

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Stories Julian Tells

by
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Book Information

Ann Cameron, The Stories Julian Tells

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The imaginative Julian transforms everyday family activities into extraordinary, heartwarming childhood experiences.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Irma and James Black Award/Honors

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Main Characters

Gloria the little girl who is the same age as Julian; she moves into Julian's neighborhood and becomes his best friend

Huey Julian's gullible younger brother, who believes in catalog cats

Julian an imaginative little boy who loves to tell stories

Julian's father Julian's parent who knows about gardening and, like Julian, tells creative stories

Julian's mother Julian's parent who encourages Julian to consider the benefits of his double teeth

Vocabulary

fig a soft, sweet, pear-shaped fruit that grows on a tree; it often has purple flesh

ignorant not having knowledge or education

mastodon a huge elephant-like animal that no longer exists

pliers a tool with a long pincer and two handles, used to bend, cut, turn, and hold things

raft a great number or amount of something

request to ask for something

Synopsis

Julian belongs to a fun-loving, close-knit family. This book recounts six special times in Julian's life.

One afternoon Julian's father decides to make Julian's mother a lemon pudding that tastes "like a night on the sea." After whipping up a beautiful pudding, the father leaves Julian and his younger brother Huey to guard the pudding while he takes a nap. He has told the boys not to touch the pudding, but they cannot resist tasting it and soon most of the pudding is gone. Horrified, they hide under the bed. When Julian's mother returns to find the nearly empty bowl, Julian's father has them make another pudding for their mother.

When Julian and Huey both agree that they would like a garden, Julian's father says he will order a catalog. When Huey asks Julian what a catalog is, Julian mischievously replies that it is a book full of cats that jump out and work in the garden. Huey dreams of the catalog cats until the catalog arrives. The boys sit with their father to look through it, but Huey starts crying when he cannot find the cats. Julian admits that Huey is looking for catalog cats, and Huey recounts Julian's catalog cat story. Julian's father quickly tells the disappointed Huey that catalog cats are invisible. He continues that, since Julian is ignorant about the subject of catalog cats and gardens, Julian did not tell Huey that the cats will only work as hard in the garden as the people work. Huey learns from his father that catalog cats cannot be ordered, so his father gives him paper and pencil to write a request for the cats.

Julian and Huey are actively involved in planting the garden. While the garden contains the usual variety of vegetables, the boys are allowed to select special catalog items to plant as well, as long as they are willing to weed their plants. Huey selects the ten-foot-tall house of flowers, while Julian's choice is the twenty-foot-tall-giant corn. They spend an entire Saturday planting seeds as Julian imagines his catalog cats' presence. Huey falls asleep quickly that night, but Julian slips out to the garden, whispering encouragement to the seeds while the

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imaginary cats watch from the garage roof. The garden is successful but, more importantly, the corn does grow as high as the house and Huey's house of flowers (which are really bean plants) provides food for supper.

Julian's father gives Julian a fig tree for his fourth birthday. He tells Julian the tree will grow with him, but when the tree seems to be growing faster than Julian, Julian eats the tree's new leaves, thinking that the leaves are the key to the tree's successful growth. Julian continues to grow over the next two years, but the tree's growth is stunted. Finally Julian's father decides the tree is defective and should be removed. When Julian objects, his father asks if he knows why the tree is not growing. Julian simply pleads that the tree be given another chance, and his father concedes. That night, Julian promises the tree he will stop eating its leaves. When the tree grows new leaves again, Julian has a dream that the tree is higher than the house and bearing fruit.

When Julian's new tooth comes in before the old one has fallen out, Julian is worried. His father suggests several techniques for removing the old one: pulling it out with pliers, using a thread on a doorknob, or wiggling it out. Julian rejects each method as too painful. His mother consoles him by saying a cave boy would have been happy to have the extra tooth to chew his raw food. Huey suggests that his brother show his classmates his special teeth. Julian goes to school and charges children a penny to look at his cave-boy teeth. However, his money-making opportunity ends in disappointment as he loses his tooth in an apple that afternoon.

One day a lonely Julian sees a moving van in his neighborhood and discovers that a girl his age is moving in. Gloria, the girl, shows Julian that she can do a cartwheel. When Julian falls trying to do one, too, Gloria's tactfulness convinces Julian to accept her. Later Julian and Gloria make a kite so they can fly wishes on it. When the strips of paper containing their wishes are blown out of the kite's tail, Gloria says their wishes will come true. Julian is happy because his wish was for Gloria to stay and be his friend.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Julian feel when he discovers that Gloria is moving into his neighborhood?

Initially, Julian has mixed feelings about Gloria. He knows that having a girl for a friend can subject him to teasing, but he is also bored and lonely because there are no other children his age in the neighborhood. He is not sure he wants to be friends with Gloria and is a bit embarrassed when he falls trying to copy Gloria's cartwheel. After she tactfully reassures him that cartwheels take practice, his attitude changes. He not only accepts Gloria, but hopes she will be his friend and worries that she may move again or choose not to be his friend. At this point he feels hopeful and a bit anxious. After they fly the kite together, Julian starts to feel confident that Gloria will be his best friend.

Literary Analysis

What information about Julian's personality do the six stories reveal?

Julian's most predominant character traits seem to be creativity and sensitivity. Although Julian really enjoys inventing the catalog cat story, he is ashamed that Julian is disappointed when the catalog cats do not arrive. He is delighted that he can grow like his fig tree, but he is again ashamed that his actions caused the fig tree to stop growing. Julian worries about his strange teeth, but he finds a creative way to earn a profit on the same teeth.

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Inferential Comprehension

How are the father's responses to the boys' misbehavior appropriate?

Julian says that he and his brother "shiver to the bottom" of their shoes when their father is angry, but the punishments that his father gives the boys are usually fair and appropriate. When the boys eat their mother's pudding, their father has them make another pudding. When Julian tells Huey a wild tale about catalog cats, their father chastises Julian by referring to his ignorance of cats and gardens. Furthermore, their father consoles a disappointed Huey by claiming that the cats exist but are invisible. In one situation, Julian refuses to accept his father's suggestion that time will take care of his extra tooth. Because Julian continues to complain about the problem, Julian's father offers alternate solutions. He suggests removing the extra tooth by using a pair of pliers, attaching his tooth to a doorknob with a string, or repeatedly wiggling it. Julian stops fussing, acknowledging that waiting is preferable to these other painful solutions.

Constructing Meaning

Do you think Julian should continue telling his stories? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Some students may think that Julian's stories are fun and make life interesting. Others might think that Julian's stories cause too many problems, such as when he convinces his brother that cats come in catalogs. There are also some who may feel uncomfortable when Julian lies to his father, as in his failure to confess why the tree is not growing.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Details The author gives a detailed description of how Julian's father makes the wonderful lemon pudding that tastes "like a night on the sea." Have students locate and bring a recipe for their favorite dessert or other food item. They may use a variety of resources: a parent, grandparent, or other relative, a cookbook, etc. The recipes should be in the student's

handwriting on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. An illustration of the completed dish should also appear with the recipe. The recipes can be reproduced and bound into a class cookbook that can be given to each student.

Understanding the Author's Craft To tease his brother, Julian invents a story about cats that jump out of a catalog. Julian's father alters the story, however, to keep Huey from being disillusioned. Have the students consider what other stories Julian could have invented about a seed catalog and how Julian's father might have to transform the story for a younger child. Have the students rewrite the chapter called "Catalog Cats" using their own inventions.

Responding to Literature Gloria and Julian fly a kite to make their wishes come true. Have the students draw a picture of a kite and, on its tail, write two or more wishes they want to come true. Afterwards, have the students explain in a journal entry or to the rest of the class what their wishes were and why they made them.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The story is rich in figurative language. For example, Julian's father says that the pudding "will taste like a night on the sea." Have each student make a list of five items and then use figurative language to describe each one. Instruct them to focus on sensory images and to avoid clichés. Ask volunteers to read their figurative language aloud. Allow other students to try to guess the object being described.