

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Circle of Gold

by

Candy Dawson Boyd

Book Information

Candy Dawson Boyd, Circle of Gold
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Mattie Benson knows just what to get her mother for Mother's Day until she loses her best job and is accused of stealing. She thinks that she can still get the present, but maybe she is expecting miracles again.

Award: Coretta Scott King Award/Honors

Topics: Behavior, Stealing; Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Mothers; Mysteries, Thefts; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Work it Out: Conflicts; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Angel Higgle Mattie's wealthy, cruel classmate, who threatens Mattie for not sharing her test answers and accuses Mattie of stealing her bracelet

Charlene poor, unconfident sidekick of Angel's, who steals Angel's bracelet

Matt Benson Mattie's twin brother, who seems to be favored by their mother

Mattie Mae Benson the principal character, an eleven-year-old girl who wants to buy an expensive pin for her mother for Mother's Day to gain her mother's love

Mrs. Benson the mother of Mattie and Matt, who learns to deal with the death of her husband and working two jobs

Mrs. Stamps wise elderly friend of Toni and Mattie, who is a good listener and offers good advice

Toni Douglas Mattie's chatty best friend, who helps Mattie discover who stole Angel's bracelet

Vocabulary

balance the amount of money that is due after a partial payment has been made
deposit something given as a partial payment with the rest to be paid later
Jackson Park El an elevated train in Chicago used for public transportation
radiator a device for heating a room, made up of a series of pipes or coils through which steaming hot water passes
superintendent a person who manages an apartment building

Synopsis

Eleven-year-old Mattie Benson is going through a difficult time. Daddy was killed by a drunk driver, the family has little money, and their home life is unhappy. Mama tries to support the family, but the stress of losing Daddy and working two jobs has made her tired and angry, especially toward Mattie. Mattie used to think Mama loved her twin brother Matt more than her. Now she thinks Mama does not love her at all.

Mattie and her best friend Toni see an expensive gold pin while looking for a Mother's Day present. Mattie thinks buying the pin will demonstrate her love for her mother and fix their family problems. Unfortunately, she had just lost her steady babysitting job. Her only hope is to win the prize money from an essay contest sponsored by the local newspaper.

When Mattie returns home late from the shopping trip, Mama slaps her. Mrs. Stamps helps Mattie understand that Mama is under a lot of pressure and she needs someone to talk to. When Reverend Harris speaks to Mama about the incident, she becomes angry that their private business was taken outside the home. Later, she agrees she needs someone to talk to. Mama begins going to secret meetings.

Mattie dislikes the essay she has written, and she asks Toni to write an essay for her. Although Toni

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feels guilty about cheating, she knows the pin is important to Mattie and she agrees. Later, when Mattie mails her entry, the reader is left wondering which essay Mattie has sent.

While all this is going on, Mattie is being bullied by her classmates, Angel and Charlene, because she refused to let Angel copy test answers. Later, Angel accuses Mattie of stealing her expensive bracelet. Toni pretends to be friends with Angel and Charlene to find the bracelet thief, and she discovers Charlene stole the bracelet.

Mama begins to act like she did before Daddy's death, and she announces that a therapist has been helping her deal with her problems. Mattie discovers the pin has been sold. Then she learns she has tied for first place with the essay she had written. The essay mentioned her family's difficulties and her desire to buy the pin for Mama. The editorial board gives the pin to Mama. Mama tells Mattie she has always loved her, and Mattie feels she has "made a place for herself in the circle of her family."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Although Charlene bullied Mattie and accused her of stealing the bracelet, Mattie felt sorry for her when she was suspended. Why did she feel this way? What were her feelings toward Angel at this time?

Mattie felt sorry for Charlene because she did not have anyone to care about her and Angel had been so cruel to her. She realized Charlene had only been mean because she was following Angel to have a friend. Mattie disliked Angel because she was cruel.

Literary Analysis

At the end of the story, Mattie thinks, "I have made a place for myself in the circle of my family . . . It's still a bumpy circle and maybe Matt will always be Mama's favorite, but that's okay." What did she mean when she said the circle of her family was still a bumpy circle?

Her family was not perfect. They still had a lot of problems, but that was okay because they also had a lot of love.

Inferential Comprehension

Mattie's father had advised Mattie never to fight. He said staying cool would get her through her problems. When did Mattie not follow this advice? Why didn't she?

Mattie did not follow this advice when she pushed Angel off her chair. Like her mother, Mattie acted in anger because she was having a hard time dealing with the stress of her problems.

Constructing Meaning

What did Mama learn throughout the course of the story?

Mama learned how much Mattie loved her and that Mattie did not feel loved by her. She learned how to handle her problems in a more positive way.

Teachable Skills

Responding to Literature To Mattie, the gold pin was the perfect gift for her mother. It might be fun for the students to draw pictures of the perfect gift for their mother or other family member. The students should write a description of the gift and an explanation of why it is perfect for that person. Display the writings with the drawings. Encourage the students to be creative; the gift can be a real item, a kind deed, or an imaginary invention.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Students at this reading level may not have had much experience with figurative language. Look for examples in the book. Ask the students to rewrite each example without the figurative language.

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For example, "I may be back on nights sooner than butter melts in a hot skillet." might be translated to "I may be back on nights soon." Discuss the effect. As a class, enhance simple sentences by adding figurative language. Ask each student to illustrate a favorite example of figurative language, and include the example as a caption. The example does not have to come from the book. Examples from the book may include the following: The words ran on like a swollen mountain stream. Toni smiled back, joy spilling over her like too much root beer in an ice cream float. Toni entered the room like a fast-rolling ball. The envelope in Mattie's hand felt as heavy as a bar of lead. The moonlight fell around the sleeping shape of her mother like a cashmere shawl. If you made the right decision, though, you may be in for some good, skin-stretching times. Tapping her feet in time to the organ and the tambourines, she let her voice fly out and soar.

Although Mattie's essay included comments about the family's problems, the students should keep their essays positive. Encourage the students to share their essays with the person about whom they wrote.

Understanding the Author's Craft Matt, Mattie, Mrs. Stamps, and Toni each had unique talents that were highlighted in the book. Matt was a talented artist, Mattie could sing and do math, Mrs. Stamps was good at listening and giving advice, and Toni was a talented writer. Discuss talents and the many forms talents can take. Ask the students to brainstorm to come up with a list of his or her many talents. The students can each make a collage with pictures from a magazine or a newspaper that symbolize each talent. For example, the students might include a comic strip to symbolize a talent for humor, or a picture of people helping one another to show kindness. Although Matt and Mattie were twins, their talents were quite different. A student might choose to make a collage of the talents of his or her family members. Observe how each family member contributes something unique to the family.

Recognizing Feelings Mattie thought her father never knew how much she loved him. The gold pin and the essay helped Mattie communicate her love to her mother. Ask the students to write an essay about what their mother, father, other family member, or friend means to them.