

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume

Book Information

Judy Blume, Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing
Quiz Number: 294
Dell, 1972
ISBN 0-440-48474-X; LCCN
120 Pages
Book Level: 3.3
Interest Level: MG

Peter Hatcher has a terrible problem--his two-year-old little brother.

Award: Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Community Life, School; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 15, 90%; Family Life, Brothers; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Dribble Peter's pet turtle that survives Fudge's antics until the day Fudge swallows him

Farley Drexel "Fudge" Hatcher the two-year-old terror who gets everyone's attention when he does just about anything he pleases

Jimmy Fargo Peter's friend and classmate, who plays in the park with Peter and works with him on a group project

Mr. Hatcher Peter and Fudge's father, who works at an ad agency and usually leaves child-care duties to his wife

Mrs. Hatcher Peter and Fudge's mother who, according to Peter, loves Fudge more because she gives Fudge most of her attention

Peter Hatcher a nine-year-old, fourth-grade boy who must live amidst the chaos caused by his mischievous two-year-old brother

Sheila Tubman Peter's bossy classmate and rival, who also must work with him on a group project

Vocabulary

brown-and-white saddles leather shoes that are white with the instep crossed by a band of brown leather

cooties germs or "bugs"

dope illegal drugs

monorail a railway in which cars run on a single rail, either balanced on it or suspended from it

mugged attacked

Synopsis

Farley Drexel Hatcher is just as unusual as his name. His older brother, Peter, certainly thinks so, and he's just about had it with his little brother's temper tantrums and stubbornness.

While it is true that Fudge, as Farley is affectionately called, gets most of his parents' attention, it's because he is small and "into everything," and not because they love him more than Peter. But Peter is not convinced. He even wishes that his brother had never been born.

Peter is prompted to think such thoughts after Fudge gets his favorite meal when he refuses to eat for three days, when Fudge throws an embarrassing fit in the shoe store, and after Fudge smears mashed potatoes on the wall of a restaurant.

The worst prank Fudge pulls, however, is swallowing Peter's pet turtle, Dribble. Everyone is concerned about poor Fudge, and no one thinks of poor Dribble or how Peter feels. Fudge recovers after a few tense days, and Peter realizes he's really glad his little brother will be all right.

But, once again, his parents seem to be concerned only about Fudge, and Peter is determined to fend off their weak attempts to make him feel loved. He probably would have succeeded if they hadn't tried to make amends by giving him a dog.

The story comes full circle as Peter, in the end, honors the memory of the pet he acquired as the story began, by naming his new dog "Turtle."

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Both Mr. Yarby and Mr. Vincent treat Peter's father in a bossy and disrespectful manner. Why does the author include these characters? Are they necessary for the story's success?

Having these two "bosses" helps Peter understand some of his father's frustration with Fudge's exploits since they put Mr. Hatcher's livelihood in jeopardy.

Literary Analysis

Why is it important to Peter that his mother spank Fudge after he ruins Peter's poster?

It is significant to Peter because his parents don't believe in spanking Fudge. It is the first meaningful signal to Peter that his mother might see things from his point of view.

Inferential Comprehension

In *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, Peter wishes that Fudge had never been born, and that he could trade in his brother for a cocker spaniel dog. Why do you think Peter feels this way?

Peter is frustrated by Fudge's mischievous behavior. He thinks having no brother at all, or a dog instead of a brother, would erase much of the trouble in his life.

Constructing Meaning

Judy Blume has her characters using persuasive language when dealing with Fudge and his antics. Identify three instances where this happens.

When Fudge won't eat, Mrs. Hatcher asks Peter to stand on his head to help, but he refuses. She asks, "Don't you care if your brother starves?" To persuade Mrs. Hatcher to let her watch Fudge, Sheila says, "I know all about baby-sitting from my sister." Mrs. Hatcher tries to persuade Fudge to put on his good party clothes by saying, "You want to look like a big boy, don't you?"

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The setting for *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* is New York City. The way of life portrayed in this story is shaped by the fact that New York is a large city. Have students recall details from the story that pertain to big-city life, such as living in a large apartment building and riding an elevator every day. Have them make a poster showing these details on one half, and if your students live in a small town or rural setting, you might have them show details of their own lives on the other half of the poster.

Understanding Characterization One of the main characters in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* has a nickname, but the author never tells where it comes from. Have students ask their friends, parents or other family members if they have or once had a nickname and also the reason for it. Then have students ask their friends/classmates to make up appropriate nicknames for each other, telling why they decided on those names. Compile a written list of the best nicknames and have them share the names.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* was written more than twenty-five years ago. Toys that children play with today, such as hand-held electronic games and remote-controlled cars, are different than the jack-in-the-box and wind-up car Fudge received as birthday gifts. Have your students ask as many

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume

younger children as they can (from school, day care, youth group, etc.) what toys they would like to get for a birthday present. Then have them share the results with the class.

Making Predictions The narrator of this story is in fourth grade. The plot revolves around the trouble the fourth-grader's two-year-old brother causes him. Have students make a list of some of the trouble Fudge gets into. Then have them think of a word to describe Fudge in each situation. For example, Fudge scribbles all over Peter's poster. A good word to describe Fudge then might be "creative." Then have students make predictions about how Fudge will act when he is in fourth grade.