

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Anastasia Krupnik by Lois Lowry

Book Information

Lois Lowry, Anastasia Krupnik
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For ten-year-old Anastasia, life is full of problems like teachers, boys, a grandmother who does not remember her name, and the arrival of a new baby brother.

Award: SLJ Best Book

Topics: Community Life, School; Family Life, Babies; Family Life, Grandparents; Family Life, Growing Up; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Series, Anastasia

Main Characters

Anastasia Krupnik a creative and sensitive young girl who feels overwhelmed by the coming of her new brother and dealing with her elderly grandmother

Dr. Myron Krupnik Anastasia's humorous and kind father, who writes poetry and teaches at a college

Grandmother Ruthie Krupnik Anastasia's grandmother, who is too old to remember Anastasia's name; she dies just before Anastasia's brother is born

Jennifer Elizabeth Theresa MacCauley Anastasia's friend from school who makes Catholicism sound glamorous

Katherine Krupnik Anastasia's creative and loving mother; Anastasia is mortified to discover her mother is having a baby at the age of thirty-five

Mrs. Westvessel Anastasia's rigid but kind teacher, who gives Anastasia an "F" for writing a poem that does not rhyme but calls to make sure Anastasia is okay when Anastasia's grandmother dies

Robert Giannini a classmate of Anastasia who draws a beautiful map of Ireland but is given a bad grade on it because he did not follow instructions

Washburn Cummings a rebellious older schoolmate of Anastasia; Anastasia develops a crush on him but is devastated when he makes fun of her

Vocabulary

dichotomy the separation into two contrasting ideas

fait accompli something that has already been done

futility senselessness or uselessness

hieroglyphics Egyptian picture writing, or writing that is difficult to understand

indefatigable never tiring

salient important, significant

Synopsis

Ten-year-old Anastasia Krupnik is the only child of an English professor and an artist. Her parents have instilled in her a love of creativity and language. One of the ways Anastasia documents her feelings is by making lists of her likes and dislikes. For Anastasia, honesty is extremely important. She carefully analyzes her preferences in her lists and constantly revises the lists.

One of Anastasia's dislikes is her fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Westvessel. Mrs. Westvessel tells the class to write a poem, and Anastasia spends many evenings working on her poem. On the day the poem is due, Anastasia is given an "F" because she did not follow the teacher's directions to write a rhyming poem. Devastated, Anastasia shows her grade to her parents, who tell her that not everyone understands poetry. Anastasia is consoled when her father changes the "F" to the word "Fabulous."

Soon after her clash with Mrs. Westvessel,

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Anastasia acquires a new dislike: her parents tell her they are expecting a baby. When Anastasia threatens to move out, her father placates her by promising to let her name the baby. Anastasia secretly chooses the most awful name she can imagine.

Another of Anastasia's dislikes is her own name. When her friend Jennifer tells her that Catholics get to choose a new name, Anastasia tells her parents she is becoming a Catholic. She goes with Jennifer to church to ask for a dispensation so that she can take her First Holy Communion at a later than customary age. However, when she finds out that Catholics consider it a sin to think bad thoughts, she changes her mind.

One morning Anastasia announces to her parents that one of her likes is sixth-grader Washburn Cummings. She is enraged when her parents launch into a discussion of their own first loves instead of treating her seriously. Eventually, she comes up with her own plan to get Washburn's attention. Since Washburn wears an Afro hairstyle, Anastasia comes to school with her hair teased into a similar style. When Washburn makes fun of her, Anastasia goes home sick, and Washburn is moved to her list of dislikes.

The dislike that probably causes Anastasia the most grief is her grandmother. Anastasia yearns for an attentive grandmother who can remember Anastasia's name, but her grandmother is ninety-two and suffers from senility. However, Anastasia gains some compassion for Grandmother at Thanksgiving, when Grandmother lovingly speaks of Anastasia's deceased grandfather, Sam.

Despite the incident with Mrs. Westvessel, one of Anastasia's likes continues to be poetry. During Christmas vacation, Anastasia's father invites her to attend one of his college poetry classes. The class is studying Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," but Dr. Krupnik ends the class in disgust because the students are putting so little effort into analyzing the poem. Afterwards, he and Anastasia discuss the meaning of the phrase "the

inward eye," which Dr. Krupnik defines as the happiness of memories. When Anastasia comments that Grandmother has "futility of life," her father disagrees by saying that Grandmother lives in her happy memories.

At Christmas, Anastasia takes the time to talk with Grandmother about the past. She realizes that her father was right and wishes that Grandmother could be granted her wish to be reunited with Sam.

Sometime after Christmas Grandmother dies. Anastasia is confused by the intensity of her grief, but her parents explain that they also cried even though they knew it was best for Grandmother. Her father lets Anastasia go with him to the nursing home to get Grandmother's things. There they discuss what is important to them about their lives. While they are there, Anastasia's mother goes into labor.

While Anastasia is waiting for the baby to be born, Mrs. Westvessel calls to offer her sympathies about Grandmother. Anastasia decides Mrs. Westvessel is not so bad after all. She has another epiphany when her father takes her to see the baby. Overwhelmed, Anastasia loses her feelings of resentment and chooses to name the baby Sam after Grandfather.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

How does Anastasia feel when Grandmother dies?

Anastasia's reaction to the death of her grandmother is complex. She is confused by her sorrow because she knows her grandmother wanted to be with her late husband, Sam. But she has just begun to appreciate her grandmother, so she also feels a great sense of loss. She also feels guilty because she spent so much time complaining about her grandmother, and she feels a little embarrassed by her outburst of tears.

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Literary Analysis

What are some of Mrs. Westvessel's strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?

Mrs. Westvessel has a great love for rules and organization. This love for order helps her clearly convey ideas to the students, such as when Anastasia has difficulty with subtraction. It also keeps her from allowing the students to explore their own creativity, such as when Robert draws a beautiful but unconventional map and Anastasia writes an inventive poem. Mrs. Westvessel's sense of fairness also works both for and against her. When the children draw their neighborhood in a way that is different from what she expected, she determines to make more rules next time instead of making the children redo the assignment the way she intended but did not state. But her dedication to fairness also makes her insist on punishing Anastasia and Robert because they did not follow the rules when the other children did. Despite these weaknesses, Mrs. Westvessel obviously cares about her students. When Anastasia's grandmother dies, she shows her compassion by calling to offer condolences.

Inferential Comprehension

How are Dr. Krupnik and Mrs. Krupnik different from one another? How are they alike?

Both of Anastasia's parents are creative people, but Mrs. Krupnik's creativity is expressed in a less structured way than Dr. Krupnik's. Dr. Krupnik is more sensitive to Anastasia's feelings than Mrs. Krupnik. When the new baby is coming, it is he who insists Anastasia be allowed to name her new brother. Mrs. Krupnik is less patient than her husband is, and she is also more private. She balks when Anastasia asks about her romantic history, whereas Dr. Krupnik immediately offers information when asked. Her parents are similar in that they both have a problem with getting sidetracked with their own ideas and their pasts when Anastasia is talking to them. Also, both parents try to give Anastasia the space to work out her own feelings about the baby and other issues.

Constructing Meaning

Anastasia is an only child until the arrival of her brother. What clues are given in the story that indicate Anastasia's life will change significantly with the birth of the baby?

There are several clues that Anastasia is going to have to adjust to sharing her parents and her home with Sam. She already has difficulty getting the full attention of her parents because of their schedules and interests. They often are more interested in their own pasts than in listening to Anastasia. They are also preoccupied with their hobbies and do not have enough time to answer all of Anastasia's questions. With a new baby at home, Anastasia may get even less attention, and it will certainly be a different type of attention. However, there are also some clues that life may improve for Anastasia. Because she sometimes appears to be lonely as an only child, she may benefit from the companionship of a sibling. She will have someone in the household who shares a child's perspective to contrast with her parents' very adult approach to most situations. Being exposed to Sam may also help her learn to be less selfish, less impatient, and more adaptable.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Dr. Krupnik asks his students what they think is the theme of the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Have the students read Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and decide with which interpretation from this book they agree. Have the students explain their position in a class discussion.

Recognizing Feelings Anastasia has very strong feelings about many things. Have the students choose one of the events in this story and describe the events in a diary entry written from Anastasia's point of view.

Responding to Literature Anastasia sorts out her feelings by making lists of her likes and dislikes and then analyzing why she feels the way she does about certain things. Have the students

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make their own list of likes and dislikes. Have them put the list away for a month and then look at the list again. Have them discuss whether they would change anything and whether they have gone through as many changes as Anastasia did in this story.

Understanding Characterization Anastasia complains that she has trouble making friends in school. Have the students write an explanation of why they think finding friends is so hard for Anastasia. Students can use the reasons Anastasia gives or come up with their own reasons based on Anastasia's character as displayed in this story.