

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Bloomability by Sharon Creech

Book Information

Sharon Creech, Bloomability
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When her aunt and uncle take her from New Mexico to Lugano, Switzerland, to attend an international school, thirteen-year-old Dinnie discovers an expanding world and her place in it.

Award: ABC (Assoc. of Booksellers for Children) Choice Aw; Misc./Other; State Award

Topics: Adventure, Travel; Community Life, School; Countries/Regions, Switzerland; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Power Lessons AR, Grade 5; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, Crown/Lamplighter Nominee; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice

Main Characters

Aunt Grace and Aunt Tillie Dinnie's aunts who send her postcards from the United States

Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max Dinnie's aunt and uncle who take her into their lives as they make a change and move to Switzerland to work in a school

Belen and Keisuke Dinnie's classmates

Crick Dinnie's brother, who is always in some kind of trouble

Dinnie (Domenica) Doone a middle-school girl whose family sends her to live with her aunt and uncle in Switzerland

Dinnie's mother a woman who follows her husband from place to place despite her own liking for city life

Grandma Fiorelli Dinnie's maternal grandmother, who criticizes Dinnie's father

Guthrie a classmate of Dinnie who is enthusiastic and optimistic about life

Jack Doone Dinnie's father, who avoids settling down and moves his family from place to place

Lila a classmate of Dinnie who is negative and pessimistic

Mrs. King Lila's eccentric mother

Mrs. Stirling the school's founder and owner

Stella Dinnie's sixteen-year-old sister, who marries a Marine and has a baby

Vocabulary

adaptable capable of adjusting to a new situation

mesmerized spellbound

proficient performing a specific skill with expertise

radical extreme

valiant courageous

Synopsis

Dinnie (Domenica) Doone lives with her family in New Mexico. It is one on a long list of places her father, Jack, has moved them over the course of Dinnie's life. Her mother quietly follows her father from place to place, much to the distress of Grandma Fiorelli. Dinnie's brother, Crick, finds trouble wherever they go, and her older sister, Stella, becomes pregnant and marries a Marine. This last event seems to push the Doones into sending Dinnie to live with her Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max. Max is the new headmaster at a school in Lugano, Switzerland, where Aunt Sandy will be teaching. Dinnie calls this move a "kidnapping" and claims it begins her "second life."

In Switzerland, Dinnie finds herself wondering why her family sent her away. Was it to make room for the new baby? Was she being punished for something? Amidst her confusion, she vents her frustrations by hanging signs in her bedroom window telling the world her feelings. Amusingly, these signs are never quite written in proper Italian.

Students at Dinnie's new school come from all over the world and have varied histories. Her new friendships include Guthrie, an enthusiastic boy with a passion for life, and Lila, a spoiled young lady who tends to whine and complain about most anything.

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Lila often appears at Uncle Max's door with complaints about the school, which puts Dinnie in the middle between her friend and uncle. School activities are quite different from what Dinnie is used to.

Throughout the school year, Dinnie becomes closer to Guthrie. He takes her sightseeing and fishing, and he attempts to teach her to ski. Students experience an intense Global Awareness Month, in which they realize how privileged they are. Along the way, Dinnie is overwhelmed by her aunt and uncle's generosity, such as when they give her a new pair of skis for Christmas. On occasion, she receives postcards from her Aunt Grace and Aunt Tillie, two comical ladies who talk about each other in their postcards. It is rare that Dinnie hears from her mother or siblings. Her homesickness never quite leaves, and she tends to see bits of all the places she has lived in the sights around her in Switzerland.

Tragedy strikes when the students go on a ski trip to the Dolomites. Guthrie and Lila are caught in an avalanche but, luckily, are rescued and escape with broken bones only. After this event, Lila's mother and Guthrie's father come to Switzerland to see their children. Lila's mother causes numerous scenes at the hospital before she takes Lila back to America.

Near the end of April, Guthrie and Dinnie take an excursion to Mt. San Salvatore. It is here Dinnie feels free. She realizes she has a choice to make about whether or not she will return to Switzerland in the fall for the next school term or live in Kentucky where her family now resides. The end-of-the-year banquet brings wonderful speeches by Uncle Max, Mrs. Stirling, and several of Dinnie's classmates. However, it is Guthrie's speech that makes Dinnie aware of how people in her life all have something in common. They all have a way of traveling that makes her want to go with them to see the world the way they saw it. Dinnie leaves Switzerland full of love for the country and heads to Kentucky, ready to consider the possibilities that await her wherever she goes.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why do Dinnie's parents send her to Switzerland?

With Crick getting into so much trouble and Stella becoming pregnant, it is likely Dinnie's parents are concerned about how her siblings' lifestyles might affect her. They recognize the problems in their lifestyle and do not want Dinnie to experience any of the troubles Crick and Stella have. They might believe a home for Dinnie with Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max will be more stable.

Literary Analysis

At the end of the story, Dinnie has a decision to make about whether she will return to Switzerland. Why is she undecided? Do you think she will return? Why or why not?

Dinnie is undecided because she has developed a love for Switzerland, her aunt and uncle, and her friends. What was once a "kidnapping" has turned into an event Dinnie will remember forever. Her heart is torn between her place with her family in Kentucky and her newfound place in Switzerland. Students will have varied responses about the likelihood of Dinnie's return and should offer evidence to support their answers.

Inferential Comprehension

What kind of person is Jack Doone? Why does he continue to move from place to place?

Based upon what is known from the book, Dinnie's father, Jack, might be described as irresponsible, thoughtless, lazy, excitable, quick to make changes, untrusting, and full of ambitious plans (but not able to follow through). His continued moving from place to place indicates his need for change. He appears to be someone who cannot settle down for very long, having a wanderlust type of personality.

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Constructing Meaning

What is your favorite part of *Bloomability* and why?

Students' responses will vary and should offer evidence to support their choices.

is described in the book as "possibilities." Have each student illustrate his or her idea of what "bloomability" looks like. Discuss other words that might create an image in their minds as they see or hear the word. Students might enjoy making up other words and their meanings.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Dinnie goes to school in Switzerland. She is shown some beautiful sights while she is there. Have students skim the story and list many of the places mentioned. Once they have completed their list, they should research Switzerland and prepare a five-minute presentation on what they have learned. Encourage several types of information to be given within their presentation (bodies of water, mountain ranges, music, food and customs native to the country, etc.).

Extending Meaning Dinnie attends a school in Switzerland where many of the students come from other countries. Have students pretend they are applying for admission to a foreign school. Before the process can begin, students should choose the country in which their school is located and research more about that location. They must write a letter introducing themselves and include their reasons for wanting to attend that school. The letter must also include a paragraph in which the students give reasons why he or she would be a good candidate for admissions.

Recognizing Details Have students create postcards they would send if they were visiting Switzerland (or some other location). They should create illustrations exclusive to their choice of location. For example, a picture of the Sphinx in Egypt or the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy could be drawn. They should pay careful attention to details in their illustrations. Discuss the limitations postcards have as far as writing a message on the back side. Space is an issue, so what highlights/details will be shared with the person receiving the postcard?

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning *Bloomability*