiction Comparison #1:

Look at the passage below from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* that shows the eviction of the Malaga Islanders as though it were a nighttime mob that razed and set fire to the Malaga community:

Now, compare this fictional description from the book with the two newspaper accounts from 1912. *How do these two accounts of the eviction differ from the fictional depiction of the event in Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy?*

“Turner could see lanterns moving up and down and across Malaga . . . There must have been fifteen, twenty of them. Then the lanterns on the far side seemed to come together and grow suddenly brighter, until Turner realized that it wasn’t lanterns he was seeing – it was a full fire shining a weird orange on the island’s snow.”

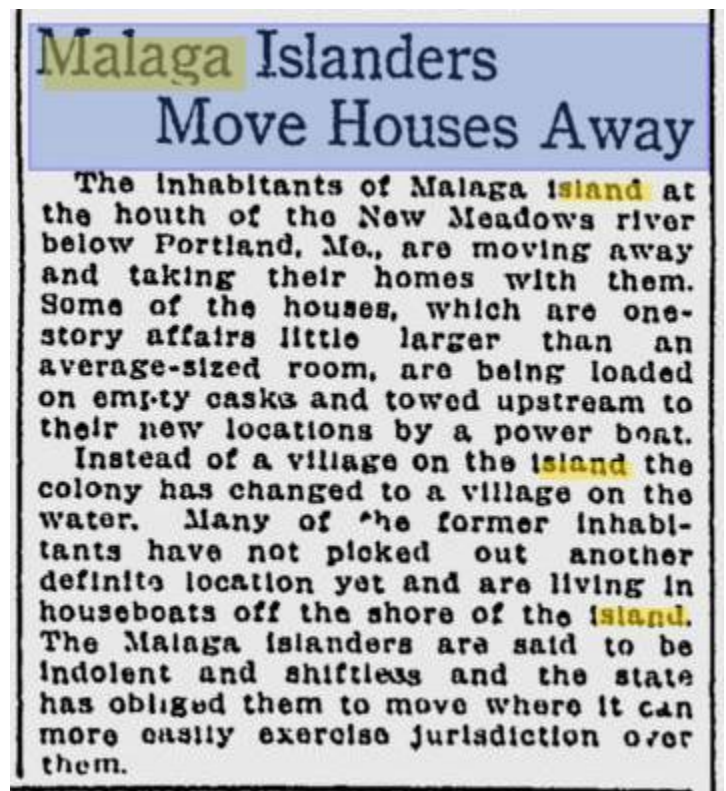
Pg. 178

“The Eason home had already been burned to the ground, but now fire was set to the Griffin home, and one by one to every house, shack, pier, barrel, stack of lobster traps – everything that could burn on the island. White smoke covered Malaga . . . everywhere the cloud touched, it left ashes.” Pg 192

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*

“Uncle Jim McKenney is taking down his house today and Professor Eason will go next. If you know of any place where I can crawl in with my wife and five kids and my old peg-leg please let me know.”

(Nelson Leighton McKenney, submitted to the *Bath Independent*, March 9, 1912)



*Spokane Daily Chronicle. Saturday, July 6, 1912*

The houses on Malaga Island did not burn to the ground as described in the book. In 1912, when the town and state officials arrived to evict the islanders, they found all of their houses had been moved or taken apart. The islanders may not have had control over whether they could stay on the island, but they had control over how they left the island – they chose to go quietly and with dignity.

*Why do you think the author, Gary Schmidt, chose to show the eviction as violent versus what actually happened?*



### Fact vs. Fiction Comparison #2:

Look at the section below from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* that describes the food sources gathered or eaten by Malaga Islanders, such as gathering clams and making chowder.

“She set her rake mightily in the mud, pulled back a layer, put the rake in again, pulled back another peel, and then once more, until the times scraped against a shell, and the clam lay like an ornery pearl, spitting at them. Lizzie lifted it. ‘Sometimes they don’t mind their manners much,’ she said.

‘I guess I wouldn’t either, if I was being dug up for chowder.’” Pg. 57

“Inside, there was bread and chowder in cracked white bowls . . . ”Pg. 63

“Lizze handed Turner a knife. ‘You know how to open clams?’ . . . even after Turner got the knack of it and could open the shell with the point of the knife, slit the muscle before the clam objected too much, and drop it into the pot along with its juice. . . ” Pg. 135 *Lizzy Bright and the Buckminster Boy*

Now, compare the fictional descriptions with the primary sources below: several artifacts found on Malaga Island, and receipts for goods purchased by the State of Maine for Malaga residents, which show purchases ranging from sugar, pork, potatoes, oil, and soap.

*How do the fictional accounts of food compare to what the primary sources show us? Are they similar or different?*



Sabasco June 3 1907  
 M State of Maine  
 F.W. Ridley

To Dr.  
 Terms. Goods del'd. Eliza Griffin  
 \$1.50 per week

Billsheads No 00

|             |       |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |       |
|-------------|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-------|
| June & July | oil   | 12 | 13 | 20 | 25 | 35 | 13 | 126 |       |
|             | Pork  | 24 | 15 | 25 | 15 | 25 | 15 | 132 |       |
|             | fish  | 23 | 15 | 25 | 15 | 25 | 13 | 136 |       |
|             | Pork  | 35 | 12 | 15 | 13 | 25 | 10 | 150 |       |
|             | oil   | 08 | 13 | 01 | 25 | 30 | 10 | 132 |       |
|             | fish  | 22 | 10 | 13 | 30 | 16 | 25 | 136 |       |
|             | Pork  | 22 | 25 | 15 | 13 | 13 | 18 | 110 |       |
|             | oil   | 50 | 30 | 06 | 25 | 13 | 34 | 208 |       |
|             | flour | 25 | 25 | 13 | 20 |    |    | 70  | 12 00 |
|             | beef  |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |       |

Paid F.W. Ridley

This handwritten receipt is difficult to read, but if you look carefully, you will see several entries for oil, potatoes, fish, pork, beef, tea, flour, and sugar.

Bones discovered during the archaeology excavations indicate that the beef and pork from the mainland are low-quality cuts, such as backs and ribs.

Sabasco June 3 1907  
 M State of Maine  
 F.W. Ridley

Billsheads No 00

|      |      |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |  |
|------|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|--|
| June | oil  | 25 | 12 | 30 | 30 | 25 | 12 | 124 |  |
|      | Pork | 27 | 13 | 10 | 06 | 25 | 25 | 133 |  |
|      | fish | 15 | 15 | 10 | 08 | 25 | 15 | 77  |  |
|      | Pork | 25 | 12 | 20 | 31 | 15 | 23 | 126 |  |
|      | oil  | 15 | 20 | 02 | 25 | 30 | 12 | 134 |  |
|      | fish | 25 | 10 | 20 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 87  |  |
|      | Pork | 08 | 13 | 29 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 95  |  |
|      | oil  | 06 | 13 | 25 | 13 | 26 | 18 | 122 |  |
|      | fish | 25 | 13 | 13 | 03 | 22 | 15 | 129 |  |
|      | Pork | 13 | 35 | 04 | 25 | 13 | 20 | 128 |  |

Paid F.W. Ridley



**Fact vs. Fiction Comparison #3:**

Look at the sections below from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* that describe Lizzie's home and what homes on Malaga Island look like. Then, consider the photos of the Malaga homes provided and compare and contrast them with the novel.

"Lizzie's house watched the New Meadows with weathered eyes. Its boards were wrapped beyond hope, and its roof slumped in the middle like a fallen pudding – and there wasn't a house in Phippsburg where she'd rather live." Pg 17-18

"... behold the cross we bear in Phippsburg: a ragtag collection of hovels and shacks, filled with thieves and lazy sots ... " Pg. 20

"... they followed the curve of the beach past the schoolhouse – the trimmest building on the island – past more shingled one-room homes, where there was always someone at the window to wave to Lizzie and nod to Turner ... "Pg. 60

"They carried all the bowls back inside the house. It was dark and warm and cozy. A shelf with pitchers was tacked to one wall, and underneath was another with a line of books, worn but serviceable. A small potbellied stove took up one corner, and next to it was a dry sink under a window that looked out to sea." Pg. 64

