

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes

Book Information

Eleanor Estes, The Hundred Dresses

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80 Pages

Book Level: 5.4

Interest Level: MG

In winning a medal she is no longer there to receive, a little Polish girl teaches her classmates a lesson.

Award: Newbery Honor

Topics: Community Life, School;
Countries/Regions, Poland; Recommended
Reading, California Recommended Lit.,
English, 3-5

Main Characters

Jake Wanda's brother

Maddie Peggy's closest friend; she feels guilty
about teasing Wanda

Miss Mason the teacher in Room 13

Mr. Svenson the old man who lives next door to
Wanda in Boggins Heights; his house and yard are
quite dirty

Peggy the most popular girl in school; Maddie's
close friend

Wanda Petronski the central character of the
story; she tells the other girls she has one hundred
beautiful dresses at home

Vocabulary

auburn reddish-brown colored

cornucopia abundance

derisively with ridicule

disconsolate dejected and hopeless

jaunty stylish, lively

precarious uncertain

stolidly without emotion

Synopsis

Wanda Petronski lives with her father and brother in

Boggins Heights, the poor part of town. She wears the same faded blue dress to school every day. One day on the way to school, Wanda encounters a group of girls from her class talking excitedly about one girl's beautiful new dress. After listening to the girls' chatter, Wanda softly tells Peggy, the most popular girl in the school, that she has one hundred dresses at home. Peggy loudly repeats the claim to the other girls, never thinking that Wanda may mean something other than real clothing. Soon all the girls are laughing at the absurd idea that Wanda has one hundred dresses and yet wears only the same faded one. Every day after that, the girls tauntingly ask Wanda how many dresses she has. Her answer, one hundred, never changes, sending the girls into gales of laughter. Peggy's best friend, Maddie, feels uncomfortable about the teasing. She wants to tell Peggy to stop playing the dresses game, but she realizes that she could easily become the new target of ridicule because of her own shabby clothing.

In October, Wanda does not come to school for days, but she had earlier entered the school art contest, submitting pictures of one hundred dresses that she had drawn over an extended period of time. She wins the contest that everyone thought Peggy would win. All the pictures are on the wall when the children come to school. The teacher, Miss Mason, reads a letter from Wanda's father saying they are moving to a city where no one will make fun of them. She tells the class to think about this.

Maddie and Peggy feel guilty. Maddie feels like a coward for not telling the girls to stop teasing Wanda. After walking to Wanda's house to apologize and finding she has already moved, the two girls write a letter to Wanda telling her she won the contest and that her drawings are beautiful. They feel even worse when time passes and they do not receive an answer to their letter. At Christmas time, Miss Mason receives a letter from Wanda and reads it to the class. In the letter, Wanda says that Maddie and Peggy can keep two specific pictures of dresses. They later notice that the two girls in the pictures have faces like their own. They sadly realize that they cannot make things right and that Wanda must have really liked them in spite of their

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cruelty to her. Maddie determines that she will never again stand by saying nothing when she sees someone being treated unfairly.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

After Wanda moves, Maddie puts herself to sleep at night making imaginary speeches defending Wanda from girls who are teasing her. Why does Maddie make these imaginary speeches?

Maddie is feeling guilty for the way she has treated Wanda and for not saying anything when Wanda was being teased. The imaginary speeches help Maddie feel better about herself by imagining she is defending Wanda and protecting her from the cruelty of others. She is imagining things she feels she should have said but never did. She may also be practicing for intervening if Wanda ever returns and is teased again or for any future teasing incident involving someone else.

Literary Analysis

Wanda is a poor, motherless immigrant girl who is quite different from her classmates, who are generally wealthier and long-time residents of the community. Describe Wanda's character in terms of her interactions with her classmates.

Despite the taunting and laughing, Wanda does not cry and is able to walk away from the group of teasing girls. She does not lash back at them by calling them names or starting a fight. Every day, when faced with their leading questions, she answers honestly that she has one hundred dresses in her closet at home. Although she knows she is considered "different" and "funny," she has the courage and the stamina to continue to answer their mocking questions.

Inferential Comprehension

Teasing Wanda bothers Maddie much more than it bothers Peggy. Compare the reasons for each character's feelings.

Peggy feels almost justified in teasing Wanda since she believes Wanda is lying about owning one hundred dresses. Peggy views the lying as an invitation to harass her and then to laugh at her answers. Since Wanda never cries, Peggy feels that the teasing must not hurt her very much. In contrast, Maddie is bothered about the teasing and wishes it would stop. Maddie knows that she, too, is poor and wears hand-me-down clothes. However, she fears that protesting the teasing might cause her to become the next target of ridicule. Later, Maddie realizes that it was worse for her to stand by and say nothing knowing how it must have hurt Wanda.

Constructing Meaning

The story gives the reader many facts about Peggy. In addition, the reader develops many opinions about her. What are some facts about her and some opinions that readers may have developed?

The story tells us that Peggy is the most popular girl in school. She wears nice clothes and does not live in Boggins Heights; so the reader develops the opinion that she is probably wealthy. Peggy also does not have compassion for Wanda nor any sense that her teasing Wanda is wrong until after Wanda is gone. Some readers may have the opinion that Peggy is mean and cruel. They also may think that she is insecure about herself and that teasing Wanda helps give her self-confidence.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors When Maddie and Peggy are late for class, they interrupt the class recitation of the Gettysburg Address. Have the students do research on the Gettysburg Address and write a short report about it. The report should include who delivered the speech, the date it was delivered, and the historical events occurring at the time it was delivered. Divide the class into several groups

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and give each group a copy of the Gettysburg Address. Assign different sections to be memorized and delivered by each group to the class.

Recognizing Details Wanda makes one hundred drawings of dresses; each drawing is beautiful. Have the students in the class make several drawings of dresses or motorboats, such that the total number for the class is one hundred drawings. After the drawings are complete, display them around the room. Ask the students if they are surprised at how many one hundred drawings actually are and to imagine how long it must have taken Wanda to make that many beautiful drawings. Discussion should also focus on why she drew them, what she might have been dreaming and thinking about as she drew them, how much time it must have taken her to draw them, and where she might have gotten her ideas.

Responding to Literature Peggy and Maddie make fun of Wanda every day, yet Wanda never cries. The teasing must have bothered her greatly, though, because she moves as a result of it. Ask the students to work in pairs to develop two to four flash cards (4" X 6" size) that have a teasing situation on one side and a responsible way or ways to respond on the other. For example, one side might read, "You overhear three girls teasing another about her hairstyle." The other side could read, "Make friends with the girl being teased; find constructive things to say about her hairstyle." The cards should then be presented to the class with discussion of possible other responses before moving on to the next flash card. Discussion should also focus on reasons why teasing is so common, why it is hurtful, and why it is important to intervene.

Making Predictions Peggy and Maddie go to Boggins Heights to find Wanda, but Wanda has already moved. They want to tell her that she won the contest, that they think she is smart, and that the hundred dresses are beautiful. Have the students work in pairs, with one student taking the part of Maddie and the other taking the part of Peggy. Have them write a script of what they will

say if they find Wanda at home. They should then present their script to the class. Discussion should follow focusing on how they would feel, how Wanda would feel, and how difficult it might be to say those things in person.