

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Extra Credit

by

Andrew Clements

Book Information

Andrew Clements, Extra Credit
Quiz Number: 130571
Atheneum, 2009
ISBN 978-1-4169-4929-9; LCCN
183 Pages
Book Level: 5.3
Interest Level: MG

As letters flow back and forth between the prairies of Illinois and the mountains of Afghanistan, across cultural and religious divides, sixth-grader Abby, ten-year-old Amira, and eleven-year-old Sadeed begin to speak and listen to each other.

Award: Christopher Award; Parent's Choice Award/Honor Book

Topics: Countries/Regions, Afghanistan; Diaries/Journals/Letters, Diaries/Journals/Letters (All); Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Recommended Reading, Book Links Lasting Connections; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2009 Summer Elementary; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2009 Summer Jr./Sr. High; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; U.S. States/Regions, Illinois

Main Characters

Abby Carson a sixth-grade girl who writes letters to a pen pal in Afghanistan as part of an extra-credit project

Akbar Khan the headman of Bahar-Lan, Sadeed's village

Amira Sadeed's younger sister, who is chosen to be Abby's pen pal, with Sadeed's help

Hassan Jaji a councilor in Sadeed's village, Bahar-Lan, who opposes the letter writing

Mahmood Jafari Sadeed's teacher

Mrs. Beckland Abby's language arts and social studies teacher, who gives her the extra-credit project

Najeeb Sadeed's friend

Sadeed Bayat a boy in Afghanistan, skillful with the English language, who corresponds with Abby

Vocabulary

academic scholastic or scholarly; having to do with learning or school

bazaar a marketplace or fair in Eastern or Middle Eastern countries; an event or place where a variety of goods are bought and sold

confident having trust or certainty; having a belief in another or oneself

hatchet a hand-held tool for chopping; a small ax
oral spoken; vocal; told or voiced

pointless neither having nor serving a purpose; without a use; without meaning; having or making little or no sense

promoted given or assigned a higher position or rank; advanced

squinted narrowed the eyes into slits; looked through narrowed eyes; peeked or peeped

traditions customs; practices; habits

turban a headdress made by wrapping a long scarf or cloth around the head

Synopsis

Abby Carson lives in Linsdale, Illinois, and loves the outdoors and climbing more than doing schoolwork. She is in danger of failing sixth grade and must meet certain conditions in order to pass. As part of these conditions, she chooses an extra-credit project that involves becoming a pen pal with someone in another country. She chooses Afghanistan because of the mountains there.

When Abby's first letter arrives at a small school in Afghanistan, things become complicated. The student most qualified to write the letters going back to America is a boy named Sadeed. In his village, however, it is considered inappropriate for a boy to correspond with a girl. It is decided that Sadeed's sister, Amira, will respond to the letters, with Sadeed overseeing her efforts. Jealous of the attention Amira is receiving and dissatisfied with her dull letters, Sadeed decides to secretly send Abby a letter from himself. He asks her to keep it a secret

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and not reply to it. She does but ingeniously includes comments in her letters to Amira that are specifically for Sadeed.

The friendship between Abby and Sadeed begins to blossom until the letter-writing is brought to a sudden stop by the elders in Sadeed's village. A stranger who sees Sadeed with a letter from America threatens him, and the elders fear that it could mean trouble for their village. Fearing a terrorist attack, they put an end to the letter exchange.

Although Abby has not exchanged the required number of letters with her pen pal, she completes the project and meets the other conditions for passing on to seventh grade.

Through the letter exchange, the children in both countries learn about each other's cultures. They discover that although they are different, they also have many things in common.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Inferential Comprehension

How were Sadeed and Abby alike? How were they different?

Both enjoyed the outdoors. Both had a sibling. Both liked FROG AND TOAD ARE FRIENDS. Sadeed was a good student, but Abby struggled. Sadeed's village was not very modern compared to where Abby lived. Sadeed lived in a place that was dangerous, while Abby lived in a place that was safe. Abby liked the mountains, but Sadeed saw them as a problem. Later, he experienced rock climbing and began to feel more as Abby did.

Constructing Meaning

Would you like to live in a village like Sadeed's? Why or why not?

Answers will vary but should show an understanding of what Sadeed's village was like and give reasons for the students' choices.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors

Understanding Historical and Cultural Factors

Understanding Characterization Understanding Characterization

Recognizing Cause and Effect Recognizing Cause and Effect

Comparing and Contrasting Compare and Contrast