

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman

Book Information

Sid Fleischman, The Whipping Boy

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A bratty prince and his whipping boy have many adventures when they inadvertently trade places.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Newbery Medal; SLJ Best Book

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Main Characters

Betsy a young woman with a pet bear who is traveling to the fair

Captain Nips a man who sells hot potatoes and gives the boys a ride back to city

Cutwater and Hold-Your-Nose Billy two infamous highwaymen who kidnap the boys for ransom

Jemmy an orphan who is used as the royal whipping boy

Petunia a tamed, dancing bear that belongs to Betsy

Prince Brat the young prince who continually misbehaves and allows Jemmy to be whipped in his place

the king the young prince's father

Vocabulary

arrogantly in an overbearingly proud manner

contemplate to consider thoughtfully

contrite sorry for one's sins

defiantly resisting in a bold manner

fathom to understand

paltry worthless

Synopsis

The young prince is known in the kingdom as Prince Brat because of his terrible behavior. He knows he has nothing to fear because it is forbidden to spank or whip him. Instead, a young orphan named Jemmy is whipped in his place. Jemmy, the son of a rat-catcher, longs to run away from his position as the royal whipping boy. He refuses to cry when he is whipped, which truly irritates Prince Brat.

One night, Prince Brat tells Jemmy he is bored and plans to run away. When the boys run off into the night, two highwaymen, Cutwater and Hold-Your-Nose Billy, kidnap them. The men discover they have the prince and decide to hold him in exchange for gold. They want Prince Brat to write a message to the king, but when it is Jemmy who declares he can write, they believe the whipping boy is the true prince. Neither man wants to deliver the message Jemmy writes to the king, so they decide to send Prince Brat, believing he is the whipping boy. But the prince refuses to go, and Jemmy cannot understand why he does not take the opportunity to flee.

While being held captive, Jemmy tries to escape, but he is betrayed when Prince Brat reveals his hiding place. Jemmy then makes a run for it, and the prince follows. Cutwater chases them, but is sidetracked by a bear that belongs to Betsy, a young woman on her way to the fair. She gives the boys directions to the river, where Jemmy tells Prince Brat to return with the soldiers who are searching for the prince. He refuses and says he may never go back.

As Jemmy searches the area for useful items to sell, he helps a man get his coach out of a mudhole. The man, Captain Nips, agrees to take the boys back into the city. However, the two highwaymen once again capture them. Billy whips the prince, still believing he is the whipping boy. The prince bravely makes no sound, and Jemmy does not feel any satisfaction in seeing Prince Brat being whipped. They are rescued when Betsy sees the outlaws whipping the prince and sets Petunia, her bear, on

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them. All three come upon Captain Nips, and he takes them into the city.

Once in the city, Prince Brat learns his subjects do not like him and is upset. The boys then head to the sewers hoping to escape the highwaymen who have followed them. However, they are spied by the outlaws and run deeper into the sewers, where a rat-catcher sends Cutwater and Billy in the wrong direction. The two men are bitten by rats and end up on a convict ship. Prince Brat takes Jemmy, Captain Nips, Betsy, and Petunia back to the castle. He speaks with his father, who thanks Jemmy and places him under the prince's protection, as long as Prince Brat promises to do his lessons and behave himself.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why do you think Prince Brat misbehaves so terribly?

The prince knows he can get away with being naughty because it is against the law to whip him. When the prince misbehaves, Jemmy is whipped in his place. However, it is likely the root of Prince Brat's misbehavior lies in a desire to get his father's attention. He comments, "I might as well be stuffed and hung on the wall like a stag's head -- for all he notices me."

Literary Analysis

Throughout most of the book, Prince Brat and Jemmy do not like each other. They disagree often and at one point, the prince betrays Jemmy by revealing his plan to escape. How does Jemmy react when Prince Brat turns traitor? Tell about a time when you have not gotten along with one of your friends or someone in your family. Have you ever betrayed someone's trust? Did someone betray your trust? How did you react?

Jemmy is furious with the prince's betrayal and is baffled by Prince Brat's action. Students should reveal moments when they have had conflicts with others and the ways they responded to those situations.

Inferential Comprehension

It is evident throughout the book that Prince Brat and Jemmy are very different. What are some of these differences? Do you have a friend who is very different from you? How does that help or hinder your friendship?

Prince Brat has royal privileges. He can do whatever he wants and does not get into trouble. Initially he is selfish, does not think of others, and is not sorry for the terrible things he does. Jemmy, on the other hand, is poor and lives in the sewers of the city. He has to struggle to survive and is the "whipping boy" for Prince Brat. He is responsible and thinks about his decisions before making them. Students should identify differences they have with their friends and consider how differences can help build or strengthen a relationship.

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Constructing Meaning

In chapter sixteen, Prince Brat is whipped by Hold-Your-Nose Billy. Jemmy finds no satisfaction in seeing the prince whipped. How did you feel as you read about the prince's whipping? Did you feel sorry for him? Did you feel he deserved it for all the times Jemmy was whipped because of the prince's behavior?

then write one based on opinions.

Responses will vary depending upon students' personal views of what is fair. Some students may emphasize the justice of the whipping, while others may be more compassionate and forgiving.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story begins in the kingdom of Prince Brat. The book does not reveal the kingdom's name or location. Bring in books about this time period and research social customs of royalty. Students can create a diorama of a castle or describe a typical day in the life of a royal family.

Comparing and Contrasting Divide the class into several small groups. Have students work together to find ways in which Prince Brat and Jemmy are similar and ways in which they are different. Once lists are completed, have students determine which of the boys they are most like and why. This will be difficult, as each boy lives a very different lifestyle from children today. Be sure to remind students they should take similar personalities into consideration.

Describing Actions or Events Cutwater and Hold-Your-Nose Billy mistakenly believe Jemmy is the real prince and Prince Brat is the whipping boy. Have students write a one-paragraph summary for each of the six chapters leading up to this identity switch in chapter seven.

Differentiating Fact and Opinion Jemmy and other characters in the story all have opinions about Prince Brat. Have students work in small groups to create a list of facts and opinions about the prince. Once the list has been made, students can create a short "biography" of Prince Brat based only upon facts from the story. They can