

Plot Summary

Chrissie and Kristen have been **best friends**—together through bright, happy days and through dark, sad ones, as when Chrissie's grandfather died. But now the friends are separated because Kristen had to move to Connecticut. Chrissie reminisces about experiences the two shared—lazy days at the pool, silly sleepovers, sampling blueberry ice cream, and going to the movies. She recalls one movie in particular, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, from which the girls picked up what was to become their favorite word—"tawanda." She tries to translate this word that "meant everything" to them as their "word of freedom," an affirmation of life shared most vibrantly by best friends. On moving day, Kristen does not say "Goodbye" but rather, "Tawanda!"—which could just as easily signify the unbreakable bond between them.

Interpreting the Story: Friendship

The following questions may help students interpret the story in more depth. Answers to the **Reader Response Log** assignment on the **Student's Page** may also become the basis for class discussion.

1. In the first four paragraphs, how does the narrator build up to the announcement that Kristen is moving? When she states, "It was all over" and "She would never be there again," did you assume something more drastic had happened?
2. What do the friends' shared activities show about their friendship? Are they very close? Do they seem to spend a lot of time together? What do you assume about the quality of their relationship?
3. What is so special about the word "tawanda" for the two friends? What is the significance of Kristen's "tawanda" to Chrissie on the day she left for Connecticut? At this moment in the story and the relationship, what does the word mean to the girls?

Responding Creatively to the Story



Ask your students to think of one special friendship they have. Encourage them to **write an essay about one favorite activity they share with this close friend**. Why do they enjoy it so much? What makes it so fun? Ask them to think about some details that go along with the activity. For example, what snack food do they munch on while watching "Friends" on TV every week? What does the court look like where they play basketball after school? What table in the library do they meet at to study?

Next, ask students to pair up and share their essays with each other. Each student should **ask questions about who/what/where/when/why/how details** that may have been left out of his/her partner's essay. Then students can go back and incorporate more details into the essay.

Connecting with Cultural Values and Students' Lives



These questions may guide your students to a deeper understanding of how the story relates to their own lives. The discussion may also be used to foster the positive values of friendship and intimacy.

1. Think about your best friend. Then write a personal essay about what quality you like best about your friend and why. Be specific. Share memories of how your friend and his/her quality have helped you in the past. Maybe his sense of humor has cheered you up, or her confidence has inspired you to try something new.
2. Based on what you wrote for #1 above, how different do you think your life would be if your best friend were not in it?
3. Has any movie, TV show, or popular song added a special element to a friendship of yours? Do you and your best friend repeat a phrase used by a TV character, recreate a movie scene, or share a special song from the radio? If so, what does this element signify to your relationship?

Name _____ Date _____

Before You Read



To get ready to read "Tawanda!," **write about one of the following topics** for a few minutes:

1. Do you have a certain friend or relative to whom you go for cheering up when you are sad? How does he or she make you smile again? How do you try to cheer up a sad friend or family member?
2. Have you ever encountered a situation where you didn't know anyone present? First day of school? Joining a new club? Moving into a new neighborhood? Who was the first person who talked to you? Why do you remember this person? Are you still friends? If so, why do you think your friendship has lasted? If not, what happened?
3. Have you ever had to say goodbye to someone special because they were moving, going off to school, etc.? Explain how you felt about this special person's leaving. Were you able to say everything you wanted to? Did you expect to see each other in the future? Did your relationship change? How?
4. What things do you like to do with your friends? How do you spend your spare time together?

After You Read: Reader Response Log



When you finish reading, **try writing about aspects of the story that are important to you or raise questions for you.** If you need a prompt, you may write about one or two of the questions below:

1. When Kristen leaves, why does she grin instead of telling her friend how she feels?
2. What does it mean to the narrator to walk through Kristen's empty house? What thoughts could be going through her mind?
3. What does their special word mean to the friends at the end of the story? How is it significant at this moment?
4. Do you think these two friends will ever see each other again? Will their friendship survive time and distance? How will they communicate? Will another person ever become as close to Chrissie as Kristen?

Connecting with Other Stories

In *Getting There* other stories examine **friendship**. In "Weston Library" the narrator tries to impress a girl by showing he is cooler than his friends. In "The Ultimatum" the narrator has to choose between new friends and a boy he used to know. In "Cherokee" the narrator feels alone until a new girl comes to class. In "Blank Disks" a younger sister misses her brother who is away at college. In "The Cormorant in My Bathtub" the narrator makes new friends with her grandmother's help. "Passing Time" tells of two friends who fight over a girl. Amanda, in "The End of the Beginning," helps her friend Matt reconcile with his father and his new girlfriend. Laurel finds a new friend—from the 1800s!—in "Reflections." A robot becomes a young boy's companion in "Investment in the Future."

Name _____ Date _____

Vocabulary from “Tawanda!”

Directions: Based on the way each word in bold below is used in the sentence, **write** what you think the word means. Then **look up** the same word in your dictionary and copy the definition that comes closest to the way the word is used in the sentence. Finally, **write a sentence** of your own using the word. Make sure the sentence shows what the word means. Use a separate sheet of paper.

Example: No more sunny days at the pool or going to Jeffrey's and trying on **ballroom** gowns. (p. 29)

Definition based on context: *formal; fancy*

Dictionary definition: *characteristic of a large room for dancing*

Original sentence: *Amy tried on several ballroom gowns before selecting the perfect one for the prom.*

1. Or funny sleepovers when we would wake up at midnight with a **craving** for homemade brownies with chocolate chips. (p. 29)
2. I was in the **funeral parlor**, crying. (p. 29)
3. On the third day, I was in the hall trying to stop **whimpering** when the front door opened. (p. 29)
4. She held my hand and talked about more cheerful and **glorious** things than death. (p. 29)
5. I **especially** remember the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*. (p. 29)
6. We said it when we tried to eat a lemon with sugar on top without **squinting**. (p. 30)
7. We were **surrounded** by white walls in her room: empty, empty. (p. 30)
8. I could visualize two beds **parallel** to each other, one with Little Mermaid blankets and the other plain peach. (p. 30)

Brain teasers for Critical Thinking

1. Why are some people *friends*, while others are *best friends*? What really is the difference? Distinguish between an acquaintance, a friend, and a best friend. What characterizes each of these relationship categories?
2. Even though Kristen and Chrissie are not likely to see each other for some period of time, will their friendship remain “special” or will it gradually fade? Support your opinion with details from the text.
3. Why do Chrissie and Kristen walk through Kristen's house one last time?
4. What is the final picture Chrissie has of Kristen? How is Kristen dressed, and what does she do? Why do you think the author ended the story in this way?

Name _____ Date _____

Reading Check for “Tawanda!”

Circle the letters of all the correct answers. Some questions have more than one correct answer.

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| <p>1. The story starts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. two days after Kristen moves b. on the last day Kristen will see Chrissie c. three months after Kristen moves d. as the moving truck is pulling away <p>2. Kristen comforts Chrissie when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. she breaks her leg b. she fails a geometry test c. her family plans to move d. her grandfather dies <p>3. The two friends use the word “tawanda” because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. it came from a movie they saw together b. all the other kids in school say it c. it is a password for their secret club d. they made it up | <p>4. When the two girls walk through the empty house for the last time,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. they pack up Kristen’s belongings b. Chrissie visualizes Kristen’s things in her room c. they trip over some boxes d. they talk with Kristen’s older sister <p>5. When Kristen is leaving, she says,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. “I’ll call you when I get there.” b. “Connecticut or Bust!” c. “I’ll see you at Christmas!” d. “Write to me.” |
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Language Skills: Description and Meaning

Successful writers use words to “draw” pictures that the reader can see, just as an artist uses brush and paints to create a visual image. Using **adjectives—words that describe a person, place, or thing**—is one way to make the things you write about seem more real, more convincing, and more interesting.

Directions: Rewrite the passage below on another sheet of paper. **Substitute descriptive words** for the ones that are underlined. Select words that will give the reader a more accurate, clearer picture of what you are describing.

Example: Kim wore an awesome dress for her wedding. It was totally cool. She looked fabulous in it.

Rewrite: Kim wore a long, white dress for her wedding. It was elegant. The scoop neckline was decorated with a band of sequins and pearls, and the hemline was designed the same way. The full skirt flowed into a graceful train. She glowed as she walked down the aisle.

On a separate piece of paper, **rewrite this passage** by replacing the underlined expressions with words or phrases that make the meaning clearer:

My mother wanted my brother to wear an awful sweater to the party. Mom found it on the sale rack, and it looked like it. The sweater was gross, and it was a putrid shade, but my mother thought it looked super. The horrendous style did nothing for him, but Mom kept saying he looked handsome. It was totally wrong for him, and it made him look like a dweeb. My brother refused to wear it, but Mom insisted the sweater was awesome.