

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Blowing Bubbles with the Enemy by Alison Jackson

Book Information

Alison Jackson, Blowing Bubbles with the Enemy
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Interest Level: MG

When a girl is refused a spot on the boys' basketball team, the whole school takes sides.

Topics: Community Life, Gender Issues;
Community Life, School; Sports/Recreation,
Basketball

Main Characters

Bobby a sixth-grade girl who is a good basketball player

Charlotte Bobby's friend and Tim's girlfriend

Coach Briley the coach of the boys' team

Leslie a sixth-grade boy whom Bobby likes

Mrs. Del Rio the coach of the girls' team

Tim Bobby's older brother

Vocabulary

infatuated having a foolish or very strong love or admiration

sadist a person who takes delight in being cruel to others

suggestive suggesting something improper or indecent

Synopsis

Bobby, a sixth-grade girl, is a good basketball player. She wants to try out for Coach Briley's all-boys' basketball team, believing that the no-cuts girls' team coached by Mrs. Del Rio is not competitive enough. Other students, including her brother Tim and her friend Charlotte, are horrified by her plan.

Charlotte has a Halloween party, and Bobby attends the party dressed as an M&M candy. Bobby dances

with Leslie, who after spending the summer with Bobby, has been avoiding her since school began, and makes a general hit with her costume.

Coach Briley makes it clear at the tryouts that he does not want Bobby on his team. Mrs. Del Rio points out that he is required to let Bobby try out. Coach Briley requires Tim to play one-on-one against Bobby and makes unfair calls so that Bobby loses the trial and fails to make the team. She is angry with her brother for letting his allegiance to his coach take precedence over fairness to his sister.

Charlotte plots revenge. She writes a letter to the school paper in which she calls the boys cowards and weaklings for remaining silent on the sidelines. As a result of the letter, many girls turn out for the girls' basketball team, which is named the M&M's.

Charlotte proposes that the girls' team play the boys'. Bobby is appalled, believing that the boys' team is far superior to the girls'. Mrs. Del Rio points out that the girls have courage, willingness, and determination. Bobby helps Mrs. Del Rio coach, and six weeks later, after much practice, the game occurs. Although they lose the game and Bobby misses her last free throw, the M&M's give the game their all and prove that they can really play basketball. During the game, Les helps Bobby up after a fall, and she realizes she has turned him into instant Jell-O, a feat she has been longing to accomplish. Charlotte publishes an article in the school paper saying that both teams proved that fun, fair play, and good sportsmanship are what count, both on and off the court.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Coach Briley's use of the phrase "little lady" when speaking to Bobby says much about his view of girls. What do you think his use of this term means?

"Little lady" is a put down that means that Coach Briley does not take Bobby--or, presumably, other girls--seriously, at least as athletes.

Literary Analysis

The heroine of the story is named Bobby, which is often considered a boy's name. The boy she likes is named Leslie, which is often considered a girl's name. Do you think the author did this on purpose? If so, why do you think she did it?

Perhaps the author wanted to emphasize that people are all human beings, whether they are boys or girls, and that all people should be treated fairly.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did so many girls come to the tryouts for the girls' team?

The girls read the letter Charlotte wrote to the school paper. They felt offended on behalf of all girls for the treatment Bobby had received from Coach Briley. They joined the team to support Bobby and prove girls could be good basketball players.

Constructing Meaning

Bubble gum is used as a simile in the story. A simile compares two unlike items by using words such as like, as, than, seems, or appears. What does the author compare with bubble gum? Give some examples of the comparisons she makes.

Bubble gum is compared with love. When Les begins ignoring Bobby, she says, "The bubble burst." She compares love going tasteless and flat to stale bubble gum and says it's time to spit it out and start over again. At the end of the story, when they are together on the beach, Les accepts a piece of gum from Bobby and they chew it together.

Understanding Characterization Coach Briley is the antagonist of *Blowing Bubbles with the Enemy*. Instruct the students to write an essay about Coach Briley, stating their opinions of his behavior at the tryouts and the game. Ask them how the fact that he is an adult influences their opinion of his behavior. If they have ever thought an adult was unfair to them, they could compare their experience to Bobby's.

Understanding the Author's Craft Charlotte's letter to the school newspaper accuses the boy basketball players of being cowards for not standing up to Coach Briley when he was unfair to Bobby. Ask the students to write a letter to the school paper from one of the boy players responding to Charlotte's letter and explaining their behavior.

Understanding the Main Idea The main idea of the book can be summed up in Charlotte's comment to Mike when he says the girls cannot possibly beat the boys. "There's more to life than winning, kid," she says. When he asks what, she says the girls will have to teach him. As a class, discuss what Charlotte meant by her statement, and whether the girls' team showed that this statement is true.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Opportunities for girls to play a wide variety of competitive sports in middle school and senior high are a relatively recent phenomenon. Ask the students to interview their mothers or grandmothers about their junior- and senior-high-school sports opportunities and experiences. Take a tally in class of the sports opportunities and experiences. Then talk about the opportunities available to girls today. Ask the students why they think the changes have occurred and whether they approve of them.

Teachable Skills