

Ellen Tebbits
by
Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ellen Tebbits
Quiz Number: 5009
Dell, 1951
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160 Pages
Book Level: 4.9
Interest Level: MG

Through many humorous adventures, Ellen learns the true value of friendship.

Topics: Family Life, Growing Up; Humor/Funny, Funny; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships

Main Characters

Austine Allen a new student in Ellen's third-grade classroom who lives near Ellen and becomes her best friend

Ellen Tebbits the main character of the story, who makes a new best friend, but then nearly loses her over a silly misunderstanding

Miss Joyce Ellen and Austine's third-grade teacher

Mrs. Allen Austine's mother, who is more easygoing

Mrs. Gitler Ellen and Austine's fourth-grade teacher

Mrs. Spofford Ellen and Austine's dance teacher

Mrs. Tebbits Ellen's mother, who is very proper and tidy

Otis Spofford a boy in Ellen and Austine's class at school who likes to cause trouble; also, the son of their dance teacher

Vocabulary

biennial occurring every two years

leotard a close-fitting, one-piece garment often worn by a dancer

Maypole a tall pole used as a center of May Day sports and dances

neckerchief a square piece of cloth worn around the neck

pantomime the art of conveying a story by bodily movements only

rhapsody a musical composition of unusual form

Synopsis

Ellen Tebbits is a third-grade girl whose best friend has recently moved away. Austine Allen is a third-grade girl who has recently moved to Ellen's neighborhood from California. Ellen meets Austine in school, but doesn't really get to know her until she sees her at dance class. Ellen has come to dance class early, hoping to change into her dance costume before the other girls arrive and discover she wears woolen underwear. When she arrives, Austine is already there. During the dance class, Ellen finds her underwear is slipping and fears everyone will guess her secret. Austine comes to Ellen's aid, and after class Ellen discovers that Austine, too, wears woolen underwear.

Ellen and Austine become friends and share many happy times together. After they begin fourth grade, however, the friendship is threatened when Ellen slaps Austine for something she didn't do. Austine then ignores Ellen, and Ellen is at a loss to know what to do. Should she apologize even though she thinks she is in the right? At the end of the book, Ellen discovers Otis, not Austine, is the one who untied her sash as they stood in line. Ellen and Austine apologize to each other and their friendship is restored.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

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Initial Understanding

Think about the part of the story where Ellen got the beet plant. How did the woman who owned the plant seem to feel when she saw Ellen taking it? Support your answer.

The woman was angry at finding Ellen in her garden (as evidenced by her yelling at Ellen), but didn't really care if Ellen took the beet (as evidenced by giving Ellen permission).

Literary Analysis

Ellen blamed Austine for something she didn't do. Have you ever wrongly accused a friend or been blamed for something you didn't do? Explain what happened. How was the problem resolved?

Correct answers, obviously, will vary.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare and contrast the two main characters, Ellen and Austine. How are Ellen and Austine the same? How are they different?

Both like ballet, both are friendly, both are in Miss Joyce's third-grade class and then Mrs. Gitler's fourth-grade class, etc. However, Ellen is thin and Austine is not, Austine knows how to make brownies and Ellen does not, Austine has a brother and Ellen has no siblings, etc.

Constructing Meaning

Why did Austine think Ellen knew nothing about horses?

She didn't use the proper terms when talking about the horses and horseback riding, she bounced in the saddle, she couldn't make her horse obey, etc.

students brainstorm to find possible solutions to the conflicts. Have the other students evaluate each group's solutions. Which are the most plausible?

Comparing and Contrasting Have the students choose a character from the story and write a description of an imaginary event involving that character. How did the character react to circumstances in the imaginary story? How is that similar to or different from the character's reactions to events in the book?

Understanding Dialogue Have the students pick two characters from the story and think about the type of conversation these two characters are likely to have. Have the students write a one page dialogue of a phone call in which the reader only "hears" one side of the phone conversation between the two characters. Have them write the dialogue so that both sides of the conversation are understood.

Responding to Literature In this story, Ellen and Austine are in a play for their school's open house. Divide the students into groups. Choose several poems or children's stories. Pick narrators and assign characters. Have each group of students pantomime the story while the narrator reads it. Have the other students evaluate the performance and discuss whether or not the students accurately portrayed the story in their pantomimes.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot This book contains several examples of conflicts, including conflicts between friends, conflicts with self, and conflicts between adults and children. Have the class list several conflicts in the story. Divide the class into groups and assign one conflict to each group. Have the