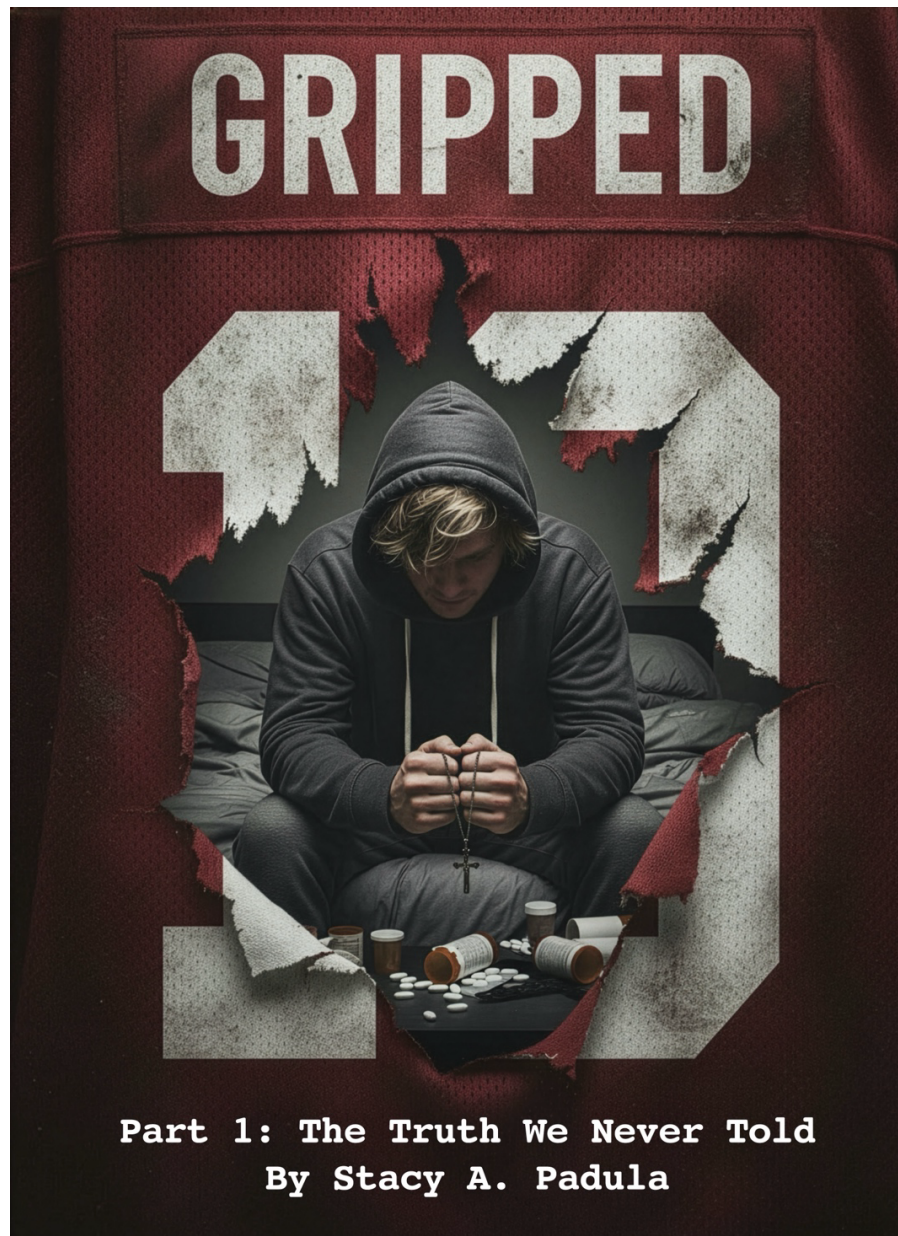


Guide to
Gripped Part 1: The Truth We Never Told
for High School Teachers
4-Week Unit Study



Grades 9–12 | English Language Arts, Health, or Interdisciplinary

Focus: Realistic fiction, addiction, decision-making, family systems, peer influence, and personal responsibility

1. Unit Overview for Teachers

Gripped Part 1 is a realistic young-adult novel that traces how a high-achieving college athlete's opioid addiction after a sports injury spreads into his hometown high-school community. The story interweaves present-day events with flashbacks and multiple points of view (Marc Dunkin, Taylor Dunkin, Cathy Kagelli, Jason Davids, and others).

The novel is intentionally unflinching. It depicts substance use, withdrawal, dealing, peer pressure, anxiety, depression, family conflict, and the early stages of seeking help. It is best suited for mature 9th–12th graders and works especially well in units on contemporary realistic fiction, health decision-making, or character education.

Essential Questions

- How do small choices accumulate into life-altering consequences?
- What roles do family, peers, pressure, and mental health play in substance use?
- How does shame both protect and destroy relationships?
- What does genuine support versus enabling look like?
- How can people begin to reclaim agency after harmful patterns have started?

Unit Length: 4 weeks (approximately 16–20 class periods, adaptable to block or traditional schedules)

2. Learning Objectives

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- Analyze how the author uses multiple perspectives and dual timelines to develop theme and character.
 - Identify and evaluate the biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to substance use in the novel.
 - Trace cause-and-effect chains from individual decisions to community impact.
 - Discuss sensitive topics (addiction, mental health, peer pressure) with evidence-based respect and empathy.
 - Produce written and oral responses that connect literary evidence to real-world issues.
 - Reflect on personal values, decision-making strategies, and sources of support.
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3. Content Warnings & Classroom Considerations

Sensitive content includes:

- Detailed depiction of opioid, benzodiazepine, cocaine, ecstasy/molly, marijuana, and alcohol use
- Snorting pills and mixing substances
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Drug dealing and organized-crime elements
- Anxiety, depression, and self-medication
- Family conflict and broken trust

- Underage parties and peer pressure
- Occasional strong language
- References to romantic/physical relationships (not graphic)

Recommendations:

- Send a brief parent/guardian notification letter before the unit.
 - Establish clear discussion norms on day one (respect, no personal confessions required, focus on text and general issues).
 - Offer an alternative text or independent project for students with trauma histories related to substance use in the family.
 - Have school counselor contact information ready.
 - Avoid requiring students to share personal experiences.
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4. Materials Needed

- Student copies of *Gripped Part 1*
 - Discussion norms poster or digital slide
 - Graphic organizers (character maps, cause-effect chains, timeline)
 - Access to short nonfiction articles or videos on the opioid epidemic and sports injuries (optional)
 - Writing journals or digital notebooks
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5. Four-Week Pacing Guide & Lesson Plans

Week 1: Setup, Discovery, and Initial Choices

Focus: Introduction to characters, the reality of addiction, family response, and the beginning of consequences.

Suggested Reading: Prologue + Chapters 1–13 (or equivalent pages covering Marc’s discovery, Taylor’s withdrawal, Cathy’s present-day situation, and early flashbacks)

Day 1 – Launch

- Anticipation guide (agree/disagree statements about addiction, pressure, family secrets).
- Read author’s preface aloud or independently. Discuss purpose of the book.
- Establish discussion norms.
- Begin reading Prologue + Chapter 1 together; model annotation for character and conflict.

Days 2–3 – Reading & Discussion

- Small-group or whole-class discussion:
 - How does Marc’s discovery scene establish both love and horror?
 - What early warning signs were missed with Taylor?

- How does the dual timeline begin to shape our understanding?
- Character map activity (Taylor, Marc, Cathy, Luke).

Day 4 – Literary Focus

- Point of view and reliability. Compare Marc’s and Taylor’s chapters.
- Mini lesson: How authors show internal conflict through action and detail.

Day 5 – Formative Check

- Short written response: “Which character’s situation feels most complex so far? Support with two pieces of textual evidence.”
- Exit ticket: One question still unanswered.

Week 1 Writing Prompt (homework or in-class): Explain how the author uses the opening chapters to show that addiction is both a personal and a relational problem.

Week 2: Backstories, Peer Influence, and the Slippery Slope

Focus: Flashbacks revealing how characters reached their current states; parties, early experimentation, identity, and peer dynamics.

Suggested Reading: Chapters 14–30 (Cathy’s middle-school years, parties at Chris’s house, early relationships, beginning of substance exposure)

Days 1–2 – Reading & Mapping

- Create a dual timeline (Present Day vs. Flashback) on the board or digitally.
- Discussion questions:
 - How does Cathy’s sheltered upbringing and twin dynamics contribute to her vulnerability?
 - What role do older teens (Taylor, Jordan) play in normalizing risk for younger kids?
 - Where do you see the difference between curiosity, fitting in, and self-medication?

Day 3 – Theme Development

- Small-group analysis of a key party scene. Identify peer-pressure techniques and individual agency.
- Mini lesson: Symbolism of “being gripped” (sports, substances, relationships, expectations).

Day 4 – Character Motivation

- Journal: Choose one character and write from their internal perspective about a moment of decision.
- Share selected responses (volunteer only).

Day 5 – Formative Assessment

- Cause-and-effect chain: Trace one early choice through its later consequences shown so far.

Week 2 Writing Prompt: Analyze how the author uses flashbacks to deepen our understanding of present-day choices. Use at least three specific examples.

Week 3: Escalation, Secrets, and Systems

Focus: Dealing, family fracture, mental health, police involvement, and the cost of secrecy.

Suggested Reading: Chapters 31–end of major present-day arcs involving Taylor’s dealing, Marc’s confrontation with authorities, Cathy’s ongoing struggles, and interconnected relationships.

Days 1–2 – Reading & Discussion

- Socratic seminar or structured fishbowl:
 - How does secrecy protect and harm at the same time?
 - What responsibilities do siblings, friends, and parents have when they suspect a problem?
 - How does the novel portray the difference between enabling and supporting?

Day 3 – Real-World Connection

- Short nonfiction excerpt or video on the opioid crisis or sports-related injuries and pain management (teacher-selected, age-appropriate).
- Discussion: Where does the novel align with or complicate real-world patterns?

Day 4 – Literary Analysis

- Examine how multiple points of view create dramatic irony and build tension.
- Track one motif (keys, phones, sports, family meals, substances) across chapters.

Day 5 – Mid-Unit Assessment

- Analytical paragraph or short essay: “In what ways does the novel suggest that addiction is a community problem as much as an individual one? Use evidence from at least two characters’ storylines.”
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Week 4: Synthesis, Reflection, and Application

Focus: Culminating understanding of themes, personal reflection, and transfer to real life.

Suggested Reading: Finish the book + review key earlier sections as needed.

Day 1 – Final Discussion

- Whole-class or small-group synthesis of essential questions.

- “What remains unresolved, and why might the author leave it that way?”

Day 2 – Creative or Analytical Choice Board (students select one)

- Write a letter from one character to another that was never sent.
- Create a public-service announcement (script or short video concept) inspired by a theme in the book.
- Design a support plan a school or family could have offered one of the characters earlier.
- Compare *Gripped* to another text or media piece on similar themes.

Day 3 – Writing Workshop

- Draft and peer-review the final analytical essay or project.

Day 4 – Presentations / Sharing

- Selected students share projects or key insights (optional or required, teacher choice).

Day 5 – Reflection & Closure

- Individual reflection: “What is one idea from this novel that you want to carry forward in how you think about pressure, friendship, or asking for help?”
- Optional: Anonymous feedback on the unit.
- Preview of possible extension into later books in the series or related nonfiction.

Final Summative Assessment Options

1. Analytical essay (4–6 paragraphs) on one essential question with textual evidence.
2. Multimodal project (podcast episode, illustrated timeline + analysis, staged monologue with rationale).
3. Socratic seminar performance + written preparation notes.

6. Differentiation & Support

- **Struggling readers:** Provide chapter summaries, audio if available, paired reading, or graphic organizers with sentence starters.
- **Advanced students:** Additional research on the opioid epidemic, sports medicine ethics, or comparison to other YA addiction narratives; leadership roles in discussions.
- **English learners:** Vocabulary lists (addiction, withdrawal, enabling, dual timeline, etc.), visual timelines, sentence frames.
- **Trauma-sensitive:** Private opt-out option, alternative independent novel with similar themes but less graphic detail, counselor check-ins.

7. Assessment Overview

Type	Examples	Timing
Formative	Exit tickets, journals, discussion participation, cause-effect maps	Ongoing
Summative	Analytical essay or choice-board project	End of Week 4
Participation	Norms-based discussion rubric	Weekly

8. Extension & Cross-Curricular Ideas

- Health class collaboration: Guest speaker (recovery coach, athletic trainer, or counselor) on injury, pain management, and substance risk.
 - Research mini project: Local or national statistics on teen opioid and prescription drug use.
 - Creative writing: Alternative ending or “what if” scene exploring a different choice.
 - Media literacy: Analyze how films or social media portray addiction versus the novel’s approach.
 - Community connection: Optional service or awareness project (with appropriate school approval).
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9. Teacher Notes

- The novel’s strength is its refusal to moralize simply. Encourage students to sit with complexity rather than rush to “the lesson.”
- Multiple perspectives allow different students to connect with different characters; leverage that.
- Faith elements appear as part of some characters’ backgrounds and coping. Treat them as characterization rather than curriculum content unless in a faith-based school setting.
- Later books in the series continue the arcs. This unit can stand alone or serve as an entry point.

This guide is designed to be practical and adaptable. Adjust pacing, depth of discussion, and assessment load according to your students’ maturity, reading stamina, and school calendar.