

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963 *Study Guide for Story Map*

STORY: *The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963*

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PLOT

Kenny is a small, bullied fourth-grader, whose family decides to take a trip to Birmingham, Alabama. White men bomb an African-American church while the family is in Birmingham. The family must rely on one another to understand the frightening experience.

THEME

Equality, endurance, freedom, friendship family, respect, understanding,

Setting

The story begins in Flint, Michigan in the winter of 1963, but includes the family's visit to Birmingham, Alabama that summer.

Characters

Kenny Watson (narrator and main character, a small boy around ten years old); Byron Watson (Kenny's older brother, a delinquent and bully); Joetta Watson (Kenny's younger sister, a sensitive and religious child); Daniel Watson (the father); Wilona Watson (the mother); Grandma Sands (Wilona's mother); Rufus and Cody (hillbilly brothers who are new in town; Buphead (Byron's partner-in-crime); Mr. Robert (Grandma Sands's companion).

CHAIN OF EVENTS

Inciting Event and Climax: An African-American church near Grandma Sands's home in Birmingham is bombed by white men. Joetta is supposed to be in the church at the time the bomb explodes. Kenny enters the church searching for his sister. He cannot find her.

Falling Action: The family immediately leaves Birmingham. They are shocked and confused by the occurrences there. Kenny is upset and confused. He isolates himself from others awaiting a magical cure, while his family worries about his well-being.

Outcome: Kenny sees his sad face in the mirror and bursts into tears. Byron comforts him, saying Kenny should cry all he can. He explains to Kenny about the bombing in Birmingham. Byron assures Kenny he has no reason to feel fear, shame, or guilt. Because of Kenny, Byron explains, Joetta was saved. He tells Kenny that it is not magic that will make his negative feelings leave, and that magic does not exist. Byron explains that Kenny has to accept what has happened, deal with it, and move on.

Resolution: Kenny begins to understand his brother's words, and is better able to deal with the day of the bombing. He disagrees with Byron on one thing, however. Kenny feels magic does exist. For Kenny, there is magic in words, in embraces, in friends, and most of all in families.

Reaction: *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* is a realistic portrayal of a young child living in a hateful world. The characters learn the importance of togetherness and camaraderie as they realize the positive difference they can be in the lives of others.