

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

I Want Answers and a Parachute

by
P.J. Petersen

Book Information

P.J. Petersen, I Want Answers and a Parachute

Quiz Number: 9954

Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1993

ISBN 0-671-86577-3; LCCN

101 Pages

Book Level: 2.4

Interest Level: LG

Two brothers are anxious to make a good impression on their new stepfamily.

Topics: Adventure, Travel; Emotions, Fear; Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Divorce; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Sons

Main Characters

Ann Dad's new wife, who helps ease the boys' transition into their new family

Ben Dad's dog

Cathy Matt and Jason's stepsister, who eventually accepts her new brothers

Dad Matt and Jason's father, who tries too hard to please his sons, but then comes to an agreement with them

Jason Matt's younger brother, who constantly causes a commotion with his fears and anxieties

Matt Jason's older brother, who looks out for his younger brother on their trip to San Francisco

Mom Matt and Jason's mother, who stays behind in Tucson

Willie Jason's toy dog

Vocabulary

aquarium a building housing and displaying aquatic animals

parachute a device used to slow a person's descent through the air

planetarium a building housing a representation of the solar system

Synopsis

Matt and Jason live in Tucson with their mother after their parents' divorce. Their father lived in Tucson for

a while after the divorce, but now lives in San Francisco with his new wife, Ann, and stepdaughter, Cathy.

When Jason and Matt are invited to fly out to see their dad and meet his new family, they are excited about the trip. However, Jason is nervous about his taking his first plane ride, and Matt is worried that if they are not on their best behavior, their dad will not invite them back.

The trip has not even started when Jason sets off the metal detectors at the airport with his dog chain. (He does not own a dog, but is ever hopeful that he may be allowed to get one.) Once on the plane, Jason panics, and Matt has his hands full trying to deal with his frightened brother. After arriving in San Francisco, Matt is busy trying to keep the visit going smoothly, despite Jason's dislike of their sight-seeing tour, the Chinese restaurant, and their stepsister, Cathy.

After Jason runs off and hides under the car rather than go on a boat trip, Matt, Jason, and their dad all realize they have been trying so hard to please each other that they have not been honest with each other. The end of the visit goes much better than the beginning, and Jason and Matt leave to fly home to Tucson happy and eager to return.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How do you think Jason and Matt feel when they are visiting their father?

Nervous, anxious, happy, excited, afraid, confused, etc.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

I Want Answers and a Parachute

by
P.J. Petersen

Literary Analysis

Why does Matt make up the secret signal "jelly beans"?

He wants them to have a way to remind each other to be on their best behavior during the visit. He is very concerned about how he and Jason appear to their dad and his new family.

Inferential Comprehension

Why wasn't Jason punished for bringing Ben into the house?

He didn't know Ben would do something wrong, and everyone was trying to make the visit go smoothly.

Constructing Meaning

What did Jason and Matt's dad mean when he said, "Tell me what I want to hear"?

He wanted to hear the truth about things rather than be told what the boys thought was the "correct" answer.

Identifying Persuasive Language When Jason is unable to finish building his sand castle on the beach, he tries to persuade his dad to let him finish it then or return to finish it later. Have the students recall an ad for a product and identify the persuasive language used to try to inspire the consumer to buy the product.

Comparing and Contrasting At the beginning of their visit with Dad, Matt and Jason try hard to make the visit go smoothly, and in doing so they are not honest about their feelings. Have the students identify some of the activities the boys do with their father (driving around town, going to the zoo, eating at a Chinese restaurant, etc.) and have them identify what the boys do and say when they are trying to "tell them what they want to hear" and what they could say to tell their dad politely how they really feel.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot The story contains many conflicts. For instance, Jason wants to go see his father, but is very worried that something will happen to the plane; Jason wants to play with some of Cathy's toys, but Cathy does not want to share any of them; Matt is not always happy with the activities his father chooses, but thinks he has to tell Dad what he wants to hear. Have the students identify one of the conflicts in the book, write a sentence or two describing the conflict, and find pictures in magazines depicting the conflict.

Recognizing Details Because he is afraid to go on the boat, Jason hides under the car. Jason's dad says, "I knew he was a little scared. But I didn't think it was any big deal. Why didn't he say something?" Matt replied, "He did say something. He said a lot. But we didn't listen." Have the students make a list of what Jason says to try to communicate his fear.