

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The True Colors of Caitlyne Jackson by Carol Lynch Williams

Book Information

Carol Lynch Williams, The True Colors of Caitlyne Jackson

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168 Pages
Book Level: 3.5
Interest Level: MG

Twelve-year-old Caity and her younger sister Cara must fend for themselves when their abusive mother storms out of the house with a suitcase and does not come back.

Topics: Emotions, Misc./Other; Emotions, Sadness; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 12, 90%; Family Life, Death; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Take Charge; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 6-8 (Theme: Surviving); Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA

Main Characters

Aunt Margaret Virginia's sister, who informs her of Caity and Cara's location when she comes looking for them

Brandon Hill Caity's friendly neighbor and classmate who tries to make sure the girls have food after he learns their mother is gone

Caitlyne Elizabeth Jackson (Caity) the mature twelve-year-old girl who struggles to take care of her sister after their mother deserts them

Cara Jackson Caity's younger sister, who is happy that their mother is gone

Doris (Nana) Caity and Cara's generous and kind-hearted grandmother, who takes care of them when they come to her for help

Jennifer Franklin Caity's classmate who resents Caity's relationship with Brandon; she demeans Caity by criticizing Caity's appearance

Kathy Jordyn Caity's classmate and close friend, who refuses to come to her house because she is afraid of Caity's mother

Virginia (Mom) Caity and Cara's abusive mother, who abandons them for the summer

Vocabulary

clenched closed tightly

grubby dirty

panic feel sudden, out-of-control fear

ranted spoke in an angry, wild way

shrill high-pitched and loud

Synopsis

Caity is a poor girl in a wealthy school system, so she is simultaneously delighted and worried when a popular boy invites her to a school dance. She wants to go with Brandon, but she is concerned about the abuse she must face from her classmates for being given this honor. However, the taunting Caity withstands from her classmates pales in comparison to the abuse she takes from her mother, who beats her the night they shop for the dress and then refuses to allow Caity to go when Brandon comes to pick her up. Brandon insists on at least being allowed to walk with Caity the night of the dance. The following night Caity's mother deserts Caity and her younger sister Cara. She says she is leaving for the summer to work on her book.

For a month the girls manage to live on the food in the refrigerator and the small amount of money Mom left them. Brandon helps them, but when his family goes on vacation, the girls are truly alone. After Cara nearly drowns in the lake behind their house, Caity decides they must go to Nana's house. They have resisted making this decision because Mom claims that Nana does not like them.

Since Mom did not pay the phone bill, the girls have to bicycle the long journey to Nana's house. When some men harass the girls, they stop at a farmhouse for help and finally call Nana to ask her to come to get them. Nana is shocked that her daughter has abandoned the girls. She takes them in but requests that they stop telling her about the horrible abuse that Mom has inflicted on them.

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When the summer draws to a close, Mom returns to take the girls back. Cara hides from her, and Caity tries to escape. Mom savagely beats Caity, and the police are called. Mom is taken away, and Nana promises the girls that they can stay with her in the future.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Mr. Burd treat Nana and the girls while they are cleaning his house?

Mr. Burd harasses Nana and the girls while they tend to his cleaning. He demands that they fix his bed a certain way and plump his pillows properly. He criticizes how Caity scrubs the tub and reminds everyone of the effect on his physical comfort if the cleaning is not done correctly.

Literary Analysis

What does Mom's house look like while she is living there?

Caity and Cara are living in squalor. The kitchen is full of dirty dishes. The refrigerator does not usually have enough food in it. Trash is on the floor, and piles of items crowd the hallway.

Inferential Comprehension

How does Mom's behavior make Caity feel small?

Mom frequently accuses Caity of bothering her and acts as if Caity is a burden. She criticizes Caity's appearance and refuses to let Caity buy a dress that looks good on her. Mom calls Caity many names, including "liar" and "sick girl." She claims that no one can bear to be around Caity and that even her grandmother does not like her. She tries to make Caity feel that she deserves the abuse she receives.

Constructing Meaning

Do you think Brandon is right to keep Caity's secret about Mom being gone?

Answers will vary. Some students will feel that Brandon helps the girls stay together by not reporting them to the authorities. Others may feel that Caity and Cara would be safer if Brandon let adults know that the girls had been abandoned.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Sequence At the end of the story, when Caity looks at the picture she made, she realizes that she is a different person than she had been at the beginning of the summer, before her mother left. Have students select five events from the story and create a time line. For each event, have students write two to three sentences explaining how that experience helped Caity grow stronger and more mature.

Understanding the Author's Craft This story is told from Caity's point of view and focuses mainly on her thoughts and feelings. Have the students choose one event and tell it from the point of view of another character in the book.

Making Predictions This story ends with the implication that life is about to change for Caity and Cara. Have the students write a story about what life is like for the girls one year after the events that conclude this book.

Identifying Persuasive Language Nana states that she is going to see about keeping the girls permanently. Have the students write a letter from Nana to the authorities to make the argument that Nana should be the one to raise the girls. Have them include what makes Nana the most appropriate guardian for Caity and Cara.