

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Stealing Home

by

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Book Information

Mary Stolz, Stealing Home

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Book Level: 4.1

Interest Level: MG

Though they still listen to baseball and go fishing, Thomas and his grandfather find life in their small house in Florida changes when Great-Aunt Linzy comes to stay.

Topics: Family Life, Aunts; Family Life, Grandparents; Family Life, Growing Old; People, African American; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6; Sports/Recreation, Baseball; Sports/Recreation, Fishing; U.S. States/Regions, Florida

Main Characters

Donny Price a friend of Thomas

Grandfather an old African-American man who lives with his grandson, Thomas

Ivan the Terrible an ill-tempered Muscovy duck that thinks Ringo is his mother

Linzy the sister of Grandfather's late wife, who has not seen Grandfather for forty years

Mr. McCallam a friend and fishing buddy of Grandfather, who occasionally visits Grandfather and Thomas

Mrs. Price a friend of Linzy

Ringo Thomas's cat

Thomas a young African-American boy who has lived with Grandfather since his parents were killed in a car accident when he was one

Vocabulary

imprinting the instinctive process in which a baby bird identifies and copies its parent

shortstop a baseball or softball player whose position is between second and third base.

vegetarian a person who eats only plants and their products and no meat, fish or poultry.

Synopsis

Thomas and Grandfather live in a small house near the Gulf of Mexico with their cat Ringo and an ornery duck, Ivan the Terrible. Ivan had imprinted on Ringo and followed him home the spring before the story takes place. Thomas and Grandfather keep Ivan because he can't fly and has nowhere else to go.

Thomas has been living with Grandfather since his parents were killed in a car accident when he was one. He and Grandfather are comfortable with their cozy routine. They enjoy baseball, fishing, playing games and an occasional visit from Mr. McCallam, a friend of Grandfather.

Their routine is interrupted when Linzy, the sister of Grandfather's late wife, leaves her job and home in Chicago to live with them. Grandfather and Linzy have not seen each other in over forty years. Like Ivan, Linzy is an uninvited and unwanted guest. Grandfather and Thomas try to be gracious and understanding, but Linzy wants things done differently. She takes over Thomas's room, empties his closet and drawers and packs up his and grandfather's things. She befriends Ivan. She cleans the entire house, and worst of all, Ringo becomes enamored with her.

Though polite, kind and accommodating to each other, the household feels the tension as Thomas, Grandfather and Linzy adapt to changes in their lives. This tension comes to a head when Grandfather and Linzy have an argument. Linzy disapproves of fishing and feels unwanted when Grandfather does not say she is welcome in his home.

After a while, things seem easier. Thomas begins to enjoy Linzy's company. He even skips listening to a baseball game to help Linzy prepare materials for painting the house.

Mr. McCallam arrives for a fishing trip. This will be his last visit for a long time because his nephew

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cannot watch the motel anymore. He is impressed by Linzy's changes to the house. Despite the fact that Mr. McCallam and Linzy have a lot in common, Grandfather and Thomas are surprised when Linzy accepts a job working for him. Linzy asks to take Ivan with her.

Though they look forward to doing things their way again, Grandfather and Thomas realize they will miss Linzy and want her to return for short visits. The story ends with a discussion about how change is a part of both life and baseball, and a realization that throughout these changes, some things do stay the same.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Thomas said that he had imprinted on Grandfather. Give some examples of how Thomas did this.

Thomas and Grandfather share the same hobbies and interests. They both prefer a pace of life that is slower than Linzy's. They are calm, honest and tend to dislike change.

Literary Analysis

In the beginning of the book, the author describes Ivan and how he came to live with Grandfather and Thomas. After that, little is said about Ivan. Why do you think the author included Ivan in this story?

The author sets the tone of the story with Ivan since he, like Linzy, is an uninvited and unwanted guest. We learn about Grandfather's and Thomas's character when they allow Ivan to stay because he has nowhere else to go. It might also be noted that Linzy explains to Mr. McCallam that Ivan was a "misunderstood duck who only needed affection and understanding to become a first-rate pet." Likewise, because of their kindness and patience, Grandfather and Thomas grow to like Linzy.

Inferential Comprehension

Grandfather, Thomas and Linzy all had to make changes and accept changes in their lives to live together peacefully. What were some of these changes? How have you had to change or be patient to get along with family members or friends?

Correct answers may include any of the following: Grandfather realizes cleaning is important to Linzy and accepts the changes she makes to the house; He gives up his routine and shares his home with little complaint; Thomas must share Grandfather and Ringo and give up his room; Linzy tolerates their love of baseball, eating meat and fish, and learns not to put their games away.

Constructing Meaning

When Bobby Bonilla signed Thomas's baseball, Thomas described it as an "Everest of joy." What did he mean? Why did he use the word "Everest"?

Thomas used this phrase to show that he felt extremely happy. He compared his level of happiness to a very high mountain peak.

Constructing Meaning

Why did the author title the book, *Stealing Home*? Do you think someone stole home?

Stealing home is a baseball term. Grandfather and Thomas worried that Linzy would disrupt their lifestyle and take over their home. It can be argued that she did not "steal home" because although they were glad she was leaving, she brought some good changes to their lives. Others may point out the inconveniences and conclude that she did "steal home."

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story takes place in Florida near the Gulf of Mexico. Characteristics of Florida that were mentioned by the author include the climate, the fishing industry, spring training and the way the skies reminded Grandfather of his trip to Benin, Nigeria. Divide the class into groups. Ask each group to briefly research either

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Florida, Nigeria or Chicago. Compare the physical geography, industry, lifestyles of the people, recreation and climate of each.

strange object.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Grandfather backed the National League because a National League team was the first to sign a black player to a major league contract. At one time, talented black players could play only in the Negro leagues. In 1945, Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson because he had both the skill to play in the major leagues, and the personal strength to handle the abuse from racist fans. Robinson played for one season with the Brooklyn farm team, the Montreal Royals, before joining the Brooklyn Dodgers to become the first black player in the major leagues. Read a biography or do your own research on Jackie Robinson. Discuss the attitude toward black players prior to 1945, the reaction to Jackie Robinson by both racist and welcoming fans, his reaction to racial abuse, his skill as a ballplayer and the opportunities he opened for other black players.

Understanding the Author's Craft One of the themes in this story is adapting to change. The reader can easily see Thomas's feelings and reactions to change because the book was written from his point of view. Adapting to change was also difficult for the other characters. Ask students to take a scene from the book and rewrite it from another character's point of view. For example, students may want to describe Linzy's feelings as she waits at the train station. Did she feel confident or insecure? What was she thinking about while she waited? Include the new perspectives in a class discussion. Students may want to share their papers with the class.

Describing Actions or Events Ivan the Terrible thought Ringo was his mother because he had imprinted on Ringo. Imprinting is the instinctive process in which a baby bird identifies and copies its parent, or the first moving object it sees. In the movie *Fly Away Home*, the baby geese follow the young girl because they have imprinted on her. Discuss imprinting with the class. Ask students to write a story about a bird that imprints on a