

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Our Sixth-Grade Sugar Babies by Eve Bunting

Book Information

Eve Bunting, Our Sixth-Grade Sugar Babies

Quiz Number: 6007

HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1990

ISBN 0-397-32451-0; LCCN

146 Pages

Book Level: 3.9

Interest Level: MG

Vicki and her best friend fear that their sixth-grade project, carrying around five-pound bags of sugar to learn about parental responsibility, will make them look ridiculous in the eyes of the seventh-grade boy they both love.

Topics: Community Life, School; Emotions, Embarrassment; Emotions, Love; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Count on Me: Responsibility; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3

Main Characters

Cynthia a seventh-grade girl

Ellie Victoria's friend

Harry Hogan the boy who sits behind Victoria in class

Mom Victoria's mother

Mr. Ambrose Victoria's neighbor, whose mind has become "a little bit strange"

Mrs. Oda Victoria's teacher

Ophelia Mr. Ambrose's daughter

Thunk a seventh-grade boy who is new to Victoria's neighborhood

Victoria the sixth-grade girl who narrates the story and is the main character

Vocabulary

agitated to feel anxious

eavesdropper someone who listens in on someone else's conversation

responsible being dependable

Synopsis

To teach responsibility, Mrs. Oda has instructed her sixth-grade class to treat five-pound bags of sugar like babies. Victoria hopes if she gets an A, her mother will think she is responsible enough to baby-sit for her half-sister for two weeks in Iowa.

Victoria is a friend of her neighbor, Mr. Ambrose, who has become "a little bit strange." His daughter Ophelia cares for him, and he stands in his front yard, waving at passersby. There is a new boy in the neighborhood whom Victoria and her friend, Ellie, nickname "Thunk"--Terrific Hunk. Victoria is telling Mr. Ambrose about the new boy's nickname when she realizes that Thunk's little brother is listening.

Ellie and Victoria see Thunk talking to an attractive seventh-grade girl, Cynthia. They think of an excuse for Victoria to go and speak with them. While she is there, Thunk's little brother arrives, and the secret of the girls' nickname is revealed.

Thunk asks Victoria to show him how to get to the library. She leaves her sugar baby, Babe, behind a tree. She is thrilled to be with Thunk until she realizes he is meeting Cynthia. When she returns for Babe, the sugar baby is gone. She yells at Mr. Ambrose for not having taken care of it. She sneaks to the store, buys another bag of sugar and tries to replicate the first sugar baby.

Ophelia tells Victoria and Mom that her father has disappeared. After a long delay, Victoria confesses that she yelled at Mr. Ambrose and tells about the new sugar baby. Using Victoria's information, they find Mr. Ambrose. Later, Mom finds the original sugar baby. Mom does not allow Victoria to go to Iowa to baby-sit, but decides to invite Victoria's half-sister to visit them. The next day in school, Victoria confesses to her classmates that she almost cheated. Her teacher says admitting mistakes is a part of responsibility.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Our Sixth-Grade Sugar Babies by Eve Bunting

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why did Victoria say she "almost stopped breathing" when the storekeeper, Mr. Gertmenian, called her "Tricky Vicki"?

She felt guilty about her plan to buy another bag of sugar and make a second sugar baby. She thought that Mr. Gertmenian might suspect she was about to do something wrong.

Literary Analysis

What is the main conflict, or struggle, in *Our Sixth-Grade Sugar Babies*?

Victoria struggles within herself whether to hide her mistakes or admit them. Her mistakes included leaving her sugar baby, thinking about cheating by making a second one and yelling at Mr. Ambrose.

Inferential Comprehension

For most of the story, Victoria tries to convince Mom that she should be allowed to baby-sit for Keiko in Iowa. After Victoria makes a second sugar baby, Mom comes to her room and says she will probably not be allowed to go. Victoria says "I understand." Why did Victoria not try again to persuade Mom to let her go?

She realized Mom was right in her opinion that she was not responsible enough to care for a real child because she had not taken good care of Babe.

Constructing Meaning

What consequences did Victoria receive for her mistakes? Do you think those consequences were appropriate?

She felt terribly guilty for leaving Babe, yelling at Mr. Ambrose and making the second sugar baby. She made up her own consequences by making herself confess her mistakes to Mom and Ophelia and to her entire class. Partly as a result of her mistakes, she was not allowed to go to Iowa. These consequences seem appropriate because it is clear that Victoria has learned the importance of honesty and responsibility and would probably apply what she has learned in a different situation.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features The theme of this book is that admitting your mistakes is part of learning responsibility. Ask the students, in a writing assignment, to reflect on situations in which they have been given responsibility. Have they ever failed to live up to it? If so, what did they do? Did they try to hide their mistake, as Victoria did with a new sugar baby? How did they feel about themselves? Did they feel guilty as Victoria did? Did they get caught? If not, did they eventually admit the mistake?

Understanding the Author's Craft Victoria's engaging point of view is one of the strengths of the book. How would the story be different if it were told from another point of view? Consider the scene in which Victoria crosses the street to meet Thunk on the pretext of getting Cynthia to sign the program for the play. She is at first awkward, and then humiliated, when Thunk's little brother arrives and she accidentally calls Sam, "Thunk." Ask the students to rewrite this scene from Thunk's point of view. What does Thunk see and think? Before writing, reread pages 43-51 and consider how much of what is happening is visible to Thunk, versus how much is in Victoria's mind.

Making Inferences Even before Victoria is irresponsible with her sugar baby, Mom tells

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Our Sixth-Grade Sugar Babies by Eve Bunting

Victoria that she will probably not allow her to go to Iowa for two weeks to care for her half-sister, Keiko. Ask the students to discuss whether they think a sixth-grader is mature enough to care for a young child in the circumstances Victoria would be in. What emergencies might arise that Victoria may not be equipped to handle? Could the situation be changed so that it would be safe for Keiko and Victoria? Would most parents come to the same conclusion as Mom? Might some sixth-graders be mature enough to care for Keiko in Iowa?

Responding to Literature As a school project, Victoria and her classmates must carry five-pound bags of sugar with them constantly for a week. Victoria seems not to mind carrying a dressed-up bag of sugar, except when she sees Thunk. Then, she stashes it behind a tree to avoid being embarrassed. Ask the students to discuss how they would feel if, as sixth-graders, they were required to pretend a bag of sugar was a baby and carry it with them. Would they feel differently if everyone in the class had the same requirement? Why? What if only one of them had to do it? If the students seem receptive, have them take care of their own sugar babies for a day, or a week!