

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Door in the Wall

by

Marguerite De Angeli

Book Information

Marguerite De Angeli, The Door in the Wall

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121 Pages

Book Level: 6.2

Interest Level: MG

A crippled boy in fourteenth-century England proves his courage and earns recognition from the king.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Countries/Regions, England; Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 4-6; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Choose a Challenge: Decisions; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Brother Luke a friar who takes care of Robin and helps him cope with his illness

Geoffrey a young boy

John-go-in-the-Wynd a minstrel and messenger

Lady Maud Robin's mother, who is away helping the Queen

Robin a ten-year-old boy with "crooked" legs who bravely saves a besieged town

Sir John de Bureford Robin's father, who is away fighting the Scots

Sir Peter de Lindsay, Lady Constance a couple who take Robin into their home

Vocabulary

malady an ailment

pilgrimage a journey to a sacred place or shrine

scriptorium a room in a monastery set aside for writing or copying manuscripts

tonsure the part of a monk's head that has been shaved

vexation irritation or annoyance

victuals food

Synopsis

Ever since he can remember, ten-year-old Robin has been told he is expected to become a knight. His father, Sir John, leaves to fight in the war for the King, and his mother, Lady Maud, must go to be lady-in-waiting for the Queen. Meanwhile, the area is suffering from an outbreak of the plague, causing the loss of the servants and the interruption of the plan to take Robin to Sir Peter de Lindsay's castle. Robin becomes ill, and his legs won't move. He is found and taken to St. Mark's by a friar named Brother Luke.

Robin finds enjoyment in whittling while he lies in bed at St. Mark's. Brother Luke spends time with Robin, always rubbing his legs as they talk. Robin asks Brother Luke to teach him to read and write. Robin becomes upset when another boy, Geoffrey, calls him Robin Crookshanks because his legs are somewhat deformed. Brother Luke explains people are given names based on some oddity they have. Robin sends a very explicit letter to his father explaining his situation. He wonders what his father would think of a son called Crookshanks.

As weeks pass, the plague dies out. Brother Luke begins to give Robin swimming lessons, which strengthen his arms. Along with the swimming, Robin is given duties in the church. Near the end of September, a letter from his father arrives instructing Robin to continue his journey to the home of Sir Peter de Lindsay. Brother Luke and John-go-in-the-Wynd are to travel with him. On their journey, they encounter two men who attempt to steal Brother Luke's money pouch, but they escape unharmed. After arriving at Lindsay, John leaves them to go to his mother's cottage in a nearby town.

On a day when the fog is very thick, the Welsh attack the castle. Robin volunteers to go for help when food and water dwindle. He sneaks from the castle disguised as a poor shepherd boy. He reaches John's mother's cottage, and John is able to round up help for Sir Peter. The two return to Lindsay, making their way to the church. There, they ring the church bell to signal a counterattack. The

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Welsh are completely surprised and march out of town. Robin is hailed as a hero. His parents return, and the King rewards Robin with a jeweled collar.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Robin is concerned by how his father will react to his crooked legs. Why is he so concerned?

Robin faces very high expectations as the son of a nobleman. The plan was for him to be sent away to live in the household of another knight, where he would learn all the ways of knighthood. He feels his legs will prevent him from fulfilling his father's wishes, and he will let his family down.

Literary Analysis

Several times Robin hears the phrase, "door in the wall." What is the significance of these words in the book?

Each time Robin confronts an obstacle, he must find a solution to the problem, or a "door in the wall." Each door he opens makes it easier for him to confront the next obstacle.

Inferential Comprehension

How are Robin's and Brother Luke's personalities different?

Robin is highly emotional, and is quick to become angry. He is impatient, worrisome, and is insecure in himself at times. Brother Luke, on the other hand, is a rational man. He is far more patient and wise. He is prayerful and thankful for what life gives him.

Constructing Meaning

What challenges does Robin face throughout the course of the story?

He must learn to live without his parents, rely on others to help him get around, and face his handicap. He learns to swim and use crutches. He learns to read and write. He whittles a harp and learns music. He uses his intelligence and cunning to outsmart the Welsh in his quest to get help for Sir Peter.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story takes place in medieval England. Team students into five groups. Assign each group one of the following tasks. Group one should research and construct a model of a medieval castle. Group two will gather information about the Black (bubonic) Plague, a deadly disease found during this time period. They should include causes, cures (if any), and number of deaths caused. Students should make a graph to chart the information. Group three will prepare a travel brochure enticing visitors to England during the Middle Ages. Group four will plan a five-minute presentation using music of the time period. (The music teacher may offer suggestions.) Group five will identify the steps to knighthood and prepare a short skit for the class detailing the steps. Adapt tasks as necessary.

Understanding Literary Features Throughout the story, a constant theme is Robin's struggle to overcome his handicap. His injured legs do not stop him from being the one who escapes the castle and finds help for Sir Peter. Place a large piece of butcher paper on the wall, and have students brainstorm famous people in history who have had handicaps to overcome. Some examples include Helen Keller, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Beethoven. After the list is complete, students should choose one to research. Have students share their research with the class in a two to three minute oral presentation.

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Recognizing Details Throughout the story, Robin whittles. First, he carves a toy boat, then a cross, a doll, and finally his prized possession, a harp. Consult the school's art teacher and have students plan and sketch either a toy boat or doll. Once the details to the sketch are completed, take the activity one step further by carving their item from a soft piece of wood or soap. This will take much monitoring and collaboration, but will be worth the effort. Open up the activity to parents. Invite them in to help and oversee the carving process. Ask students if they know of a relative or member of the community who knows how to whittle. Hold a demonstration in lieu of each student carving his or her sketch.

Making Predictions The story ends with the King rewarding Robin for his heroism. The King gives him a jeweled collar. A ten-year-old hero would make newspaper headlines today. Have students prepare a news item for the town crier dated ten (or more) years into the story's future. Students should consider what they know of Robin and conclude what he might have done that is newsworthy. One example; he could have lead a group of crusaders in England's ongoing attempts to conquer the Holy Lands.