

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Blue Sky, Butterfly

by

Jean Van Leeuwen

Book Information

Jean Van Leeuwen, Blue Sky, Butterfly
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125 Pages
Book Level: 4.2
Interest Level: MG

When her father leaves, Twig feels isolated from her older brother and her mother as they all try to cope with the changes in their lives.

Award: State Award

Topics: Adventure, Life Changes; Emotions, Sadness; Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Divorce; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice

Main Characters

Annie Twig's best friend
Brandon Annie's younger brother
Carrie Twig and Nathan's mother
Charley the family dog
Daddy Twig and Nathan's father
Grandma Ruthie Twig's maternal grandmother
Nathan Twig's older brother
Twig the main character; an eleven-year-old girl whose parents have separated

Vocabulary

contraption device, gadget
orgy a lack of moderation
stalactites a deposit of calcium carbonate which hangs from the ceiling of a cave
stalagmites a deposit of calcium carbonate rising up from the floor of a cave

Synopsis

Twig is an eleven-year-old girl whose parents have separated. Following the separation, Twig's world seems to be falling apart. Her mother no longer cooks meals, does laundry, or cleans the house. Her

older brother, Nathan, is gone even more than before, and she has not seen or talked to her father since he moved to his own apartment. Twig tries to help out by doing the laundry, but that event turns into a disaster.

After a phone call from Twig, Grandma Ruthie comes to visit. When the house is clean, the laundry is done, and meals are made, Twig begins to think maybe, just maybe, her world will be okay again. But after only two days, Grandma Ruthie leaves on another one of her adventures. Twig is even more confused when Grandma sends them seeds in the mail, since they don't even have a garden.

Twig's mother decides to plant a garden, and gradually begins to act more like the mother Twig remembers. As they work in the garden, Twig and her mother begin to talk about many things, and Twig begins to adapt to the many changes in her world. Twig begins to learn that life contains many changes, and that good times, while fleeting in nature, need to be enjoyed and remembered.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why did Twig decide to call Grandma Ruthie?

Twig had been trying to hold things together by doing the laundry and taking care of her mother. Twig started getting a cold and missed not having someone to take care of her. She saw Nathan fighting with his friend.

Literary Analysis

Compare Twig's Grandma Ruthie and Grandma Rose.

Grandma Rose was the type who liked to bake cookies, knit, and read stories. Grandma Ruthie traveled to far away places, sent lots of post cards and "swooped down out of the sky" for very short visits.

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Inferential Comprehension

How did Twig show that she was angry with her father?

She gathered up things that reminded her of him and put them in the basement. She hung up the phone when he called. She refused to see him. She tried to change her name because her father had given it to her.

Constructing Meaning

Why did Grandma Ruthie send seeds to Twig and her mother?

She wanted them to plant a garden, tend it, watch it grow, and feel the satisfaction of seeing the fruits of their labors. She also wanted to bring back the memories of Twig's grandpa's garden and to show them that life goes on.

Teachable Skills

Differentiating Fact and Opinion This story has many examples of fact and opinion, but if students are not careful, they may be fooled by statements of opinion that are presented as fact such as "This was terrible. This was a disaster." Facts may be confused with opinions such as "Twig didn't like being the mother." Have the students cut out an ad (or ads) from a newspaper or magazine and mount it (or them) on a piece of paper. Have them make two columns on the paper, one headed FACTS and one headed OPINIONS. Instruct them to list the claims made in the ad(s) in the appropriate column.

Recognizing Cause and Effect In the book, Twig and her mother plant a garden. Discuss with the class the many steps necessary for a productive garden. If possible, have the class plant a garden, tend it, and enjoy the fruits of their labors. If planting a garden is not possible, perhaps the students could plant some seeds in pots right in the classroom. There are many kinds of herbs that grow well in pots, as well as some flowers and vegetables. For further study in cause and effect, plant some seeds in soil without fertilizer;

some in soil with fertilizer, give some, but not all, of the plants plant food, etc. Have the students record which plants grow fastest and biggest.

Recognizing Details Have the students choose a scene from the book and draw a detailed picture of that scene. They should include all of the details listed in the book, as well as other details that could be implied. For instance, in the scene in which Twig finds the baby bunny, we know that there was a stone wall next to the rabbit and that the rabbit was reddish-brown. Since the rabbit was "nearly invisible," the stone wall was probably a reddish-brown color also, as opposed to a gray stone wall or a stone wall covered with green moss or vines. Twig was walking up the driveway when she saw the rabbit, so the driveway would be pictured near the stone wall.

Understanding Characterization Twig's two grandmothers were very different. One was the knitting, cookie-baking type of grandmother, and one was an adventurer. Have the students find pictures and activities in magazines and newspapers of things they would expect each grandmother to enjoy. Have them divide a piece of paper in half and mount the pictures under the titles "Grandma Rose" and "Grandma Ruthie."