

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Journey

by

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Book Information

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When Journey and Cat's mother goes off, leaving them with their grandparents, the two children feel as if their past has been erased until Grandfather finds a way to restore it to them.

Topics: English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 8, 90%; Family Life, Grandparents; Family Life, Mothers; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Bloom a stray cat adopted by Journey

Cat Journey's older sister, who, through industrious activity, works out her frustrations about Mama leaving

Cooper a kind-hearted boy from a neighboring farm who is best friends with Journey; he is infatuated with Cat

Emmett Cooper's baby brother

Grandfather (Marcus) a candid but loving man who gives Journey a sense of his past through the art of photography

Grandma (Lottie) a wise and gentle woman; she understands Cat's need to garden, Grandfather's need to take photographs, and Journey's need to have a cat

Journey an eleven-year-old boy and the principal character of the story; he tries to regain his past after his mother leaves, abandoning him and his sister to their grandparents

Mama (Liddie) Journey and Cat's mother, who has always had a restlessness about her; she leaves the children and her past behind

Papa Journey and Cat's father, who left the family shortly after Journey's birth

Vocabulary

compost a mixture of decaying matter usually used for fertilizing

fetching attractive and charming

groused complained

tripod an adjustable three-legged stand used to hold a camera in a particular position

wryly with twisted humor

Synopsis

Journey and Cat are devastated when their mother abandons them to their grandparents on the farm where they all lived. When Grandfather bluntly tells eleven-year-old Journey that Mama will not be back, Journey shifts his anger to his Grandfather. Each of the family members deals with the situation in his or her own way. Journey broods, Cat cleans and weeds, Grandma gardens and plays the flute, and Grandfather begins to photograph everything. Journey is at first annoyed by Grandfather's intrusion with the camera, but Grandma explains it is something he needs to do.

A letter comes from Mama containing only money; there are no words and no return address. Journey escapes to his room to brood, but Grandma comes in, bringing a photo album with her. She explains how the camera knows things about people that are revealed in the pictures. She points out the wanderlust in his mother's eyes even when she was young. Cooper, a neighbor boy, comes in with his baby brother, Emmett, to visit. With Cat, they look through the photo album, pointing out resemblances -- Cat to Mama and Grandma, Journey to Grandfather. Grandfather enters the room and plays with the baby, singing a rhyme Journey finds familiar. Journey cannot recall who sang the same rhyme to him, but he believes it was his father. He feels compelled, however, to take a picture of Grandfather and Emmett.

Grandfather's picture taking becomes an obsession,

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and Journey is beginning to appreciate the pictures. He is also starting to realize that, even though the pictures are not perfect, they are good enough, just like life. Journey asks Grandfather about Mama's old pictures, and Grandfather honestly tells him that she tore them up. Journey is again sad and broods in his room until Cat forces him to face the reality of who Mama is.

A cat comes to Journey's window one night, and though Journey knows Grandma's affection for birds, he and Grandfather adopt the cat, naming it Bloom. Bloom quickly becomes Grandma's favorite. Mama's torn up pictures are discovered by Bloom one day when she hides under Mama's bed to escape the camera flash. Cat declares the box of ripped photos to be murder of their family, and Journey vows to piece them together. Cooper comes by later and declares the task impossible. Journey is angry with Cooper but goes to his house to reconcile with him the next morning. Cooper bikes Journey back to Grandma and Grandfather's farm, and they learn that Bloom had her kittens in the box of torn up photos. Journey wants to capture the moment on film with the timer, and as he runs to get into the picture, his memory is jogged by a button he sees on Grandfather's shirt. He cannot quite make out what the memory is. That night Mama calls, and Journey tells her he cannot come to see her because he has kittens to tend.

Two months pass. Cat and Journey are picking berries when Cat explains that Grandfather's motivation for taking pictures is to give Journey his past back. However, Grandfather is beginning to act secretly, going to town, carrying packages, and sneaking out to the barn. Journey creeps out to the barn one night just before dawn and discovers Grandfather has built a darkroom. Grandfather has also found the negatives of all Mama's old photographs. Journey chooses some he would like developed. When he sees the developed pictures, he realizes he never knew his father and that the man who had sung the nursery rhyme to him was Grandfather. They walk hand in hand out of the barn into the breaking day.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Grandma show her wisdom?

She allows the members of the family to process Mama's leaving in their own way. She knows Grandfather has to take pictures, Cat has to garden, and Journey has to contemplate. She even allows herself to bend her own rules and becomes attached to a cat. By allowing this individual freedom, she enables them to heal and to realize that even though they hurt, they still have each other and are loved.

Literary Analysis

How is the story arranged like a photo album?

Even though the story is divided into chapters, the chapters have smaller snippets in them, just like various photos of the same subject or occasion are grouped together in a photo album. The story is arranged chronologically, but it is not a continuum of time. Instead, the story sometimes jumps a day, a week, or even months ahead. Similarly, people often take photographs on certain occasions, not necessarily marking every day, but capturing moments that are significant to their lives, such as holidays, reunions, birthdays, and school events.

Inferential Comprehension

Why is Journey a good name both for the boy and for the book's title?

Even though Journey may have thought his mother named him after her own restlessness, Journey does not wish to see new places as much as journey into his past. He goes on an inward journey, piecing memories together until he is able to form a picture of his family for himself. The book title reflects not only Journey's search, but also the journey of the whole family as they try to heal from Mama's leaving.

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Constructing Meaning

The characters in the story respond to adversity in different ways. When you face a problem in your life, how do you react? Do you think this is a healthy way to deal with problems?

Students' personalities differ and so do their ways of handling problems. Some may become withdrawn and pensive, trying to figure things out for themselves. Others may lose themselves in their work, trying to keep busy and not think about painful things. Still others may talk about their problems openly and seek advice and comfort from others. Some blame others and become angry and destructive towards people or property. Students may or may not feel they handle problems in a healthy way. Perhaps a discussion could take place indicating when a particular strategy might be unhealthy and when someone should seek help dealing with a problem.

Teachable Skills

Making Inferences Grandfather and Journey take pictures of ordinary events and moments in their day. The students may wish to assemble an album of candid photos they have taken themselves. Suggest they shoot a roll of film, showing their family or friends in ordinary situations. After the film is developed they can place the pictures on a sheet of paper, leaving room for a written analysis of the picture. In the analysis the students can explain what they were trying to capture and what message the photograph reveals about each of the people in the picture. Have the students assemble the pages into an album. If cost is a concern, perhaps the students can be asked to create and analyze an album of facial expressions found in magazines.

Recognizing Details When Bloom discovers the box of torn up photographs under Mama's bed, Journey is determined to tape all the pieces together. To give the students a feel of the formidable task before Journey, mix the pieces from three rather difficult puzzles together and

have the students try to put the individual puzzles together again. This may be an ongoing project left in the back of the classroom that students can go to when they have finished an assignment.

Understanding Characterization Both Grandfather and Grandma have a hobby they can pursue. Grandfather has his photography, and Grandma has her gardening and the flute. Encourage the students to develop a hobby for themselves, either by continuing with a pastime they currently pursue, or beginning a new hobby. They should find some time over the course of a couple of weeks to work on the hobby of their choosing. Encourage them to write a short paper about their hobby and the rewarding feelings they get from pursuing it. Consider having students give a presentation of their hobby to the rest of the class.

Responding to Literature Journey tries to recall happy moments from his past. Ask the students to reflect on their childhood and the fond memories they have of it. Then, using their creative skills, have them present a memory in a vivid way to the class. This may be by illustration, dramatic storytelling, short story, etc.