

# The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

By Christopher Paul Curtis

## Characters:

**Kenneth Bernard Watson** - Main character, boy age \_\_\_\_ in the 4th grade. Nicknames: Poindexter, Professor, Cockeye Kenny and Egghead.

**Joetta Watson** - Kenny's younger sister, nicknamed "Joey." She was in morning Kindergarten.

**Byron Watson** - Kenny's older brother (age 13 or 14). AKA "Lipless Wonder" or "By" or "Daddy Cool."

**Wilona Watson** - Kenny's Momma. Born in Birmingham, Alabama. Nicknamed "Lona."

**Daniel Watson** - Kenny's Dad, age 35. Lived in Flint all his life.

**Moses Henderson** - Man who Momma almost married. AKA "Hambone" because his head was shaped like a hambone.

**Aunt Cydney** - Dad's sister who lived in Flint.

**Buphead** - Byron's friend. Also had a "conk" hairstyle.

**Larry Dunn** - Bully at Clark Elementary School.

**Miss Henry** - Kenny's 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade teacher.

**Mr. Alum** - Byron's 5<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher.

**Mrs. Davidson** - Next-door neighbor who taught Sunday school to Joey.

**Mrs. Cordell** - Kenny's 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher.

**Rufus Fry** - Kenny's friend from Arkansas. Nicknamed "Country Corn Flake."

**Cody Fry** - Rufus's younger brother.

**LJ Jones** - Boy that Kenny played with until he stole some of his dinosaurs.

**Grandma Sands** - Momma's mother who lived in Birmingham. Widow for almost 20 years.

**Theo Johnson** - Neighbor who knew a lot about cars.

**Mr. Robert** - Grandma Sands' boyfriend.

**Setting** - Flint, Michigan and Birmingham, Alabama in 1963.

## Questions:

1. What did Momma do whenever she was going to smile? (Put her hand over her mouth because she had a gap between her front teeth)
2. What was the name of the Watson's car? (Brown Bomber)
3. What kind of car did the Watson's have? (1948 Plymouth)
4. What color did Byron say the car was? (Turd brown)
5. Where did they get their car? (Uncle Bud gave it to Dad when it was 13 years old)
6. What were the 3 parts of Byron's "Surviving a Blizzard" test? (Wind test, balance test, and blowin' section)
7. How did Byron earn the nickname "Lipless wonder"? (Kissing his reflection in the car mirror and getting his lips frozen to the mirror)
8. What was the name of Kenny's school? (Clark Elementary School)

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9. What were two things "wrong" with Kenny that made people beat him up? (He loved to read and he had a lazy eye)
10. What did Miss Henry do to keep Kenny from reading too fast? (She turned the book upside down)
11. What would the school busdriver do when the kids were late? (Close the door and speed away before they could get on the bus)
12. What did Momma pack for Kenny's lunches? (Throat-choking peanut butter sandwiches and an apple)
13. What was Kenny and Rufus's favorite game? (Playing with little plastic dinosaurs; Americans and Nazis)
14. What were two things "wrong" with Rufus? (He talked with a strong Southern accent and he only had two shirts and two pairs of pants)
15. Why did Rufus get so mad at Kenny that their friendship almost ended? (Kenny cracked up when Larry Dunn called Rufus a "Country Corn Flake")
16. Why did Kenny and Joey dress up so much in the cold weather? (Momma was from the warm-weather south and she was afraid of the cold weather)
17. Why did Joey stop whining about getting into her winter clothes? (Byron told her the garbage trucks picked up frozen people like them with thin southern blood)
18. Where did the Watson's buy their real leather gloves? (Montgomery Ward's)
19. What did Momma do if they lost their first pair of gloves? (She tied the second pair to their coat with a string)
20. What were "Maytag Washes?" (Larry Dunn smashed snow in other kids' faces)
21. What was "funny" about Larry Dunn's tennis shoes? (They had holes in the bottoms and he put pieces of cardboard in them)
22. What was "*The Great Carp Escape*"? (A "movie" Byron directed about a carp trying to get out of the Flint River...really about him bashing Larry Dunn into the fence repeatedly.)
23. What was Momma's "Smokey the Bear" story? (When she was little, her house caught fire)
24. How strong was Momma? (See page 67)
25. How could they tell when Momma was super mad? (She talked in a real Southern-style accent)
26. What were the names of the Watson's dog, cat and fish? (Blackie, Tiger, Flipper and Flapper)
27. What did Byron say a "Peon" was? (Folks that was so poor that the rich folks would just as soon pee on them as anything else)
28. What made Byron throw up? (Bag and a half of Swedish Crème cookies and some green apples)
29. What did Byron do to his hair? (He got it straightened by getting a "conk" "process" a "do" a "butter")
30. What did Dad do about Byron's hair? (He cut it off and shaved his head)
31. Why did Dad always hide his toothbrush? (Because little boys liked to use toothbrushes to clean stuff like the dog's teeth)
32. What was the "Ultra Glide?" (Record player installed in the Brown Bomber)
33. What was Byron's reaction to the Ultra Glide? ("Awww, man, this is too, too hip! Speedy don't even have one in his Cadillac! Too much, man, way too much!")
34. What kind of radio music could you get south of Cincinnati? (Hillbilly music)
35. What did Mrs. Davidson give Joey as a gift before their trip and where did Joey put it? (A chubby angel; in her sock drawer)

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36. Which two states does I-75 connect at its ends? (Michigan and Florida)
37. Which union was Dad in? (United Auto Workers)
38. What kind of shoes did Joey have? (Buster Brown)
39. What were the "country names" Dad joked about for everyone? (Dad-Clem, Kenny-Homer, By-Billy Bob, Joey-Daisy Mae, Momma-Wilona)
40. What was Mr. Roberts' dog's name? (Toddy)
41. How did Mr. Robert save Toddy's life? (Gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation)
42. Who was "Wool Pooh"? (Monster that Byron made up and claimed was Winnie the Pooh's evil twin brother)
43. What did Kenny say when he thought someone did something extremely stupid to himself? (Tying yourself to a tree and telling someone "Ready, aim, fire!")
44. Why was Kenny ashamed about the bombing? (Because he didn't try to rescue Joey from the rubble)
45. What did Byron call the area behind the family couch? (World Famous Watson Pet Hospital)
46. Who talked some sense back into Kenny's head after the bombing? (Byron)
47. What did Congress do in response to the civil rights movement? (Passed the Civil Rights Bill, the Voting Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act)

## In What Book...

Did someone say, "It was so cold that if you spit, the slob would be an ice cube before it hit the ground."?  
(Kenny Watson)

Did someone say, "Sweetheart, do what Mommy says, it's better to be too warm than too cold."? (Momma)

Did someone say, "He's not as dumb as he looks." (Kenny describing Byron to Grandma Sands)

Did a boy almost drown in a whirlpool?

