

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Forever Amber Brown by Paula Danziger

Book Information

Paula Danziger, Forever Amber Brown
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Amber Brown is learning that sometimes when things change, the most important thing stays the same.

Award: Misc./Other; State Award

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Main Characters

Amber Brown the nine-year-old narrator of the story
Brandi Amber's new best friend
Brenda Amber's baby-sitter
Justin Daniels Amber's best friend who recently moved to Alabama
Max Mom's boyfriend; he wants to marry Amber's mother
Sarah Thompson (Mom) Amber's divorced mother

Vocabulary

blushes turns red in the face
laminator a machine that puts a clear plastic coating on paper
mallet a hammer with a large head
mimes copies, imitates

vegetarian a person who eats no meat or animal products

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Amber Brown is in the fourth grade and lives with her divorced mother, who has a boyfriend named Max. Amber's father lives in Paris, France. Amber hopes that her parents will someday get back together again, so it is hard for her to accept that her mother and Max are getting serious. Meanwhile, Amber's friendships are changing, too. Amber's best friend, Justin, recently moved to Alabama. Her new best friend is Brandi.

One day, Amber decides that her room should be redecorated because it looks much too babyish. To convince her mother, she makes a list of reasons why her room should be redone. But Mom gives several reasons why redecorating her room at this time is not a good idea. First, money is a concern. Second, they may be moving because Max has asked her to marry him. When Amber learns this, she is dismayed and forgets all about her room. Since Mom and Max have been dating for only a few months, she thinks it is too soon for them to be talking about marriage. Also, she is still hoping her parents will get back together. Amber's mother also has questions about the decision she must make. On the spur of the moment, Mom and Amber go to Alabama to talk things over with Justin's mother, Mom's best friend.

After arriving in Alabama, Amber is excited being with Justin once again. The two children have fun together while Amber's mother talks seriously with Justin's mother. When Amber tells Justin about her mother possibly marrying Max, Justin helps her understand that things always change and that change is normal. Amber finally realizes that her mother is in love with Max and that it may not be so bad to have him in her family. Amber has learned that although some things change, she will always be Amber Brown.

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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 Amber is on the plane, she watches a little girl play with a Barbie doll. What are some reasons that Amber feels jealous of the Barbie doll?

Amber is facing many changes and challenges in her life. As she watches the little girl play, she hears the girl tell the doll that there is nothing to worry about. Amber has so much to worry about: living apart from father, dealing with the possibility of her mother marrying Max, doing her homework, making good grades at school, keeping her hair from getting messy, wondering if she will have to move, and seeing her friend Justin after six months. Amber thinks that for the doll, everything stays the same. The doll does not have to face the worries that Amber has in her life.

Literary Analysis

What are some of the conflicts facing Amber's mother after Max asks her to marry him?

Amber's mother seems to love Max, but she is concerned about bringing him into Amber's life. She knows how much Amber loves her father and that Amber still hopes that her parents will be together again some day. Mom had not intended to fall in love so soon after her divorce from Amber's father, and she is wondering if it is too soon to get married again. Max says he will take a job in California unless Sarah is more committed. This causes Sarah even more conflict since she must make her decision in a hurry.

Inferential Comprehension

When Amber and her mother get back to New Jersey, Mom will most likely tell Max that she has decided to marry him. How do you think Max will respond? How will things change even more for Amber?

Max will most likely be very happy to hear that Sarah has decided to marry him. Once Max and Sarah are engaged, it is likely that Max will spend even more time with Amber and her mother. They will be testing how things will be when they are a family. They will begin talking about which of their homes they will live in or if they will move to a new and different house. Amber will begin to see herself more as a part of the new family with Max as her stepfather. Amber's relationship with her father may also change as Max becomes more involved in Amber's day-to-day activities. She may not feel the need to communicate as much with her father and may also feel somewhat uncomfortable talking to him about things that involve Max. Her hope of getting her parents back together again may also diminish.

Constructing Meaning

What is the main reason that Amber's mother decides to go to visit the Danielses? Why is the Daniels family so important to her at this time?

Amber's mother is overwhelmed by the decision that she must make about marrying Max. She goes to visit the Danielses not only to get away from her environment so she can think more clearly, but also to confide in her best friend, who will help her make this important decision.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Amber makes a game similar to "go fish" called "build your own library," in which she makes cards of authors' books. Have the students work in groups to create a similar game using the characters of the book and four characteristics about each one. For example, the following four characteristics about Justin could be listed: 1. He is a good friend to

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Amber. 2. He likes to play "Whack-a-Mole." 3. He shares a Snap Snot. 4. He teases his little brother. The students can play the game within their group and then trade cards with another group.

Describing Actions or Events In the story, Amber's friend Brandi wants to be a newscaster when she grows up. Have the students work in pairs to create a news broadcast about the events of one chapter of the story. They should write a script and practice the newscast before presenting it to the class. Have each group present its newscast in the order of the chapters to create a continuous flow of the story. You could also have each pair create a visual display to show during their newscast.

Making Inferences On the airplane, Amber and her mother are both writing their own lists of reasons why her mother should and should not marry Max. The reader sees Amber's list, but her mother will not reveal her list. Have each student create a list of what they think Amber's mother's list contains. Then have them write a paragraph explaining why Amber's mother wants to keep her list private. Class discussion should follow focusing on what leads them to believe Amber's mother thinks and feels as she does.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Amber lives in New Jersey, while her friend Justin lives in Alabama. Have the students locate the two states on a map of the United States and then do a research report on each state. The report should include climate, population, major cities, and places of interest.