

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

One-Eyed Cat

by
Paula Fox

Book Information

Paula Fox, One-Eyed Cat
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216 Pages
Book Level: 5.4
Interest Level: MG

Ned thinks he may have injured a wild cat when he recklessly fires a forbidden rifle into the dark shadows near the house.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults; ALA Notable/Best Books; Christopher Award; Misc./Other; Newbery Honor; SLJ Best Book

Topics: Behavior, Obedience; Health & Wellness, Accidents/Prevention; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, NY Times Editor's Choice

Main Characters

Billy, Evelyn, Janet neighbor children

Doris Mr. Scully's daughter, who lives out West

Mr. Scully an elderly neighbor for whom Ned works and who cares for the one-eyed cat

Mrs. Kimball a neighbor who takes care of Ned's mother when Mrs. Scallop takes a new job

Mrs. Scallop the Wallises' housekeeper

Mrs. Wallis Ned's mother, who is afflicted with arthritis

Ned Wallis an eleven-year-old boy who shoots a cat in the eye

Reverend Wallis Ned's father, a village minister

Uncle Hilary Ned's uncle, who gives Ned a gun

Vocabulary

catkin a type of flower cluster

meditative a state of quiet reflection

salutary promoting health or producing a beneficial effect

subterfuge concealment or deception

Synopsis

Eleven-year-old Ned Wallis lives outside the village of Tyler, New York, in 1935. An only child, his father is a minister, and his mother is largely bedridden with rheumatoid arthritis. Their housekeeper is Mrs. Scallop.

Uncle Hilary visits and invites Ned to take a trip with him over the coming Christmas holidays. He gives Ned a gun for his birthday. Ned's father says Ned may not have the gun until he is older and puts it in the attic. That night, Ned sneaks the gun outside. He shoots at a shadow without thinking. As he comes back to the house, he thinks he sees a face at the attic window.

A month passes. Ned goes to help Mr. Scully, an elderly neighbor, with chores. A wild cat with a missing eye comes into the yard. Ned is certain he shot the cat.

Mr. Scully puts out food for the cat, and it begins sleeping on the top of an outdoor icebox. Ned worries the cat will freeze in the winter, and Mr. Scully might forget to feed it. The cat becomes ill, but recovers. Ned cannot bring himself to tell his parents what he did. His school grades fall.

One day, Ned finds Mr. Scully lying on the floor, having had a stroke. Mr. Scully is taken to a hospital and then the nursing home where Mrs. Scallop has taken a new job. Ned takes food to the cat; he refuses to go on the trip with Uncle Hilary.

Ned is ill during Christmas; he wishes the cat would die, and when he recovers, he no longer feeds and waters it. He thinks he sees it, though, when he visits the old, abandoned Makepeace mansion.

Ned visits Mr. Scully in the nursing home several times. He confesses that he shot the cat. Mr. Scully cannot speak, but he presses Ned's hand.

Ned's mother begins a new treatment for her arthritis, which offers some relief. Mr. Scully dies. One night, Ned cannot sleep, and goes to the

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Makepeace mansion. His mother finds him sitting on the veranda. She has recovered enough to walk on her own. Ned sees the one-eyed cat. He tells his mother he shot it, and she tells him she saw him that night. She confides that she left home for three months when Ned was three because she was afraid of her husband's goodness. They return home together.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What is the significance of Mr. Scully pressing Ned's hand after Ned confesses he had shot the cat?

Mr. Scully is acknowledging that he heard and understood Ned, and he is presumably trying to comfort Ned.

Literary Analysis

In what way is the name of the Makepeace mansion symbolic?

At the mansion, Ned finally is able to make peace with his shooting of the cat. He sees that the cat has survived and has a family, and he tells his mother what he had done and learns she had seen him that night. His mother also tells him a secret of her own.

Inferential Comprehension

After he realizes he shot the cat, Ned begins to fear animals. Why might he feel this way?

His shooting of the cat causes him guilt, pain, and turmoil. He probably associates all animals with these negative emotions.

Constructing Meaning

After Ned tells Mr. Scully that he had shot the cat, the author writes, "Mr. Scully was going to die; he was leaving Ned perched on the top rung of a ladder built out of lies; the ladder was leaning against nothing." What does the author mean?

Ned told many lies to cover up the shooting and his care of the cat afterward. Now, he had told Mr. Scully his secret, and Ned feels some support from him--he is holding Ned up. Once Mr. Scully dies, Ned will be on his own again.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Ask the students to write an essay on the main conflict in the novel: Ned's struggle within himself over the shooting of the cat. Ask them to describe why Ned is so upset over shooting the cat, and the impact of it on his relationships with his parents, his friends, and himself. Ask them to include their thoughts on why he does not tell his parents, why he whispers while he is feverish that he hopes the cat will die, why he fails to go back to Mr. Scully's house upon his recovery, and why he flings the cat's food bowl. Ask them to describe any long-term changes that would be likely in Ned as a result of shooting the cat.

Understanding Literary Features Initiate a class discussion of the themes presented in *One-Eyed Cat*. Write them on the board. Themes could include the inevitability of death, illness, and change; forgiving one's self for one's imperfections and mistakes; the solace to be found in human communication and relationships; how lies beget more lies. Ask the students to discuss how each major character contributes to the themes they identify.

Understanding Characterization Instruct the students to write a few paragraphs on the character of Mrs. Scallop, including why the author might have included her in the novel, the positive and negative aspects of her character, and why she does not tell Ned that Mr. Scully had died.

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Drawing Conclusions Ask the students to discuss the following questions: Why does Ned's mother choose to tell him about the time she had left him and Ned's father when Ned was young? How does it relate to Ned's situation and the story?