

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

One Bird

by
Kyoko Mori

Book Information

Kyoko Mori, One Bird
Quiz Number: 26635
Ballantine Books, Inc, 1995
ISBN 0-449-70453-X; LCCN
248 Pages
Book Level: 5.4
Interest Level: UG

After fifteen-year-old Megumi's parents break up, she feels no one cares until she's offered a job helping heal sick birds.

Topics: Emotions, Loneliness; Family Life, Divorce; Family Life, Growing Up; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+

Main Characters

Dr. Mizutani the veterinarian who takes an interest in Megumi and encourages her to confront her father about visiting her mother

Father the man who has been unfaithful to Megumi's mother and uninvolved in his daughter's life

Grandfather Kurihara Megumi's grandfather, with whom Megumi's mother goes to live in rural Japan

Grandmother Shimizu the woman who comes to take care of her son and Megumi

Keiko a neighbor girl and ex-friend of Megumi

Megumi the principal character in the story; a fifteen-year-old girl who struggles with her separation from her mother

Mother or Chie Megumi's mother, who goes to live with her father in the country because she finds living with her husband unbearable

The Katos old friends of Megumi and her mother; Pastor Kato is the religious leader of the church Megumi attends; Kiyoshi is Megumi's age and a long-time friend

Toru a childhood friend and Megumi's confidant

Vocabulary

omission something left out

ornithology a branch of zoology that deals with birds

samisen a three-stringed Japanese musical instrument resembling a banjo

superficial lacking depth of feeling and understanding; shallow

tatami straw matting used as a floor covering in Japanese homes

Synopsis

Megumi, an intelligent fifteen-year-old girl, is deeply hurt when her mother decides to leave her father and her to live with Megumi's grandfather in a rural area of Japan. Megumi understands that her father has made life unbearable for her mother. He has been unfaithful and unkind to her. She also understands that her mother has left her with her father not because she wants to, but because it is a disgrace to grow up fatherless and poor in the Japanese culture. What Megumi doesn't understand is her mother's effort to keep her departure plans a secret. Megumi sees her mother's secretiveness as a lie. She blames her mother for not being truthful about her husband's girlfriend, her own misery, and her unhappiness about leaving her daughter.

Despite her disappointment with her mother, Megumi misses her deeply and is miserable when she thinks of their long separation. Her father has forbidden her to have contact with her mother until she is twenty-one. Her home life becomes more unpleasant when Grandmother Shimizu comes to care for her. Although she realizes her grandmother loves her, Megumi struggles with the older woman's fastidiousness and critical attitude. She sees her grandmother as self-pitying and is frustrated by the woman's determination to cover up her son's affair with Tomiko Hayashi. Adding to her loneliness is the absence of her father in her life. He is rarely home and is not supportive or loving when he is.

When Megumi turns to some of her childhood friends for support, she experiences disappointment as well. A long-time friend, Kiyoshi, becomes zealous about his Christian beliefs. His rigorous philosophy offends Megumi. When she gradually

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admits her loss of faith to the Katos, Kiyoshi and Megumi's relationship ends.

Another long-time friend, Toru, does give solace to Megumi. He is a true friend and confidant. Megumi is deeply touched by Toru's caring nature and begins to feel more than friendship for him. She is secretly disappointed when he confides his love for Yoshimi, a girl he met in Tokyo.

One person who does show unwavering friendship and support is Dr. Mizutani. The veterinarian not only teaches the girl how to care for injured birds, she teaches her to stand up for herself and feel confident and pleased about her own individuality. It is Dr. Mizutani who eventually encourages Megumi to confront her father about her right to visit her mother. Megumi follows through and is rewarded when she is reunited with her mother.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Megumi struggles with the principles of Christianity. At one point in the book, she recalls the Bible story in which Jesus meets the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. What are her feelings about that story? Why does she feel the way she does?

Megumi feels angry about the story. She thinks Jesus was unkind when he didn't reveal himself to his friends. From her perspective, he spied on them. Megumi is feeling vulnerable about her situation, and she is sensitive to lies.

Literary Analysis

More than once Megumi is told that she thinks too much. What is your reaction to that statement?

Megumi is an intelligent, imaginative, and sensitive girl. It is part of her nature to be probing.

Inferential Comprehension

Dr. Mizutani teaches Megumi many things about birds. In one scene, the veterinarian explains that birds never do well alone. Later, Megumi compares a lone bird to her mother and her. Why does she do that?

She thinks of herself as a lone bird since her mother's departure. She wonders how she will survive. She also thinks of her mother as a helpless baby bird, not as the strong mother bird returning to the nest to feed her young.

Constructing Meaning

One night, as Megumi prepares to go to sleep, she turns out the light and notices the "afterimages of light" before her eyes. She remembers that as a child, she thought of those afterimages as "floating islands in the sea." However, that particular night, the afterimages make her think of "something broken--colored shards of glass or porcelain." Why has her perception changed?

Megumi has lost her childhood innocence. She is burdened by her troubles. Her life has been shattered by her mother's departure.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Draw a map of Japan. Label the cities and other geographical areas mentioned in the book.

Understanding Literary Features A girl searching for truth while struggling with her lonely existence is clearly a theme of the book. Megumi is lonely and vulnerable after her mother's departure. She is sensitive to the lies she witnesses around her. She is also critical of herself for telling lies. After Megumi is reunited with her mother and her life is happier, she realizes that there are "many kinds of lies"- "inexcusable" ones and "hopeful" ones. Have the students make a list of the lies Megumi reacts to throughout the book. Discuss these lies and determine which ones are "inexcusable," and which ones are "hopeful."

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Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors In Japan, the people follow laws and customs unique to their culture. For instance, the divorce laws described in the book are different from those in the United States. Have the students skim the book and find other cultural differences. Discuss these. Invite a guest informed on Japanese customs to speak to the class. Have a Japanese cultural day. Read Japanese poetry, play Japanese games, make Japanese food, etc.

Identifying Persuasive Language At the climax of the book, Megumi confronts her father and in a dramatic speech demands to visit her mother. Although her father never gives his consent, she does go to see her mother. She even plans to stay with her mother during summer vacations. Discuss why Megumi gets her way despite her father's dominance.

Responding to Literature When Megumi asks Dr. Mizutani if she believes in God, the veterinarian says she doesn't. She goes on to say that when she watches a bird fly, it is the closest she comes to believing. Birds are a symbol of beauty to Dr. Mizutani and the Japanese people. Provide the students with origami paper and bird patterns. Have them create a mobile with various colors and designs.