

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

I, Amber Brown

by

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Book Information

Paula Danziger, I, Amber Brown
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Because her divorced parents share joint custody of her, nine-year-old Amber suffers from lack of self-esteem and feels that she is a piece of jointly-owned property.

Topics: Character Traits, Self-Acceptance; Emotions, Misc./Other; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 6, 90%; Family Life, Divorce; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Know Yourself; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Series, Amber Brown

Main Characters

Amber Brown the narrator and main character of the story; she is adjusting to the new joint custody arrangement her parents have made

Brenda the teenage girl who "Ambersits"

Max Mom's fiancé; he wants Amber to accept him as part of her family

Philip Brown (Dad) Amber's father; he has recently returned from living in Paris and will now play a bigger part in Amber's life

Sarah Thompson (Mom) Amber's mother; she is engaged to Max

Savannah Marshall a third grade girl at Amber's school; her family lives above Amber's father

Vocabulary

kindle to ignite or set fire to

ointment a heavy, thick medicated lotion or cream usually applied to skin

preliminary something that comes before another thing

pun a humorous use of words giving them double meanings

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Amber Brown is getting ready for Christmas; her mother's fiancé, Max, on the other hand, is getting ready to celebrate Hanukkah. Amber's father has recently moved back to New Jersey after living in Paris, and Amber is trying to get used to the new joint custody agreement her divorced parents have made. Amber still has a slim hope that her parents might get back together, even though her mother is now engaged to Max.

Amber's mother has told her she cannot get her ears pierced until she is twelve. When Amber's father picks her up for his evening with her, she fools him into taking her to the mall to get her ears pierced. Afterwards, Dad takes Amber to his new apartment in a duplex. Amber is upset that he did not let her help select the apartment as he had promised to do. Dad apologizes, but Amber still has a jumble of emotions about all the changes in her life. Dad explains that sometimes he feels lonely and that sharing the house with his new friend, Steve, and Steve's family seemed to be a good idea.

Later that evening, Dad returns Amber to Mom's house. Mom is angry with Dad for allowing Amber to get her ears pierced. When the two parents argue in front of her, Amber also gets angry and tells them that she feels she has no control over her life; they are fighting over what she can do and when. Amber goes to her room feeling like she is a burden to both of her parents. After a while, her mother comes to get her, and the three of them are able to talk calmly together. Amber admits she was wrong to fool her father and to get her ears pierced; her parents say that in the future they will try to make decisions about Amber together.

Amber celebrates Hanukkah with Mom and Max. Then she spends time celebrating Christmas with

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her father. In some ways she thinks her life is better since her parents' divorce; in some ways it seems harder. Amber realizes she will probably always feel split between her parents, but she knows she will work things out.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Amber is confused about the joint custody arrangement. She feels like each parent owns all of her part of the time, that each one gets a part of her the balance of the time, and that there is nothing left over for Amber. What are some reasons that Amber might feel this way?

When Amber's father lived in Paris, joint custody was not possible because of distance. Now that he lives close, he wants to spend more time with her. Both parents have reached an agreement to take turns being with her. Since this is a new arrangement, Amber is having difficulty understanding that she really does belong to both of them, but they no longer belong to each other. As they discuss and even argue about taking turns and making decisions about her, Amber sometimes feels like she is an object or possession that they are trying to control rather than a person with feelings to be considered.

Literary Analysis

Amber knows that fooling her father into letting her get her ears pierced is wrong. She also knows that her mother will be angry when she finds out. What are some reasons that Amber decides to get them pierced anyway?

Amber is feeling very confused about her parents. The new joint custody arrangement is creating disruptions and new patterns in her life that she is not used to yet. She is angry at her mother for acting mean when her father is with them. Amber loves both of her parents, and it is difficult for her to accept that they do not love each other anymore. By telling herself that she really is not lying, she rationalizes that fooling her father is okay; she is just not telling the whole truth. She also wants to do something just for herself. That thinking seems justifiable to her at first, but as the night progresses, she realizes that what she did was wrong.

Inferential Comprehension

Amber is upset with her father for breaking his promise that she could go with him to help pick out his apartment. What are some possible reasons why Dad broke his promise to Amber?

When Dad apologizes to Amber, he tells her that he was lonely and that Steve Marshall has become a good friend. It is likely that when Dad heard about the opportunity to rent half of a house, Dad completely forgot about his promise to Amber. He thinks renting the house is a good idea and that it will be a good place to create a home for Amber when she is with him. He does consider the size, location, and decor of her bedroom. He also believes she will like the family that lives upstairs and the yard with its swings and treehouse. He is probably so focused on trying to be a good father by second guessing Amber's wants and needs that he does not always consider Amber's point of view.

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Constructing Meaning

When Dad shows Amber the basement of his new house, he shows her a place where they can do jigsaw puzzles and recalls how they always used to do them together. Explain the meaning of the jigsaw puzzles to Amber and the importance of them in this scene.

In happier days, before Amber's parents divorced, Amber and Dad enjoyed doing the puzzles together. To Amber, the puzzles reflect a piece of her past that was happy, reassuring, and fun to remember. When Dad says he bought a new puzzle, Amber thinks about the "little kid" puzzles they used to do and hopes that he does not think she is still that little. When the puzzle turns out to be a 3-D clock puzzle, Amber is reassured that he knows she is growing up, yet they can still have the same happy, secure feelings they did when they worked puzzles in happier times.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Details Amber is making Scrabble jewelry for Christmas presents. She is using letters from old Scrabble games to spell out the names. The game of Scrabble uses the letters of one word to form another word, much like the construction of a crossword puzzle. Have the students work in groups of three or four to create simple crossword puzzles using words that reflect details of the story. For example, a puzzle could contain the words, "pierced, custody, apartment, will," etc. After the groups have developed the puzzles, make copies of each puzzle and staple them together to make books for each student to solve.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Max helps Amber get ready for Christmas by taking her shopping. While shopping, he teaches Amber about Hanukkah. At the end of the story Amber says that next year she will learn all about Kwanza. Have the students do research into the three holidays and write a report describing each of them. The report can be accompanied by pictures or drawings representing something about one or all of the holidays.

Responding to Literature When Amber's father comes to pick her up, she learns that if one parent kisses her, she cannot immediately kiss the other one because it may seem like they are kissing each other. This prompts her to think there should be a book for kids of divorced parents containing rules that the kids have to remember. Have the students create a rulebook for something that is important to them in their lives. For instance, they could develop a rulebook for music students with a list of things that they need to remember. Another example might be a rulebook for new pet owners. Encourage them to be creative in their lists and to include things beyond the basics.

Understanding Characterization Amber frequently refers to herself as, "I, Amber Brown." She says referring to herself that way makes her feel like she belongs to herself and is not just Mom's daughter or Mrs. Holt's student. She wants people to know that is who she is. Have the students write a short chapter that could be a part of the book introducing themselves to Amber. It should be written in first person and give the reader an understanding of the student's personality and an idea of one or two events or situations that are currently affecting the student's life.