

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Baby-sitting Is a Dangerous Job

by

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Book Information

Willo Davis Roberts, Baby-sitting Is a Dangerous Job

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Interest Level: MG

Thirteen-year-old Darcy thought she was being followed for some strange reason, and then the children she baby-sat for were kidnapped.

Topics: Mysteries, Kidnappings; People, Baby-Sitters; People, Strangers; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Count on Me: Responsibility

Main Characters

Clancy a police officer who is a friend of Darcy's brother Tim

Dan Hazen the softhearted and easily persuaded son of Pa Hazen

Darcy Ann Stevens a thirteen-year-old girl who bravely and intelligently finds a way to save the lives of three kidnapped children

Diana Hazen a classmate of Darcy's who is trying to escape her abusive father

Ellen Hazen the sister of Diana; she once baby-sat the Foster children

George Hazen Diana's older brother who is supposed to help her escape her abusive father

Henry Hazen the ruthless brother of Dan who participates in the kidnapping of the Foster children

Irene Pappagoras Darcy's best friend who has a crush on Darcy's brother Tim; she encourages Darcy to protect Diana's secret

Jeremy Foster the oldest of the three Foster children; he frequently misbehaves in order to get attention

Melissa Foster the middle Foster child who frequently imitates Jeremy

Mr. Foster the busy father of the three Foster children

Mrs. Murphy the frustrated and tired housekeeper for the Fosters; Darcy suspects her of neglecting the children

Mrs. Stevens Darcy's mother, who gives her insight into the behavior of the Foster children

Mrs./Dr. Foster the indulgent but neglectful mother of the three Foster children

Okie the caretaker of the old house where the kidnapped children are taken; he is in the hospital during the events of the story

Pa Hazen the abusive father of the Hazen family; he is the mastermind behind the kidnapping

Shana Foster the outspoken youngest Foster child who easily befriends dogs

Tim Stevens Darcy's older brother who often gives her advice

Vocabulary

alert very aware and watchful

apparently according to evidence

cupola a room with a domed roof that sits on the top of a building

eaves the overhanging edges of a roof

hypothetical existing only in theory

outwit to beat using cleverness

psychiatrist a doctor who deals with people's thoughts and feelings

ransom a payment made in exchange for the release of a captive or captives

sedan an automobile with a front and rear seat and a permanent top

vandals people who purposely destroy property

Synopsis

Thirteen-year-old Darcy Stevens is offered the job of baby-sitting three difficult children while their housekeeper, Mrs. Murphy, is having root canal treatment. She accepts the position because the money being offered by the wealthy Fosters is too good to refuse. Besides her reservations about the Foster children, Darcy is worried about a strange car that seems to be following her. She is also worried about a classmate, Diana Hazen, who has run away from her abusive home again.

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Darcy has an eventful first day of baby-sitting Jeremy, Melissa, and Shana Foster. The children misbehave, a strange man claiming to be the gas man tries to gain access to the house, and Darcy begins to suspect that Mrs. Murphy, the housekeeper, does not take very good care of the children. After baby-sitting, Darcy goes for a walk in the park with her best friend Irene, and they discover their missing classmate, Diana, hiding in the woods. Darcy and Irene make plans to help Diana and hide her in a tree house in Darcy's yard.

The next day, Darcy gets advice from her mother on how to deal with the Foster children. Mrs. Stevens advises Darcy to be firm but loving with the children. Darcy's second day of baby-sitting is interrupted by the burglar alarm going off. The police confirm there was an attempted break-in, and later that afternoon Darcy finds three kidnappers in the house. Without thinking, she lets them know she recognizes one of them as Diana's brother Dan. The kidnappers had intended to take only the Foster children, but they now decide to take Darcy with them too. Darcy realizes there is little hope of the neighbors noticing suspicious activities when she sees that the kidnappers have entered the garage using Mrs. Murphy's stolen car.

The kidnappers take Darcy and the children to a secluded vacant house in the country and leave them alone in an upstairs bedroom. They have two Doberman pinschers guard the stairs to keep the children from escaping, and Darcy struggles to find a way to save the children. Shana is only two years old and too heavy for Darcy to carry while they run. Jeremy and Melissa may be old enough to run, but Shana cannot be left alone. In the meantime, Shana begins to befriend the dogs by feeding them, and Darcy and the children discover a secret room in the cupola above the attic. Jeremy spots a wasp nest just outside the window of the cupola, but Darcy shoos him away and makes the children return to the bedroom before the kidnappers can discover their whereabouts.

Darcy soon sees that Dan is the weakest of the

kidnappers. She persuades him to allow the children downstairs while the other kidnappers are out. Darcy encourages the children to feed the Dobermans hamburgers while Dan is not watching, and she notes the location of an unlocked window while Jeremy is playing video games with Dan. When Dan's brother Henry returns, he makes a ransom call to Mr. Foster, and Darcy and the little girls are able to talk to him.

After nightfall of the following day, Jeremy sees Henry and Pa Hazen drive off to get the ransom. Darcy and Jeremy sneak past Dan and climb out the window, but the gate they have seen from the house is impassable for Darcy. She has Jeremy leave part of his sweater to mislead the kidnappers, and they return to the house. Darcy takes the children to hide in the cupola, and she realizes that the wasp nest can be used as a weapon. She sneaks back downstairs to get a bag to put the wasp nest in and is almost caught by Pa Hazen who has just come back with the ransom money. Pa tells Henry and Dan that he will "take care of the kids" and then they will escape to Mexico with the money. Fortunately, Pa makes the mistake of kicking one of the dogs and then is viciously attacked by both of them. Darcy uses the diversion to return to the cupola. With Jeremy's help, she carefully scoops the wasp nest into the bag and waits for the kidnappers.

From the cupola window, Darcy listens as the kidnappers search for them, and then she notices the flashing lights of a police car nearby. She instructs Jeremy to flash the lights in the cupola to get the attention of the police, but the police car keeps going and now the kidnappers know where the children are. Quickly, she sends the children onto the roof. When Henry and Dan enter the cupola, she releases the wasps into the room and closes herself and the children out on the roof. Soon afterward the police arrive, and everyone is saved.

When they all arrive at the police station, Darcy tells the housekeeper, Mrs. Murphy, that she has grown very fond of the Foster children during their ordeal. Mrs. Murphy has realized she is getting too old to take care of young children, so Mrs. Foster offers

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Darcy the job for the rest of the summer. Darcy accepts but only after she boldly tells Mrs. Foster that the children need more attention from their parents. Mrs. Foster agrees that she and her husband must spend more time with them.

Darcy arrives home and finds that Irene has told Mrs. Stevens about Diana Hazen hiding in their tree house. Darcy's mom called Child Protective Services, and a hearing will be held to decide if Diana has to go home. Darcy stays up late that night to give Irene every detail about her ordeal.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Before Darcy was kidnapped, she discovered Diana Hazen hiding in the woods from her abusive father. Why is the sequence of these events important to the story?

Because Darcy had recently spent time with Diana, she was able to recognize Diana's brother Dan. Secondly, talking to Diana about her father made Darcy aware that she needed to be careful when dealing with Pa Hazen. She also realized that Pa was willing to hurt others in order to protect himself. This helped Darcy foresee that Pa could not be trusted to return the children even after the ransom was paid.

Literary Analysis

What features of the cupola did Darcy find helpful?

Darcy and the children discovered the entrance to the cupola by accident. This meant that the kidnapers probably did not know the room existed. Darcy felt the room was a great place for the children to play without being heard because the room was far above the rest of the house. Also, the cupola was set up as a playroom and had toys to keep the children occupied. Darcy was able to protect the children until the police arrived because the cupola had access to the roof. The nest of wasps Darcy took from outside the cupola served to hinder the kidnapers' progress onto the roof. The height of the cupola made it easy for the police to see Jeremy flashing the lights.

Inferential Comprehension

What could the adults around Darcy have done to prevent the kidnapping from happening?

The police could have taken the children to a more secure location or posted a permanent guard outside the house. Mrs. Murphy could have kept the garage door opener on her instead of leaving it in the car. Mr. Foster could have come home or sent Darcy and the children to stay where there were adults who could protect them. Finally, the neighbors could have paid more attention to who was coming in and out of the Foster house, particularly since the burglar alarm had recently gone off.

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Constructing Meaning

Do you think Darcy was right to tell Mrs./Dr. Foster that the children needed more attention from their parents?

Answers will vary. Some students will agree with Mrs. Stevens that the children were misbehaving because they were trying to get attention from adults. They might note that while the Foster children had everything money could buy, they seemed happiest when Darcy played with them, and Jeremy's behavior in particular improved when he got attention. Other students might feel that Darcy was too young to be telling an adult, particularly one who was a psychiatrist, how to raise children.

they support Darcy's opinion of Mrs. Murphy. Have them use details from the book to defend their position.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Darcy was a very responsible baby-sitter. She did not let the man who claimed to be from the gas company into the house, and she called the police when the burglar alarm went off. Have students make a list of safety concerns they might encounter while baby-sitting. Then as a class or in small-group discussions, have students come up with ways to address these concerns. Finally, have students make a booklet of baby-sitter safety tips that they could use in their lives. Students should include first-aid tips, what to do in an emergency, and a list of emergency phone numbers.

Comparing and Contrasting Jeremy's behavior changes while he is under the control of the kidnappers. Have the students make a list of the ways in which Jeremy changes and the ways in which he stays the same.

Recognizing Feelings Dan obviously does not feel comfortable with the kidnapping. Have the students write a journal of the events from his point of view. Have them include not only his opinions of the children, but also his responses to how his family treats him and his concerns about being caught by the police.

Extending Meaning Darcy thinks Mrs. Murphy is not a good baby-sitter for the Foster children. Have the students write a paper showing whether