

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Earthquake Terror by Peg Kehret

Book Information

Peg Kehret, Earthquake Terror
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Interest Level: MG

When an earthquake hits the isolated island in northern California where his family had been camping, Jonathan must find a way to keep himself, his sister, and their dog alive until help arrives.

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Animals, Dogs; Disasters, Earthquakes; Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Sisters; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Count on Me: Responsibility; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice

Main Characters

Abby Palmer Jonathan's six-year-old sister who was injured in a car accident at age two and now uses a walker to get around

Jonathan Palmer a twelve-year-old boy who is on a camping trip with his family

Moose the family dog

Mr. Palmer father of the children

Mrs. Palmer mother of the children

Vocabulary

aftershock a minor earthquake following a more powerful one

diving reflex the slowing of the heartbeat and the constriction of the arteries when exposed to cold weather

primitive facility a campground with pit toilets, but no water, picnic tables or fireplaces available

Synopsis

Jonathan Palmer and his family are camping on Magpie Island when Mrs. Palmer breaks an ankle. Jonathan is left on the island with his sister who is handicapped and needs help walking.

The children experience an earthquake before they can get back from the beach to the camper. Abby's walker is destroyed and there is little food and water. Jonathan is worried about his parents and their safety as he attempts to take care of Abby and himself. They are forced to use logs to float to safety after the island is flooded. After a valiant effort to stay together, the children become separated when Abby's tree boat becomes lodged on a broken fishing pier. Through their incredible determination to live, both children make it to shore and are eventually rescued and reunited with their parents and dog.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Discuss the ways Jonathan protected Abby during the earthquake and during the problems they encountered afterward.

He gave her food and drink and made a lean-to for protection from the elements. He also tried to move her to a higher location. Finally, he taught her to ride a tree in an attempt to reach land.

Literary Analysis

How did Jonathan feel when he saw the bridge was broken?

He was filled with fear, worry and concern. He also expressed a feeling of helplessness.

Inferential Comprehension

Do you think the Palmers will change where and how they take their vacations? Have you ever had to change your vacation plans?

They may check the weather more carefully. Also, they might choose to have a cell phone along for emergencies.

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Constructing Meaning

Think about Jonathan's outdoor skills. Do you have any special skills that might be useful in a similar situation?

Jonathan knew how to build a raft, float on a tree, and swim.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features The main theme of this story is the struggle of a boy to save himself, his sister and his dog. Although he is only twelve years old, Jonathan is able to cope with the problems that the earthquake has caused. Ask the students about events that have occurred in their lives or that they have read about that are examples of children saving themselves or others. Have the students discuss whether the children used similar problem-solving skills such as staying calm, thinking through the possible solutions, and evaluating the materials at hand.

Comparing and Contrasting Abby's legs were partly paralyzed as a result of an accident. She is able to walk with the aid of a walker, but prefers to crawl. She places her forearms on the floor and pulls herself forward, with her legs dragging behind. Because of this, her arms are very strong. Have the students interview someone with a handicap and ask how they manage to move about. Also discuss Abby's movements and abilities with them and find out if this is realistic. Share the information with the class.

Describing Actions or Events Earthquakes can cause extensive destruction. In *Earthquake Terror*, an island is submerged and extensive flooding occurs along with downed trees, damaged roads and bridges, and burned buildings. Describe the destruction from a recent earthquake or tornado. Include human interest stories, if possible, about people rescuing others or being saved by the strange twists of nature. An example of one such event was a dog that was found in good condition in a tree over a mile from his home following a tornado.

Identifying Reading Strategies Jonathan succeeded in saving himself and his sister because of his problem-solving ability. He tried different solutions such as building a shelter, climbing a downed tree, making a raft, and floating on a log. As conditions changed or he realized his solution wasn't going to work, he had to try a different approach to the problem. Ask the students to select one situation in the story and write a different solution to the problem. They should cite examples from the story to support their solution as a reasonable choice.