

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

When Pigs Fly

by

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Book Information

June Rae Wood, When Pigs Fly
Quiz Number: 14852
G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995
ISBN 0-399-22911-6; LCCN
259 Pages
Book Level: 5.9
Interest Level: MG

Thirteen-year-old Buddy Rae and her best friend Jiniwin do everything together--taking care of Buddy's slow, younger sister, "parenting" egg babies, and dealing with Buddy's family move to a farm outside Turnback, Missouri.

Award: State Award

Topics: Community Life, School; Disabilities, Learning; Family Life, Misc./Other; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Family Life, Sisters; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Work it Out: Conflicts; Recommended Reading, Canadian Children's Book Centre's Our Choice; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies

Main Characters

Buddy Richter a young girl who is protective of her sister and resents having to move to Aunt Ruby's house

Dallas a young man who people make fun of because he smells of dirt and mustard and collects junk; he eventually becomes Buddy's friend

Jiniwin Buddy's best friend who envies Buddy because of her close family

Reenie Buddy's younger sister who has Down's syndrome, loves purses, and frequently runs away

Vocabulary

caterwaul howl like a cat; screech

menagerie a collection of wild animals kept in cages for exhibition

paraphernalia personal belongings

potpourri a fragrant mixture of dried flower petals and spices

sauntering walking slowly and happily

Synopsis

Buddy and Jiniwin are best friends. Partly because Jiniwin's parents are divorced, Jiniwin becomes part of Buddy's family. Jiniwin is nice to Reenie, Buddy's sister who has Down's syndrome. Although Buddy envies Jiniwin because she has more money, Jiniwin envies Buddy because of her close family.

Because of their financial problems, Buddy's family moves into a house they inherited from Aunt Ruby. The house, long neglected, has mice and snakes in it. Buddy is ashamed to live there. Forced to ride the bus because she no longer lives in town, Buddy is upset by the way children on the bus make fun of Reenie. She and Reenie are befriended by Dallas, a young man who collects trash to sell at the flea market.

As a class assignment, Buddy and Jiniwin are to care for egg "babies." Jiniwin becomes upset when she loses her purse with her egg in it. She blames Reenie for taking it. Jiniwin and Buddy argue over this and lose their friendship for a short time.

While looking for Reenie, Buddy discovers Dallas's home. He lives in a storm cellar all by himself. His mother had died and his father had set fire to the house and then left. Dallas supports himself by selling junk at the flea market. Buddy's opinion of Dallas begins to change as she sees him being kind to Reenie and learns he is self-supporting. She realizes Dallas is her friend.

Buddy learns Jiniwin has been drinking. She feels she can tell no one since they will think she is making it up to get even with Jiniwin. When Buddy sees Reenie's "monster," she and Reenie work together to capture the blacksnake in a barrel. Buddy finally calls Jiniwin after receiving sound advice from Aunt Sage. Buddy tells her that she cares and tries to get her to seek help for her drinking.

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After learning the value of Aunt Ruby's buttons, Buddy searches for more of them. While trying to reach one box, she falls into a cistern. She must rely on Reenie to find Dallas who will get help. While in the cistern, she realizes how grateful she is to have parents who care for her and a roof over her head. She now thinks of Aunt Ruby's house as "home."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

In this story, Dallas appeared to have loved his mother. How do you know this?

He was sad when he talked about her. He kept a sock monkey she had made for him. He saved some of her things from the burning house.

Literary Analysis

The author describes Aunt Ruby's house as a "witch's head." Why do you think the author does this?

It helps us realize that Buddy is afraid of moving. When Jiniwin says the house has "cast a spell," we can more easily feel the haunted mood.

Inferential Comprehension

Buddy feels that sooner or later her family will discover Dallas's secret. What do you think will happen when they do?

They will ask him to live with them. They will ask him to live with Aunt Sage. They will keep his secret and allow him to live in the storm cellar.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the story, Buddy's mother promises to talk to Jiniwin's mother about Jiniwin's drinking. How do you think Jiniwin's mother will react when she is told about Jiniwin's drinking?

She will deny that Jiniwin is drinking. She will make excuses for Jiniwin's drinking. She will be angry with Buddy's mother for telling her.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features For a family living class assignment, Buddy and Jiniwin were to carry an egg with them and pretend it was a baby. The purpose of this assignment was to show them how much trouble it was to take care of an egg. In this way, they might think twice about having a real baby. The students might find it interesting to try this assignment. They could carry an egg with them for a set period of time and then discuss the problems they had. It would give them a better understanding of the problems Buddy and Jiniwin had with their egg assignment. If carrying a real egg is a problem, perhaps the students could just imagine the problems they would have and discuss them.

Comparing and Contrasting In this story, Buddy learns things about two of the other characters. She learns that Jiniwin has been drinking and she learns that Dallas has been living on his own. At the end of the story, Buddy told her mother that Jiniwin had been drinking. She did not tell her family that Dallas was living alone. Have the students discuss Buddy's decisions. Do they think she was right to wait so long to tell her mother of Jiniwin's drinking? If they were Buddy, would they have told their mother about Dallas or Jiniwin? Discuss the reasons why they would have told on their friends or kept their friends' secrets.

Describing Actions or Events When Buddy went to Aunt Ruby's house with Jiniwin, she was shamed by the looks of the house. On page 76, the book gives a vivid description of the house as a witch's head. It might be fun for the students to reread this section and draw a picture of how they

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envision Aunt Ruby's house to look.

Responding to Literature When Loretta calls Reenie a "retard," Buddy becomes angry. The book says she was "blind with rage." The students might find it interesting to explore their feelings on this subject. Have them pretend they are Buddy. They should be able to write a one-page report on how they feel when Reenie is laughed at. Do they feel protective of Reenie? Do they feel as though they should take revenge against the people who laugh at Reenie, or do they feel as though it would be a waste of time? Are they ashamed of having Reenie as a sister or are they proud to know someone who has overcome obstacles?