

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Private Notebook of Katie Roberts, Age 11 by Amy Hest

Book Information

Amy Hest, The Private Notebook of Katie Roberts, Age 11

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75 Pages
Book Level: 3.5
Interest Level: MG

In a series of journal entries and letters to a pen pal, Katie relates her feelings about her father's death in World War II, her mother's remarriage, and the family's move from New York City to Texas.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; State Award

Topics: Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Family Life, Stepfamilies; People, Jewish; U.S. States/Regions, Texas

Main Characters

Katie Roberts a young Jewish girl who moves with her mother from New York to Texas after her father is killed in World War II

Lucie Katie's new best friend in Texas

Matthew a boy in Katie's class who helps tutor her in math

Mrs. Leitstein an old neighbor lady from New York who becomes Katie's pen pal

Mrs. Roberts/Gold Katie's mother, who remarries after Katie's father dies

Sam Gold the man whom Katie's mother marries

Vocabulary

bloomers a woman's garment of short loose trousers gathered at the knee

seder a Jewish meal celebrating the Passover

synagogue the house of worship of a Jewish congregation

Synopsis

After Katie Roberts's father is killed in World War II, her mother meets another man, Sam Gold, and

moves Katie from New York City to Texas, where Sam lives. Katie's mother marries Sam and soon after becomes pregnant. Katie is unhappy with the move and feels her mother doesn't love her as much anymore. Katie is unfamiliar with life outside the city and has a difficult time adjusting to her new life and surroundings. She begins writing to Mrs. Leitstein, an old neighbor from New York. Mrs. Leitstein becomes her pen pal and attempts to help Katie understand and learn to accept her life.

Katie does make friends with Lucie, whom she discovers is also good at art. Lucie and Katie have the normal childhood arguments, but continue to be friends. Since Katie is having trouble with math, her teacher assigns Matthew, a classmate, to tutor her. Although she generally doesn't like boys, Katie learns to like Matthew. Matthew shares his secret desire to go to New York to see the Yankees play and meet Joe DiMaggio. Katie becomes Matthew's lawnmowing assistant and draws him maps of New York to help him with his plans.

When Katie becomes convinced her mother loves Sam and the baby more than her, she decides to return to New York with Matthew. The two board a train on the appointed day and begin their trip. Tipped off by Mrs. Leitstein, Katie's mother and Sam end the trip and pick them up at a railroad station. Katie's mother then goes into labor and delivers twin boys. Because of her love for the babies and her desire to be a family, Katie decides to allow Sam to adopt her, as long as she can keep her name--Katie Roberts.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How did Katie use her knowledge of New York to help Matthew?

She drew him maps of the city and told him how to use the subway.

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Literary Analysis

In what war did Katie's father die? How can you tell?

You can tell it was World War II. The clue is that her letters to Mrs. Leitstein are dated in the 1940s.

Inferential Comprehension

How is Katie's life in New York different from her life in Texas?

In New York she knew all her classmates, used the subway to get around town, knew many other Jewish people, and lived alone with her mother. In Texas she lives in the country, must ride in a car to get to town, knows very few other Jewish students in her school, and must share her mother with Sam.

Constructing Meaning

Katie often had conflicting feelings about the events in her life. Have the students list some of the events she felt confused about and why she felt that way. Have the students share if they have ever felt the same way about an event in their own lives.

Katie didn't know whether to be happy or mad when her mother got married, when she heard her mother was pregnant, and when she was picked up at the train station (to name a few). Katie usually didn't know whether to hug her mother or be mad at her.

Teachable Skills

Identifying Reasons In order to help herself decide whether or not to be adopted by Sam, Katie made two lists that covered the pros and cons of the issue. This technique can be useful in making many decisions. Have the students think of some decision they either have to make or made recently and make list for each side of the decision. Discuss whether this helped or would have helped them make a better decision.

Recognizing Feelings When Katie moved to Texas, she had a great fear of going to school the first day. She worried about how she would look and if she would make friends. Have the students write about how it would feel to be Katie and what

they could do to help new students adjust in their classroom or school.

Responding to Literature When Katie moved, her old neighbor, Mrs. Leitstein, became her pen pal. Through her letters we can see how she tried to help Katie adjust to and understand her new life. Pen pals are good for more reasons than that. Discuss with the students the benefits of having pen pals. Set up a pen pal program with another class of students, some senior citizens, public officials, etc.

Responding to Literature Katie often felt left out after her mother married Sam. She had been used to having her mother to herself, but now she had to share her. This was a tough adjustment for her. Have students write about a time when they felt left out.