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Teacher Study Guide For:

The Circle of Friends, Book III...James By L. Diane Wolfe

Synopsis:

Haunted by a troubled past...

The future appears bright for James Sheppard. Emerging from a troubled childhood, he is blessed with talent and a good work ethic. Excelling in his classes and at the campus newspaper, James's goal of editor appears within his grasp. However, years of abuse and loneliness have dampened his spirit. By the time Maria enters his world, James is nearing the breaking point. Her innocent love slowly fills the void in his life, boosting his confidence and giving him hope. When a crisis abruptly forces him into adulthood, James is saddled with more responsibility than expected. Struggling to cope with the situation, the past returns to haunt him. Will James find peace before the mistakes of his father destroy him completely?

Multiple Choice Questions:

- 1) From what type of abuse did James suffer?
 - a) neglect
 - b) physical
 - c) emotional
 - d) **all of the above**
- 2) What artistic trait did James & Maria share?
 - a) dancing
 - b) **photography**
 - c) drawing
 - d) singing



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- 3) In what month do James & Maria marry?
 - a) February
 - b) June
 - c) July**
 - d) September
- 4) In what branch of the service did James's father serve?
 - a) Army
 - b) Air Force
 - c) Navy
 - d) Marines**
- 5) What was Maria's BIG Christmas gift?
 - a) a bigger apartment
 - b) a new SUV**
 - c) a horse
 - d) a ring
- 6) Who was James's best friend?
 - a) Shane
 - b) Geoff
 - c) Derrick**
 - d) Jason

Discussion topics:

- 1) James had issues with anger and depression. From where did these problems stem?
- 2) Like so many children, James suffered abuse in silence. Why didn't he want others to know? What do you think he feared more than his father?
- 3) James fears Maria will leave if the past incident with her friend Lori is discovered. Why does he reveal the truth anyway? Would you have admitted the truth? If you were Maria, would you trust James?
- 4) Maria's parents are very strict and overprotective. How has this affected Maria's behavior? Do you think dating James was in part an act of rebellion?
- 5) Upon discovery of Maria's pregnancy, the couple immediately decides to marry. What was James's reasoning for marrying? Did they make the right decision? What would you do in their situation?
- 6) James dealt with a lot of guilt – his mother's abandonment, his inability to please his father, hurting Lori, getting Maria pregnant, etc. Could you handle that much guilt? Should James have felt guilt in every instance?
- 7) James worked hard to support his family by working and going to school full time. Would you be willing to sacrifice your time? Why did James so willingly do those things?



8) Derrick did not want to get married. What were the reasons he offered? What were the real reasons for his reluctance?

9) Why was James so close to his stepmother? Do you think it mattered to him that she was not his birth mother?

Character Studies:

1) Consider the relationship between James and his father. What were some of the points of contention? Why did Ben not approve of his son? Why could James not please his father?

2) Despite his upbringing, James was a good father. Why did James connect with his son? Why was it so important that he treat his children differently?

3) If James's mother had not abandoned the family, how would it have affected his life? What if he'd lived with his aunt instead? What if Lynn had never entered his world?

Themes of the Story:

Importance of friendship & family

Overcoming abuse

Letting go of anger

Assuming responsibility

Sacrificing for others

Developing trust

The past does not equal the future