

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Pleasing the Ghost

by
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Book Information

Sharon Creech, Pleasing the Ghost
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Nine-year-old Dennis, whose uncle and father died within a year of one another, is visited by the ghost of his uncle, and together they settle some unfinished business.

Topics: Family Life, Aunts; Family Life, Death; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Uncles; Horror/Thriller, Ghosts/Spirits; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Choose a Challenge: Decisions; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family)

Main Characters

Aunt Julia Uncle Arvie's wife; she misses her husband, but is unable to see his ghost

Billy Baker a boy in Dennis's class who has also lost his father; he is mean to Dennis and doesn't believe he has seen a ghost

Bo Dennis's dog; he can also see the ghosts

Colin a male friend of Aunt Julia's; Uncle Arvie is jealous of him and tries to get rid of him

Dennis a nine-year-old boy who usually leads an ordinary life, except when the ghosts visit him; his father died the year before this story takes place

Dennis's mother doesn't believe Dennis when he says he sees ghosts; she has lost her husband and misses him

Uncle Arvie Dennis's uncle, who died the year before his ghost appears to Dennis; he has three favors he wants Dennis to do for him

Vocabulary

barreling moving quickly toward

menacing threatening

quivery shaky

reeling whirling around and around

trousers pants

Synopsis

Dennis is an ordinary nine-year-old boy, except that he is visited by ghosts. In the past his friends and teachers laughed at him when he tried to tell them about the ghosts. His mother doesn't believe him either. One boy, Billy Baker, even punched him in the chest and called him a liar.

One night Dennis is visited by the ghost of his Uncle Arvie. Only Dennis and his dog, Bo, can see Uncle Arvie. Uncle Arvie is upset to learn that his brother, Dennis's father, has also died. He is happy when he sees a picture of his wife, Dennis's Aunt Julia. Uncle Arvie wants Dennis to do "three pleases," or favors, for him. It is hard for Dennis to understand Uncle Arvie because his uncle has been speaking in his own language ever since he had a stroke. Dennis has to decipher everything Uncle Arvie says to him.

The next morning Dennis figures out that Uncle Arvie wants him to show Aunt Julia a certain book. Dennis and Uncle Arvie go to Aunt Julia's house to find the book. When they arrive at Aunt Julia's house, they find that she already has company. It is Colin, a male friend of Aunt Julia's. It is clear that Uncle Arvie doesn't like Colin. Uncle Arvie breaks a vase of flowers that Colin has brought for Aunt Julia. While Aunt Julia cleans up the mess, Dennis immediately begins searching for the book Uncle Arvie wants him to show her. Colin finds the book first and pulls an envelope out of it. He puts the envelope in his pocket. Uncle Arvie is irritated and pinches Colin. Dennis retrieves the envelope from Colin's pocket and gives it to Aunt Julia. In the meantime, Colin leaves because he thinks he is being stung by wasps. Inside the envelope is a love poem Uncle Arvie had written for Aunt Julia before he died.

On the way home, Dennis encounters Billy Baker, the boy from school who is not very nice to Dennis.

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Dennis realizes that Billy can see Uncle Arvie, but Billy leaves before Dennis can talk to him about it. At home, Dennis finds out what Uncle Arvie wants him to do next. Uncle Arvie had been painting a picture before he died, and he wants Dennis to finish it for him.

The next day, Uncle Arvie and Dennis return to Aunt Julia's house and find the painting. It is a painting of the place Julia and Arvie went on their honeymoon. With Uncle Arvie's help, Dennis finishes the painting. Once again, Colin comes to the house to see Aunt Julia, and Uncle Arvie's antics cause him to leave. On the way home, Dennis again sees Billy. Billy asks him about "the geezer," and Dennis tells him that "the geezer" is actually a ghost. Dennis plans to prove that Uncle Arvie is a ghost by having him fly for Billy. Uncle Arvie is asleep and won't wake up. Billy threatens to throw a rock through Dennis's window if the "geezer ghost" doesn't fly the next day. The next day, Billy does throw a rock through the window after Uncle Arvie fails to fly as promised.

On the following day, Uncle Arvie and Dennis go back to Aunt Julia's to give her the painting. She is touched and happy to receive it. When Uncle Arvie and Dennis return home, they discover that Billy has thrown a rock through another window. Uncle Arvie reveals his third "please" to Dennis. He wants Dennis to dig in Aunt Julia's garden for something.

The next day in school, Dennis learns that Billy's father is also dead. Billy threatens to throw more rocks if the "geezer" doesn't fly. After school, Dennis and Uncle Arvie go to Aunt Julia's. She is not home at the time. Uncle Arvie directs Dennis to dig up one of Aunt Julia's rosebushes. When Aunt Julia comes home and sees what Dennis is doing, he tells her that he had a dream in which Uncle Arvie told him to dig there. They find a box in the hole, and inside the box are some old letters and a lot of money. Aunt Julia is very happy, and Dennis leaves her reading the letters.

When Dennis is on his way home, Billy again appears and wants to see the ghost fly. This time, Uncle Arvie does fly, and Dennis sees Billy grin for

the first time. Billy finally believes that Uncle Arvie is a ghost. Dennis is a little sad because Uncle Arvie has flown away for good. Later, Aunt Julia offers Dennis a reward for finding the buried money. Dennis decides he wants Uncle Arvie's old bike. In bed that night, Dennis decides that he and Billy could see ghosts because they needed a ghost. Dennis is hopeful that he will someday see his father again.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What were some things that Dennis learned about ghosts from watching and talking to Uncle Arvie?

Ghosts spend most of the time flying and sleeping. They have very little control over where they fly. They just aim and go where the wind takes them. They are invisible to adults and to many children. They still have feelings for their loved ones. They don't eat. They are unable to lift heavy objects. They are unable to paint, write or dig.

Literary Analysis

The author takes a serious subject, dealing with the death of loved ones, and makes it somewhat funny. What are some of the ways the author does this?

The way Dennis explains his encounters with the ghosts is humorous. The ghost of Uncle Arvie is a funny character. He wears a red cowboy hat and green boots. He speaks his own unique and funny language. The names Uncle Arvie uses for people are very funny. The things Uncle Arvie does to get rid of Colin are humorous. He pinches him, crushes his chocolates, and breaks a vase of flowers.

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Inferential Comprehension

How did Dennis's feelings for Billy change from the beginning of the story to the end? Why do you think his feelings changed?

At the beginning of the story, Dennis didn't like Billy very much because Billy was mean to him. He didn't think they had anything in common. At the end, Dennis realized that he and Billy both needed a ghost. Although they have not become best friends, Dennis is hopeful that both he and Billy will see their fathers. Dennis's feelings may have changed because he found out that he and Billy had something in common. Both had lost their fathers and both could see the ghost. Dennis noticed a change in Billy when Billy realized Uncle Arvie was really a ghost. This, too, could have caused Dennis to look at Billy in a different way.

Constructing Meaning

If you were Dennis, would you have chosen Uncle Arvie's old bike as a reward? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Uncle Arvie's bike has neat compartments and would be a reminder of him. Also, Aunt Julia said she would have it fixed up. A new bike, however, would look better and be more reliable.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Dialogue Throughout the book, Uncle Arvie speaks in his own unique language. Dennis is able to decode most of what Uncle Arvie is saying. Have the students select one conversation between Uncle Arvie and Dennis. Have them list the unusual words and phrases Uncle Arvie uses and explain how Dennis was able to interpret them.

Understanding the Author's Craft This story is told from the point of view of nine-year-old Dennis, who can see the ghost. Have students select one of the scenes at Aunt Julia's house and rewrite it from the point of view of another character, such as Aunt Julia or Colin.

Extending Meaning Obtain several factual books

on death and grief that are at the children's reading level. Have the children read one of the books and write a factual report on the ways people deal with grief, or have a class discussion on the ways people deal with dying and grief. The class could also discuss the ways Billy and Dennis dealt with the loss of their fathers.

Responding to Literature Have the students pretend that they can see ghosts. Have them write a story about their adventure with a ghost of their choice. Tell them to think about who their ghost will be and what they will do with the ghost. Their stories can be humorous or serious.