

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Broccoli Tapes

by
Jan Slepian

Book Information

Jan Slepian, The Broccoli Tapes

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Book Level: 4.0

Interest Level: MG

During a stay in Hawaii with her family, Sara reports her experiences by tape back to her sixth-grade class in Boston, detailing her 'adoption' of a wild cat, a friendship with a Hawaiian boy, and the death of a beloved grandmother.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books

Topics: Animals, Cats; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 2, Chapter 12, 90%; Family Life, Death; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; U.S. States/Regions, Hawaii

Main Characters

Aunt Carrie & Uncle Steve Delly Davidson's brother and sister-in-law

Bert Davidson (Dad) Sara and Sam's father, a university professor

Broccoli a wild black cat

Clara Pilapil the columnist from the Hawaiian newspaper

Delly Davidson (Mom) Sara and Sam's mother, a newspaper columnist in Boston

Eddie Nutt a Hawaiian boy in Sam's class

Grandma Florrie Sara and Sam's maternal grandmother

Miss Hasselbauer Sara's school teacher in Boston

Mr. Nutt Eddie's father, who owns a pet shop

Sam Davidson Sara's teenage brother

Sara Davidson a sixth-grade girl from Boston

Vocabulary

haole a person not descended from an original Polynesian inhabitant of the Hawaiian Islands

leis wreaths or necklaces of flowers

mutiny a forcible or passive resistance to authority

pidgin simplified speech used for communication between people of different languages

Synopsis

Sara Davidson is in Hawaii for five months with her parents, grandmother, and brother, while her father teaches at the university. Miss Hasselbauer, her sixth-grade teacher in Boston, had suggested that Sara be a reporter and tape everything she hears and sees as part of a project. The book is written as a transcript of what Sara says into her tape recorder.

Sara tells about her first visit to the lava field where she and her brother, Sam, free a wild cat caught between the rocks. While bringing it food in a bowl, Sara meets a boy named Eddie Nutt. When Sara and Sam's parents discover the missing bowl, Sara tells them about the cat. Mom and Dad are afraid of rabies and forbid them to go near it. But the children love the cat and name it Broccoli because of what it eats. While shopping for a bowl for Broccoli at the mall, the children visit the pet store owned by Mr. Nutt and see Princess Di, his beautiful cat. Eddie works there and when he accidentally lets a guinea pig get away, Sam takes the blame.

With their parents preoccupied with Grandma's illness, Sam and Sara continue to feed the wild cat and help Eddie build a swimming pool at the lava field. Sara starts questioning Eddie about his family, but Sam tells her to leave Eddie alone.

Aunt Carrie and Uncle Steve come to stay when Grandma goes into the hospital. Aunt Carrie tells the children that Grandma is going to die, so Sara and Sam escape to the lava field to find peace. Sara discovers that Eddie's mother left three years before and his father treats Eddie like it was his fault. Eddie thinks his father likes his cat, Princess Di, more than him. He thinks it would be funny to mate the beautiful Princess Di with Broccoli, until they discover that Broccoli is female.

Sara tries to talk out her feelings for Eddie on the tape. When she finds him at the pool looking awful,

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Eddie tells Sara that his mother phoned to say she wants him to live with her, and his father left to discuss the situation in Arizona. When Eddie comes for supper at the Davidsons', Mrs. Davidson gets him to talk about his feelings.

Shortly after, Grandma dies, and the family has a memorial picnic where they share fun memories. The picnic is cut short, however, when Sara is stung by a jellyfish. Sam asks what the point of loving someone is since it hurts so much when they die. Their father explains that love is everything and part of the price paid for loving is the hurt. Sam does not think it is worth it and says he does not need love.

The children visit Princess Di, who is pregnant, and learn Eddie's father is on his way home. When he arrives, he tells Eddie to pack because he is going to live with his mother. Eddie runs away and comes at night to Sara's screened wall. He refuses to go home, so Sam goes with him to sleep in the lava field. When Sara's parents come home, they find Sam missing. Sara explains, and they go and get the boys. Mr. Nutt arrives the next morning, and Mrs. Davidson makes them talk to each other about the whole situation.

When their parents tell Sam and Sara they cannot see Broccoli anymore, the children refuse to comply. Mr. Davidson decides that they must find a home for the cat before leaving for Boston or it will go to the pound. While searching for a home, they discover that Broccoli is expecting kittens. After visiting the pet store to see Princess Di's new kittens, they return to the lava field to find that Broccoli has also given birth. When they come to feed Broccoli the next day, Broccoli is dead in the pool. They take the kittens home and bury Broccoli at the field. Dad asks Sam if loving Broccoli was worth the hurt.

With two kittens left for adoption, Eddie comes up with a plan. He brings over one of Princess Di's old blankets. Carefully rubbing the scent on the kittens, Eddie places them next to Princess Di, who accepts them. When the newspaper comes to cover the story of the kittens, Mr. Nutt has to let Broccoli's babies stay.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Sara recalls that Miss Hasselbauer said "people are all the same at heart." Why does Sara not believe this at first? Do you agree or disagree with Sara's views? Why? What changes Sara's mind later on in the story?

Sara remembers crying at school when she thought about her grandmother's death. She says that no one asked her why she was crying or even tried to find out what was wrong. They only made fun of her for being a crybaby. Sara says the students back in Boston at her old school would not have done that. Students may relate their own experiences in which they felt alone because no one wanted to talk to them or include them in activities. Sara changes her mind when she opens up to the class about the kittens and finds that her new classmates are very interested and even adopt some of the kittens.

Literary Analysis

After Grandma's death, the family has a memorial picnic where they tell funny stories about the past involving Grandma. Why does the family choose this type of event rather than a typical funeral with lots of relatives and friends? How would this type of memorial help the family in their time of sadness and grief?

Students could talk about how Grandma did not want a lot of people around. She described to have only family members present. The importance of remembering the fun times their family enjoyed will help people to see that life is not all sadness, even when a loved one dies from a serious illness. Students may relate incidents from their own family about a death of a grandparent and how family members talked about the person to help everyone understand.

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Inferential Comprehension

Sam tells his father, "If it hurts so much to have somebody die, then what's the point of loving?" His father explains that love is everything. What does Mr. Davidson mean by this? What is so great about loving if it ends in a broken heart? Why does love hurt?

Mr. Davidson is trying to get Sam to understand that unless a person has something or someone to love in the world, he or she is not really living. People need the feelings of caring for and loving someone else to make themselves happy. Mr. Davidson says the hurt is the price people pay to have the wonderful feeling love gives them. He feels that it is worth the price even though Sam does not agree when Grandma dies. Sam learns to love the cat and his heart breaks when Broccoli dies, but he feels better knowing he really did love Broccoli.

Constructing Meaning

Sara says that Sam is a "holder on," while she is a "blurter." What does she mean by these terms? Give examples from the story to support your answer.

Sam does not talk to other people about the way he feels. When Grandma is sick, Sam just goes to his room and does not talk to the family. When they hold the memorial picnic, Sam walks alone down the beach rather than listen to or talk to the family. He holds his feelings inside. Sara, however, says what she is thinking, even if it comes out wrong. Several times when she is talking to Eddie, she says she wishes she had kept her mouth shut because she realizes that not everyone wants to talk about their problems. She just blurts out how she feels or what she wants to know from other people.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Divide the class into groups and have each group research a different aspect of the two states where Sara lives -- Hawaii and Massachusetts. Then have the groups present their comparisons for the class. Some areas for comparison could be geographical features, plant

life, animal species, founding history, climatology including average rainfall, temperatures, seasons, etc.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Sara and her family watch some school girls doing the hula and learn it is a dance involving hand movements that tells a story. Check out a recording of the Hawaiian song, "Pearly Shells." This native song has hand movements and the instructions may be available from a library or on the Internet. Have some of the class members learn the hand movements and demonstrate, or have students take a familiar song with lyrics and make up their own hand movements that tell the story. They can demonstrate this to the class with one member explaining what each movement means.

Extending Meaning Sara's class in Boston is doing an oral history project using a tape recorder. Give each student a cassette tape. During a week or two, provide time for each student to tape two to three minutes each day on his or her own tape to tell about something that happened or share feelings about something, just as Sara does on her tape. After two weeks, share the tapes with the class. Ask students how easy or difficult it was to talk into a tape recorder. What were some of the problems about talking into a tape rather than face-to-face?

Responding to Literature When Eddie tells Sara and Sam about his background, Sara calls it a real "mishmash." Have students check into their own backgrounds and find out what nationalities make up their ancestry. If students cannot find information about their ancestry, have them research the region in which they live. What types of people settled the area? When? Why? What different nationalities live there today?