

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Tarantula Shoes

by
Tom Birdseye

Book Information

Tom Birdseye, Tarantula Shoes
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131 Pages
Book Level: 4.3
Interest Level: MG

Ryan and his family are moving from Arizona to Kentucky, and he is worried about having to go to a new school, make new friends, and fit in with a new crowd.

Topics: Animals, Arachnids; Emotions, Misc./Other; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Humor/Funny, Funny; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8

Main Characters

Bobbie Jo Webster a girl Ryan's age who has also just moved to Macinburg and is popular with the twins

Ellie and Justin Ryan's twin sister and brother, who will be entering kindergarten

Fang Ryan's pet tarantula, his link to Arizona and the attraction at the shows put on by Ryan to raise money for the Slam Dunk Sky Jumpers

Gordon Schur the new neighbor boy who will be entering junior high in the same class as Ryan

Mom and Dad Ryan's parents

Mrs. Marcosa, Amy minor characters in the story

Quando the name of the spaceman Ellie and Justin claim talked to them on an old radio, and whom they plan to meet

Ryan O'Keefe the principal character in the story, a twelve-year-old boy who has just moved from Arizona to Kentucky with his family

Telly Lewis and Aaron Dexter seventh-grade basketball players who Ryan thinks are cool, and who wear Slam Dunk Sky Jumpers

Vocabulary

exaggerate to say something is more than it really is

tarantula a large, hairy spider that can bite but usually is not poisonous to people

terrarium a container for raising and keeping animals and plants indoors

Synopsis

Ryan's parents move the family to his father's hometown in Kentucky. Ryan, who has lived in Arizona all of his life, is not happy to be in this very different area, even though his parents assure him he will learn to love Kentucky. His uneasiness with the move increases when the neighbor boy, Gordon, tells him their class will be entering junior high school. Ryan decides the way to avoid being picked on is to wear Slam Dunk Sky Jumpers like those of the cool seventh grade basketball players.

Ryan's parents agree to help pay for the expensive shoes, but require Ryan to pay the balance. Ryan raises enough money to buy the shoes at the sale price by doing odd jobs. When he tries to purchase the shoes, he discovers the pair in his size have been sold. The clerk tells Ryan that more will be coming in, but they will be sold at the regular price. The problem becomes how to raise the extra money to pay full price. Ryan follows Gordon's advice and sets up a show featuring his pet tarantula, Fang. All goes well until Bobbie Jo brings a library book with information that contradicts the exaggerations Ryan has used on the signs advertising his show.

Ryan's brother and sister, who are twins, become upset that he doesn't have time for them while he is trying to earn the money for his precious shoes. He comes face to face with his priorities when the twins risk serious injury trying to meet a spaceman they say talked to them on an old radio.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

When Ryan first advertises for people to stop and see the tarantula, Gordon tells him to think business. What does Gordon mean by this?

Gordon thinks it is okay to stretch the truth and do almost anything to keep the profits high.

Literary Analysis

How does Bobbie Jo's attitude toward Ryan change during the course of the book?

Earlier in the book, she challenges him and mocks his shoes. After Ryan rescues the twins and apologizes to her, she seems to treat him with a new respect and enjoys his company.

Inferential Comprehension

Ryan finally raises enough money to buy his shoes, but gets them muddy trying to rescue the twins. Why do you think this doesn't make him angry?

He realizes the twins could have been hurt, and they are more important than shoes with a certain brand name.

Constructing Meaning

Ryan does odd jobs and gives shows to raise money for the shoes. What other ways could he have gotten money to buy the shoes?

He might have set up a car wash or a lemonade stand. (A wide variety of answers are possible. They should reflect realistic ways for a twelve-year-old to raise money.)

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Ryan has just moved to Kentucky from Arizona. At the beginning of the book, he comments how different the plants and animals are in Kentucky from those of Arizona. Make a poster or booklet that shows plants and animals native to Kentucky and plants and animals native to Arizona.

Understanding the Author's Craft Ryan realizes that he left Fang in the tent when he went to

purchase his new shoes. Looking in the tent, he finds that Fang is missing from the terrarium, and he accuses several people of taking Fang. Eventually Ryan finds Fang in his shoe. Write a story as Fang would tell it about what happened from the time he left the terrarium until Ryan found him in his shoe.

Understanding Sequence Ryan learns from Gordon that he will be a sixth-grader in the junior high in Macinburg rather than a sixth-grader in an elementary school as he would have been in Arizona. He feels robbed of the special privileges of being one of the oldest students in the school. Write a follow-up story to *Tarantula Shoes* that tells about Ryan's first week at his new school in Kentucky. Things to consider as you write include who his new friends will be, whether he makes the basketball team and if he has any more adventures with Fang.

Identifying Persuasive Language Ryan feels he needs to look cool the first day at his new school. He thinks Slam Dunk Sky Jumpers will help him be accepted. Unfortunately, they are expensive, and he must earn part of the money to purchase them. He puts on a show with his pet tarantula, Fang, to raise the money. Pretend that you, like Ryan, have put together a show to earn some extra money. Plan what your show will be. Then create a poster, an advertisement or a commercial to convince others to come see your show.