

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Roller Skates

by
Ruth Sawyer

Book Information

Ruth Sawyer, Roller Skates
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Ten-year-old Lucinda makes friends of all social classes in New York City while her wealthy parents spend the year in Europe.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Community Life, Neighborhood;
Interpersonal Relationships, Neighbors;
Sports/Recreation, Skating

Main Characters

Aleda Solomon a girl living at the Gedney House who shares Lucinda's interest in theater
Aunt Ellen Douglas McCord Lucinda's godmother, who takes Lucinda's exuberance in stride
Aunt Emily Mrs. Wyman's sister, who believes Lucinda belongs under her watchful eye
Caroline Browdowski (Trinket) a four-year-old girl whom Lucinda adores and "borrows" to play with
Doctor Hitchcock Lucinda's benevolent family doctor, who agrees to care for Trinket
Dr. Collyer the minister at Lucinda's church, who christened her when she was a baby
Frances, Virginia, Sybil, and Agatha Aunt Emily's daughters; Lucinda's lady-like cousins
Hugh Marshall (Mr. Night Owl) a newspaper reporter who works in the evening and befriends Lucinda
Jerry Hanlon the police officer who stops the bullies from stealing from Tony's fruit stand
Louis Sherry a candy store owner
Lucinda Wyman (Snoodie) the principal character of the story; a vivacious ten-year-old girl who enjoys newfound freedom while her parents are away for the year

Miss Lucy Wimple (Miss Lucy, honey) the woman who runs the boarding house where Lucinda is staying

Miss Nettie Miss Peters's sister; a seamstress whom Lucinda adores

Miss Peters a schoolteacher who agrees to board and supervise Lucinda while her parents travel

Mr. and Mrs. Gilligan a hansom cab driver and his wife who enjoy Lucinda's company

Mr. and Mrs. Wyman Lucinda's parents, who travel to Italy for a year so that Mrs. Wyman's health can improve

Mr. Spindler the Gedney House manager

Mrs. Caldwell a resident of Gedney House who owns a dog named Pygmalion

Mrs. Elise Grose (Princess Zayda) an Asian woman whom Lucinda befriends and tutors in English

Patrolman M'Gonegal a policeman who becomes Lucinda's friend

Pygmalion Mrs. Caldwell's dog that Lucinda walks

Rags-an'-Bottles a kindly rubbish collector

Serge Browdowski Trinket's father; a poor man with great potential as a concert violinist

Tony Coppino Lucinda's friend who helps his father at the fruit stand

Uncle Earle Aunt Emily's husband, who introduces Lucinda to the wonders of Shakespeare

Vittore Coppino the owner of a small fruit stand

Vocabulary

beat the area regularly covered by a police officer or reporter

heinous terribly wicked

prigs smug people who act extremely proper

rapture an extremely happy or overjoyed feeling

tripe the lining of a cow or sheep's stomach, used for food

Twelfth Night the eve of the Epiphany, when the visitation of the three wise men to the infant Jesus is celebrated

Synopsis

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The story begins in New York City in the 1890s as ten-year-old Lucinda Wyman is about to be sent to live with Miss Peters and Miss Nettie. Lucinda's parents are going to spend a year in Italy to improve Mrs. Wyman's health. Aunt Emily, Mrs. Wyman's older sister, tries to spoil the plan by claiming that Miss Peters is unfit to care for a girl of Lucinda's high social rank. Furious with Aunt Emily's interference, Mr. Wyman insists that the original arrangement be kept and sends Lucinda to Miss Peters and Miss Nettie's apartment. Lucinda is pleased with her temporary home and begins recording her thoughts in a diary.

Miss Peters, a teacher at the private school Lucinda will attend for the year, admires Lucinda's craving for freedom from her family's strict social codes. She allows Lucinda to be a tomboy and to explore the city on her roller skates. Wherever Lucinda travels, she talks with people she has never been allowed to speak to before. She makes friends with a cab driver, Mr. Gilligan, and with Patrolman M'Gonegal. She visits with the boarders in her boarding house and the adjacent one, both run by Miss Lucy Wimple. At the dinner table Lucinda meets a reporter she nicknames Mr. Night Owl; she also befriends Mr. and Mrs. Browdowski and their four-year-old daughter, Trinket.

Skating one day after school, she rescues a boy whose fruit stand has been toppled by bullies. She learns that the boy's name is Tony Coppino and that the bullies have been repeatedly raiding the fruit stand to steal as much as they can. She enlists the help of Patrolman M'Gonegal to catch the thieves in the act. The Coppino family is grateful for her help, and Tony becomes a close friend of Lucinda.

Lucinda dreads her required Saturday afternoon visits to Aunt Emily's home, where she must act like a docile lady and sew beside her four cousins. On her third visit, she loses her composure and vents her frustration in a fit of rage. Her aunt is furious and demands that she leave without dinner. Her Uncle Earle defends Lucinda, however, by reminding his wife that children have individual temperaments and should not be forced to fit a mold. Uncle Earle takes

Lucinda to his library and reads Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* to her. She delights in the musical sound of the words and plans to give her own performance of the play using her toy theater.

Lucinda takes Trinket, the little girl from upstairs, with her to the toy store to buy supplies for the play and, while she is there, purchases a small doll for Trinket. Trinket is thrilled with the gift, but it is not until several days later that Lucinda discovers how poor the Browdowski family really is. Lucinda begins inviting Trinket to dinner regularly so she knows that Trinket is getting enough to eat.

One Saturday, Tony and Lucinda plan a picnic in Central Park. There they meet a friendly but very dirty trash collector who calls himself Rags-an'-Bottles. Tony and Lucinda share their lunch with the hungry man, and in return for their kindness, the man gives Lucinda a brooch that he had found.

Lucinda receives invitations for Thanksgiving dinner from many friends, so she schedules her meals with them at different times. She even arranges to have the poverty-stricken Browdowkis invited to dinner in her place for one of the meals.

The next day she visits Gedney House, the hotel where she had lived with her parents, and sees the Spindlers, who are the hotel managers. She also meets some new tenants: Aleda, a girl Lucinda's age who loves the theater, and a mysterious Asian woman whom Lucinda names Princess Zayda. Lucinda's visit with the princess is cut short when Zayda's malicious-looking husband storms into the room. Lucinda visits the princess often, though she never mentions this to Miss Peters, knowing that Miss Peters would not allow her to return.

As Christmas approaches, Lucinda decides she would like to give Trinket her first Christmas tree. She invites all of her friends to a party on Christmas morning. She realizes that she will need money to buy a present for each guest. She gets jobs walking a dog and teaching English to Princess Zayda. The Christmas party is delightful, and the dog's owner

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sends the red sled that Lucinda had wanted to buy for Trinket.

Opening night for *The Tempest* draws near. Tony uses his artistic talent to paint the scenery, while Lucinda makes the costumes for the doll characters in the play. They give a very successful first performance at Miss Peters's apartment and a second one at Gedney House the next night.

The winter grows monotonous, and Lucinda begins to feel bored and mischievous. When she causes chaos in her school by rearranging student schedules, Miss Brackett, the director of the school, sends her home. On the way, Lucinda stops to visit Princess Zayda at Gedney House. She finds Zayda murdered in her bed. When she tells Mr. Spindler what she saw, he tells her never to speak of what she witnessed. Mr. Spindler then sends her to spend the rest of the day with Mr. Gilligan, the cab driver, and his wife.

Spring finally arrives, and Lucinda is excited to be able to go roller skating again. She is equally excited when Mr. Night Owl invites her to a circus parade. Always thoughtful, she insists on taking Trinket with them. When Mr. Night Owl returns several days later with tickets to the circus, Trinket cannot go because she is sick. Tony goes with them instead, and they have a grand time. As the week progresses, Trinket's condition worsens.

The next time Lucinda visits her Uncle Earle, he reads the Shakespearean tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* to her. While she is there, she persuades two of her cousins to pawn some books to get money to attend a theater performance that is considered vulgar by the standards of high society.

Lucinda continues to worry about Trinket's health and wonders why the Browdowskis do not get a doctor for her. Then she realizes that a doctor's services costs money. Lucinda persuades her family physician to examine Trinket. Despite his best efforts, Trinket dies. The Browdowskis are unable to pay for the funeral either, so Lucinda skates all the way to Uncle Earle's office to ask him for help. He

pays for the funeral, and the other residents of Miss Lucy's boarding house take care of Mr. and Mrs. Browdowski and Lucinda, who are devastated by Trinket's death.

The Wymans are expected to return from Italy soon, and Lucinda realizes her days of unbridled freedom are coming to an end. She wishes she could remain ten years old forever.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why is Tony so grumpy with Lucinda the day before her parents return?

Even though Lucinda invites Tony to visit her and says she will visit him, Tony knows their time together will not be the same. Lucinda's French governess, who will disapprove of their friendship, will now accompany Lucinda. He knows Lucinda will not have the freedom she has enjoyed the past year. Tony probably does not want to cry or tell Lucinda how much he will miss her, so he chooses to be abrupt with Lucinda instead.

Literary Analysis

In what way does Lucinda get a "vaccination" against snobbishness during her tenth year, as Uncle Earle claims?

Lucinda is born into a family of high social rank. She is allowed to associate only with people of similar means and status. Instead, Lucinda chooses to associate with immigrants and vagrants. She feels at home with them, for they are genuine, generous, and interesting, not dull and rigid like Aunt Emily. Uncle Earle feels that Lucinda's exposure to people of lesser means is beneficial because it will prevent her from becoming snobbish like some wealthy people. This exposure is much like a vaccination that is given to prevent someone from being infected by a disease.

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Inferential Comprehension

Uncle Earle is very different from Aunt Emily. What qualities did Uncle Earle likely see in Aunt Emily to make him want to marry her?

Possibly, Uncle Earle admired Aunt Emily's strength of character. Or he may have chosen or been pressured into the marriage simply because of financial or social benefits. In any case, he seems able to cope with her faults and values her for her strengths.

Constructing Meaning

Lucinda has the opportunity to live away from her parents for a school year. If you had the same opportunity, with whom would you choose to live and why?

The students' answers will vary. Some may choose a relative they feel especially close to, while others may select a friend whom they think has a better life than they. Still others may choose to "custom design" a person or family they think would be the perfect chaperones for a year.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Aunt Ellen, Lucinda's godmother, mentions Andrew Carnegie at Thanksgiving dinner as someone with whom she speaks and socializes. To give the students an idea of the social status of Lucinda's family, have the students research the life of Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie's rise as an industrialist will help the students gain a sense of the times in the 1890s and learn about the condition of America's working class at that time. The students can write a paper about their research.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning

Personification is the attribution of human qualities to non-human subjects for the purpose of forming comparisons. Ruth Sawyer uses many examples of personification in this book. Ask students to find three examples of personification and to explain how personification helps the

reader better understand the non-human subjects.

Extending Meaning In this story, Lucinda meets and befriends many people she ordinarily would have had to ignore. Have the class choose an outing that will allow students to get to know people with whom they usually do not associate. Perhaps the class can attend a cultural festival, work at a soup kitchen, visit a farm if students live in the city, or visit a large city if students have a rural background. Have students write a journal about their experiences as Lucinda did.

Understanding Dialogue Although most students study Shakespeare after they enter high school, Lucinda loves Shakespeare's words when she is ten years old. Students sometimes have difficulty reading the plays themselves, but when the plays are performed, students often find the language a little easier to understand. Show a video of one of Shakespeare's plays, providing frequent breaks to clarify any questions about dialogue. At the end, have the students learn, rehearse, and act out a scene or two of the play. They may wish to invite their parents or other classes to view the performance.