

Shiloh Critical Literacy Unit

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Rationale:

From the time I read this novel as a fifth grader, I have always been intrigued by the intense moral dilemma that Marty faces over the well-being of an animal versus the acts of lying and stealing. This novel brings such issues as abuse, lying, stealing, and justice into the open. This is why I believe this novel lays an excellent groundwork for students' critical thought. This will be a new unit, that I have never taught before.

Objective:

Students will gain exposure to the social issue of animal cruelty. Students will debate the right course of action for the main character, Marty (should he steal to protect an animal or abide by the law and allow animal cruelty to continue?). Students will journal and discuss various thought provoking questions throughout the unit. Students will complete a social justice community project at the end of the unit.

Timeline:

This unit will take approximately 3 weeks to complete including time for students to work on their final projects.

Anticipatory set:

Students will discuss the following scenario:

Imagine one of your friends is being bullied at school. Your friend decides that he or she is going to skip an important class he or she shares with the bullies because after this class, the bullies have threatened to harm your friend. The teacher's interventions with the bullies have been unsuccessful and the teacher has made it clear to your friend that he or she cannot skip anymore classes without failing. When the teacher asks you where your friend is, do you tell the truth to protect your friend from failing the class and being harmed by the bullies or do you risk getting in trouble yourself and lie about your friend's whereabouts to the teacher?

Vocabulary:

Themes: honesty, responsibility, truth /shades of gray, justice

Chapter questions (all questions directly from www.scholastic.com):

Chapter 1:

How do you know that Marty likes animals?

Why isn't Marty's family allowed to have pets?

What does it mean when Marty gives the dog a name?

Chapter 2:

How does Marty's dad react when Marty tells him that Shiloh has ticks?

If you were Marty, do you think you would be able to mind your own business regarding Judd and Shiloh?

How would you feel about having to leave a dog with Judd Travers?

Chapter 3:

What does it say about Judd Travers' character that he doesn't name his dogs?

Do you think that Marty should have told Judd Travers that the dog's name was Shiloh?

Why or why not?

Chapter 4:

Do you think Marty was right to take Shiloh home and hide him? What would you have done?

Marty does not bring Shiloh back to Judd as he said he would. Is it ever right to break a promise?

After Shiloh returns, Marty sleeps through the night for the first time in a while. Why?

Chapter 5:

Do you think Marty is right to sneak food from his house for Shiloh?

Judd Travers says, "he wasn't such a good hunting dog, I would have shot him by now." What do you think this comment will do to Marty's determination to keep Shiloh? What would you do?

Chapter 6:

Do you think it's okay to lie to some people but not to others? Is it okay for Marty to lie to Judd? Is it okay for him to lie to his family?

What does Judd tell Marty in this chapter that helps explain the man's character?

Do you think Judd Travers is suspicious of Marty? Do you think you would be?

Chapter 7:

Why doesn't Marty tell David about Shiloh?

After asking for more cookies for the walk home to give to Shiloh, Marty says to himself, "Seems I'm at the point where I'll do most anything for Shiloh... And right and wrong's all mixed up in my head." Do you think there are any easy answers for Marty? For anyone?

Chapter 8:

Marty thinks, "Having Shiloh a secret is like a bomb waiting to go off." Do you think all secrets are like that?

What do you think is going to happen after Marty's mother finds Marty and Shiloh on the hill?

Chapter 9:

Do you think Marty's mother should tell his father about Shiloh?

Why does Marty feel both relieved and scared that his mom found out about Shiloh?

How do you think Marty feels about Shiloh getting hurt when he was supposed to be taking care of him?

What do you think Marty's dad is going to do with the injured dog?

Chapter 10:

Why does Marty's dad make Marty tell Doc Murphy what happened?

Why does Marty's dad think that Marty must be keeping other things from him?

How do you know what's right and wrong? Do you agree with Marty's dad that you have to go by the law?

Chapter 11:

What are some bad things that resulted from Marty's keeping Shiloh?

How does Marty feel after he tells David all about Shiloh and what happened to him?

Does having a friend to talk with usually make things easier?

Chapter 12:

Why did Marty's dad make him tell Judd Travers what happened when Judd came and found Shiloh in their house?

Do you think there's any chance now that Judd will let Marty have the dog? Do you think there's any chance Marty will give him up? Can you imagine any solution to this problem?

Chapter 13:

Do you think Marty is wise to go alone to Judd Travers' place early in the morning? Do you think Judd would harm Marty?

How might seeing Judd Travers shoot the young doe help Marty keep Shiloh?

Chapter 14:

Do you think it's right for Marty to blackmail Judd Travers in order to keep Shiloh?

How is Marty putting other deer in danger by letting Judd get away with killing this doe?

Marty says this is and isn't the best day of his life. Why?

Do you think Marty's troubles with Judd are over?

Chapter 15:

Do you think Marty should have told his mother and father exactly what happened with Judd? What would you have told your parents if you were in Marty's position?

Why does Marty feel sorry for Judd? Do you?

Marty says, "Nothing is as simple as you guess." Do you agree? What happens between Marty and Shiloh to support this statement?

Unit Plan Details:

Each day, students will be responsible for reading two chapters and completing the corresponding questions above in their journals. After students have answered the questions individually, they will be given the opportunity to discuss their answers in their literature circles. Every Friday, students will be given extra time to catch up if they have fallen behind with the reading and to discuss the major themes as a class either in written essay form or in verbal discussion (more on this below). The ASPCA recommends the following guidelines when discussing animal cruelty with children:

Discussing Animal Cruelty with Children Ages Six to Ten:

With most children who are six to ten years old, you can begin to discuss why someone might be mean to an animal—as long as you make sure the child always keeps in mind that it is wrong to hurt animals. In addition, do not let discussions of animal cruelty satisfy the morbid curiosity some children of this age may have. Children of this age often form some of their earliest memories and impressions about the state of the world beyond their families. It is very important that adults filter what these children perceive! Even if children witness violence as a "bad example" or as a way NOT to act, they are still witnessing violence, and can be strongly affected by it.

Discussing Animal Cruelty with Children Ages 10 to 14

Many children between 10 and 14 are exploring their self-image and reflecting upon their relationships with others. Studies indicate that children of this age are still strongly affected by violence, so discussions about animal cruelty should still be kept free of details about the violence. Nonetheless, the issue can be raised directly—if delicately—with most of these children. Adults should make it clear that they do not condone violence in their own thoughts and behavior. Children of this age are finely attuned to the words and actions of adults, and still rely on them as role models.

<http://www.asPCA.org/fight-animal-cruelty/talking-to-kids-about-animal.aspx>

Parents, teachers, and trusted adults can also discuss with 10- to 14-year-olds how they would act if their peers or friends treated animals cruelly. By couching the advice in terms of what you would do if you were in a given situation, you can help children overcome peer pressure and follow what they know is right. These children may encounter others abusing animals—knowing that they are in the right and will be supported for standing up to it is very important at this age of strong peer pressure.

With these guidelines in mind, students will be given the following discussion/essay questions:

Chapter 1-6 discussion/ essay question (these questions are either based on or taken directly from www.scholastic.com):

How important is honesty? What are some of the lies Marty has told already? Do you think he will have to continue to lie (what are some lies you think he will tell)? Do you think Marty was wrong to lie? Is it ever right to lie?

Chapter 7-14 discussion/ essay question:

Do you agree with Marty that "nothing is as simple as you guess"? What experiences have you had in which right and wrong were not black and white, but shades of gray?

Chapter 15/ overarching book themes:

What is an ally? How is Marty an ally for Shiloh? Have you ever stood up for someone or something you believed in as Marty did?

Or

Should Marty have obeyed the law (as his father suggested) or taken Shiloh in order to protect him?

Students will be responsible for completing one written essay over the course of the unit. They may choose, of the three discussions, which one they will complete in written form and which two they will complete through discussion. Students will be marked on participation points (minimum participation= at least one new comment and two responses to a comment from another student, totaling three contributions all together).

End of unit project:

In Reading, Writing, and Rising Up, Linda Christensen advocates for teaching students about social justice issues. She writes, "This lesson deals with small-scale injustice where an ally can help stop the abuse of an individual. But larger structures of exploitation and domination remain. Allies also need to work on bigger, society-wide change. Students must understand the need to struggle on both the personal and societal levels (82)." This scenario is true in teaching Shiloh. This novel represents a smaller scale of a societal issue. Students must then also learn to deal with abuse on a societal level. Therefore, as an end of unit project, students will research and present on animal abuse. Their presentations will be given to other, grade-level, classes.

To help students understand the transition from small to large scale, the class will discuss the validity of the following statement:

According to an animal rights organization out of Washington state, www.paws.org, "people who abuse animals are more likely to hurt other people. This is why it's so important to report animal abuse. Not only will you help the animal, but you help your community be a safer place for everyone."

Students will then research (internet and books) to create a presentation (poster or powerpoint) on the signs of abuse and what should be done to prevent abuse. These presentations will be given to grade level peers.

Finally, the class will take a field trip to a local animal shelter to volunteer for a day. The purpose for this trip is to give students a perspective of what potentially abused animals look like, the work involved with caring for them, and to witness positive role-models in the adults working in the shelter.

Cross-curricular connections:

Math: geometry

Just the Right Size: Why Big Animals are Big and Little Animals are Little by Nicola Davies

Careers/ Social Studies: Social issues

Animal Rights Activist (Get Involved!) by Carrie Gleason

Further reading:

Beautiful Joe by Marshall Saunders (abuse from the perspective of a dog)

Shiloh Season by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Resources:

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2000. Print.

Paws people helping animals. N.p., 2011. Web. 27 Apr. 2011. <www.paws.org/kids.HTML>.

Sanderson, Jeanette. "A Reading Guide to *Shiloh*." *Scholastic*. Scholastic Inc., July 2003. Web. 13 Apr. 2011.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. N.p., 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2011. <www.ASPCA.org>.