

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The In-Between Days

by
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Book Information

Eve Bunting, The In-Between Days
Quiz Number: 8696
HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1994
ISBN 0-06-023609-4; LCCN
119 Pages
Book Level: 3.9
Interest Level: MG

A child confronts the death of his mother and his father's remarriage.

Award: State Award

Topics: Family Life, Death; Family Life, Single Parents; Natural Environments, Islands; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Caroline Best a thirty-two-year-old divorcee who visits the island and falls in love with David Bowser

David Bowser a widower with two sons who runs a bike rental shop in the summer tourist season and paints in the winter months

Debbie O'Jibway a cute girl in George's fifth grade class who likes George

George Bowser an eleven year old boy who wrestles with his feelings towards a new woman, Caroline, in his father's life since his mother's death

Harry the Needle the man who determines when it is safe to build the ice bridge across the bay from the island to St. Ann's

James Bowser George's five-year-old brother who warmly welcomes Caroline into his heart and the Bowser home

Tyler Flaherty a friend of George's who is more perceptive than George is of the developing relationships between David and Caroline and Debbie and George

Vocabulary

ferryboat a boat or ship that regularly carries people across a stretch of water

marooned to be stuck somewhere and not able to leave

resent to feel hurt or angry about something that has been done or said to you

sandpiper a small bird with a long bill, long, slender legs, and brown or gray feathers that feeds in flocks by the seashore

wizened to dry up; wither or shrivel

Synopsis

George Bowser is an eleven-year-old boy who lives with his father and brother on an island off the lakeshore of a small city, St. Ann's, a ways north of Chicago. George's mother died shortly after James's birth.

During the tourist season, a woman, Caroline Best, visits the island. George and James befriend her, but George's feelings change toward her when he realizes that his dad is becoming interested in her as a girlfriend. She begins to ferry back and forth to the island every Saturday and spends time with David and his sons. George resents her presence in their lives. Caroline realizes she is easily accepted by James because he was so young when his mother died, but that George's memories are stronger.

Dad invites Caroline to spend Christmas with them, and she agrees to come. During Caroline's visit the weekend before Christmas, George finds himself alone in the house with Caroline. He gives her his gift and she gives one to him. When she opens her present, she finds herself staring at a dead mouse. She quietly buries the mouse and doesn't tell his father what happened and leaves as usual on the ferry that evening.

Caroline is unable to spend Christmas with the Bowsers because her father had fallen ill and she needed to go to Chicago to be with her mother. Caroline tells David that she doesn't know if things will work out and that she might stay in Chicago. Dad replies by saying he will stop calling if she doesn't come back to St. Ann's.

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During the in-between days, George realizes the ways Caroline's presence is still in their home, even if she isn't, and he decides to apologize to Caroline by leaving a message on her answering machine. He asks his father if he can help build the ice-bridge to the mainland. When his dad asks why, he confesses what he had done to Caroline. Caroline is waiting for them on the other side when the bridge is complete.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Dad refers to the days since his wife died as "in-between days." How are these like the "in-between days" on the island?

They are both times of waiting. Since his wife died, Dad has been waiting for real life to begin again--life with the happiness and love he felt before her death. The in-between days on the island are a time of waiting, too. It can give one "rock fever," a sense of aloneness, until movement can freely begin again between the island and the mainland.

Literary Analysis

Caroline responds quietly to George when she receives the mouse and George's dad does the same when George confesses to what he did to Caroline. If the author had chosen to have his characters respond by yelling or lecturing, might this have affected how George reacted?

Probably. With his friends, George seemed sharp-tongued at times. George very likely would have yelled back and gotten defensive. He might have said or done more unpleasant things than he had already. He may have been so resentful that he might never have come to accept Caroline.

Inferential Comprehension

George eventually accepts Caroline as the new person in his father's life. What caused him to do this?

George has come to realize that his father still loves him and that his dad's love for Caroline never was intended to take the place of his love for his mother. He sees that his dad and James are happy with Caroline in their lives, and that he is unhappy when she is not around.

Constructing Meaning

Think of a friend or family member who is dealing with a new person in his/her parent's life? Describe how the child may feel.

The child may display a variety of emotions, ranging from resentment to excitement, wariness to welcoming with open arms. Much depends on the family situation and the age of the child.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story takes place on an island off the coast of a northern Midwest city. For a few weeks each year the island experiences "in-between" days where no one can come to the island and no one can leave. Have the students imagine themselves living on the island and preparing for the in-between days. Write a list of the supplies they would need to get through those few weeks. How would they pass the time? Which books would they choose to read and which hobbies would they pursue?

Understanding Literary Features A main theme in the story is the difficulty often experienced with change. It involves more than the physical reality of having a new person in one's life or living in a new place. It involves very strong feelings. People react differently to change. Have the students look back in their own lives and choose a time of change. They may share a similar experience to George's welcoming a new person into a parent's life; they may have lost a parent or sibling through death or separation; or they may have moved to a new home. Have the students write about the

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experience. What fears of the new situation did they have? Did they do anything out of anger for which they are not proud? How did the change work out? Was it as bad or good as they perceived it would be?

Understanding Characterization George has a keen interest in flight. Caroline recognized this interest and gave George an ornithopter kit for Christmas. It might be fun for the students to research the early history of flight. The ideas for flying machines have been around for much longer than the Wright Brothers. Other activities might include making a time line of early inventions and/or constructing a model of a flight vehicle, either historical or modern.

Understanding the Author's Craft The story was told from George's point of view. How might the story be different if told from Caroline's perspective? Have the students retell, from Caroline's point of view, the part of the story where Caroline receives the mouse from George. What feelings are going through her mind? Why does she choose to say nothing to George's father, David? Retell some other scenes. Discuss if the mood of the story changes when told from this other perspective.