

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Amber Brown Goes Fourth

by
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Book Information

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Entering fourth grade, Amber faces some changes in her life as her best friend moves away and her parents divorce.

Award: State Award

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Main Characters

Amber Brown the narrator and main character of the story; her parents are separated, and her best friend just moved away

Brandi Colwin Amber's classmate; Amber wants to be her best friend

Hannah Burton Amber's classmate; she is bossy and says mean things to others

Justin Daniels Amber's best friend; he just moved away

Max Mom's new boyfriend; at first, Amber does not want to meet him

Phil Brown (Dad, Daddy) Amber's father; he lives in Paris, France

Sarah Brown (Mom, Mommy) Amber's mother; she has a new boyfriend

Vocabulary

ebony dark-colored or black

feat a great accomplishment

fiend a wicked or evil person

pushover a person who is easy to persuade

rhinestones small, shiny, colored stones used for decoration

Synopsis

Amber Brown is starting fourth grade, but things are very different this year because her parents have divorced. Her father now lives in Paris, France, and Amber lives with her mother. Mom has a new boyfriend, Max, who Amber does not want to meet. Amber's best friend, Justin, has just moved away. Amber is nervous and worried about starting a new year at school with a new teacher and no best friend.

On the first day of school, Amber arrives at the playground looking for someone who might also need a best friend. Instead, she encounters Hannah, who calls Amber names and acts mean to Amber. Brandi Colwin arrives late to Amber's class and sits next to Amber. Amber notices that Brandi and Hannah are no longer best friends, and she thinks Brandi could make a great best friend. The two girls start passing notes. When Amber begins to compare Brandi to Justin in a note, however, Brandi is no longer interested in becoming her friend.

After the first week of school, Brandi and Amber are both in Elementary Extension for students whose parents pick them up from school later. They begin laughing together, and soon Brandi invites Amber to her house. She agrees to be friends with Amber as long as Amber does not compare her to Justin. Amber realizes she must learn how to become Brandi's best friend.

Meanwhile, Amber's mother finds out that Amber wants to win a burping contest because the prize is a mermaid statue. When Amber does not win the prize, Max buys an identical mermaid for Amber. He sends it to her with a note saying he hopes to meet her soon. Since Amber has experienced loneliness while looking for a new friend, she realizes that her mother also needs a best friend. She wonders if Max might be that friend. Amber accepts the mermaid and agrees to meet Max sometime soon.

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Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When Brandi comes into the classroom late, what does Amber admire about Brandi? Why is her new look significant to the story?

Brandi's clothes look very nice to Amber, and Brandi is smiling and waving to her classmates. But Amber notices Brandi's hair looks very special. When she looks closer, she sees Brandi has three braids with strings and beads in each one. The new hairstyle and new look are the subject of Amber's notes to Brandi. This is significant because the "new look" foreshadows a new friendship and a willingness on Amber's part to accept new ideas, people, etc.

Literary Analysis

As Amber enters the fourth grade, she is also going "forth." In what ways is she going forth?

Amber's life has changed drastically. Her parents have separated; her best friend has moved away; her fourth grade teacher is new; and her mother has a new boyfriend. As school begins, Amber realizes that her life has changed and will never go back to the way it was no matter how much she wishes it would. She learns that she must adapt to the challenges and changes and continue, or "go forth," with her life as best she can.

Inferential Comprehension

In what way has Amber's opinion of Max changed by the end of the story?

Amber struggles with trying to find a best friend after Justin moves. She discovers it is not easy to find another best friend, and she misses Justin terribly. Amber wants nothing to do with Max because she still has hope that her mother and father will be reunited. By the end of the story, Amber realizes that her mother has also lost two people who were her very good friends -- Justin's mother and Amber's father. She, too, may need to find a replacement. Realizing how difficult it is to find a best friend, Amber considers that perhaps Max could take the place that her father had in her mother's life. She is willing to meet Max at some time in the future after she learns to adjust to the idea of his being her mother's friend.

Constructing Meaning

Mrs. Holt, the teacher, passes out note cards requesting important information from the students. Why does Amber write, "I would like it if all the brussels sprout crops failed this year"?

Amber has just finished writing about the things that are troubling her as the school year begins. She is demonstrating a little bit of humor to her teacher by indicating that she does not like to eat Brussels sprouts. If the entire crop fails, then she will not have to eat them. That will make one thing in her life easier.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Amber's father calls Amber from Paris on the first day of school. He says he will call her at six o'clock in the evening her time to find out how her first day went. Amber calculates that he will be calling at midnight his time. Give each student a map that contains the United States and Europe. Have them locate Paris, France, on the map of Europe, and New Jersey on the United States map. Have the students look in an atlas to locate the number of time zones between France and the United

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States, and within the United States, and draw them on their maps. Then have them work in groups to question each other on various time problems. For example, if a student who lives in California calls another student in Paris at ten o'clock in the morning California time, what time will the student in Paris receive the call? After they understand the concept of time zones, conduct a class discussion as to why the time zones were created. The discussion could also include the International Dateline and Greenwich Mean Time.

can then be played to match the fact with the identity of the student.

Responding to Literature Amber misses Justin very much. After school starts, she answers a letter he has written to her. In her reply letter, she comments on things that he wrote in his letter, and she asks him several questions. Then she lists several news items before closing. Have the students work in pairs to write each other a letter describing what they have done in the last two weeks. After exchanging letters, each partner should write a reply letter, commenting on what the partner wrote and asking questions of the partner. Class discussion should focus on how writing can convey our thoughts and activities and how questions can engage the recipient.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The story is rich with plays on words. For example, "There's no business like shoe business" and "Put your heads on your desks!" are humorous statements that make Amber and the reader laugh. Have the students work in groups to identify three or four of the word plays that are found in the book. After writing the phrases, each group should write an explanation of the meaning of the phrase and what makes the phrase humorous. Then have each group develop a list of their own ideas of word plays with an explanation of the meanings. The lists may be shared with the class.

Recognizing Details Mrs. Holt asks all the students to answer a few questions about themselves. Amber feels that the question, "What would you like to tell me about yourself?" is the most difficult to answer. Have the students answer that question anonymously with a little known fact about themselves. A guessing game