

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Fade Far Away

by

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Book Information

Francess Lantz, Fade Far Away

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Interest Level: UG

When Sienna's father is diagnosed with a grave illness, he tries to make up time not spent with her and realizes they had a lot more in common than he ever knew.

Topics: Family Life, Daughters; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Illness

Main Characters

Caleb Hanlon a local fisherman who helps Hugh and Sienna get to the island

Evelyn Fadulo Hugh's agent, who allows Hugh and Sienna to stay at her home

Hugh Scully Sienna's artistic father, who battles a brain tumor

Liesel the Scullys' housekeeper

Marianna Scully Sienna's mother, who manages all of her husband's business affairs

Sienna Scully a teenage girl who discovers her own identity and strength while trying to connect with her dying father

Vocabulary

chemotherapy the treatment of disease with chemicals

ingot a casting mold for metal

malignant threatening to life or health

skiff a flat-bottomed boat

tumor a swollen growth

Synopsis

Fifteen-year-old Sienna Scully is a shy girl who is disconnected from her parents. She spends most of her time sketching in her sketchbook, hidden from view. Her father, Hugh, is a famous bronze sculptor.

Marianna, Sienna's mother, is completely absorbed in Hugh's career.

One day, when Hugh is rushed to the hospital after collapsing, it is discovered that he has a brain tumor. Marianna, ever his greatest muse and critic, attempts to convince Hugh that his disease is not going to affect his art. When Marianna goes to Los Angeles to unpack some items in Hugh's new art installation, Hugh tells Sienna that he has seen another doctor behind Marianna's back and has learned the tumor is malignant. He asks Sienna to accompany him to their cabin on an island in Maine. Sienna agrees, thinking she will finally get a chance to connect with her father.

On the way to the cabin, Hugh stops at the home of Evelyn Fadulo, Hugh's art agent. When the two arrive at Evelyn's door, they are greeted with surprise. They agree to spend the night, and Sienna witnesses Hugh and Evelyn kissing. She is very confused and angered by the sight.

The next day Hugh and Sienna visit the Museum of Modern Art. Hugh and Sienna actually seem to bond over some of the paintings, which pleases her. At a nearby diner, Hugh and Sienna discuss his past, a subject that Sienna is surprised he shares with her. When Hugh pays for the bill, he starts to feel as if the room is spinning. Refusing to give in to his illness, Hugh suggests they attend a local art opening. At the gallery, Hugh becomes dizzy and loses his balance. He allows people to think that he has had too much to drink because no one knows about his tumor.

Hugh and Sienna hurriedly leave the gallery, and Hugh runs back to the museum. The museum is closed, but Hugh pounds on the door demanding to see the Kandinskys. Sienna flags a taxi and brings Hugh back to their car. He is too sick and out of control to drive, so Sienna is forced to drive out of the city. She stops in a parking lot with the intent to call her mother, but reconsiders and stops herself. Hugh then goes into a seizure and Sienna has to take him to the hospital. The doctors give Hugh some painkillers, and Sienna and Hugh continue

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their drive to Maine.

When they arrive in Maine, Hugh and Sienna go to a local eatery. Hugh tries to persuade the local fishermen to take him to the island, but they refuse because a storm is coming. Eventually, Caleb Hanlon offers to take Hugh to the island. Sienna is furious because she wants to go with Hugh, but he will not allow it. Sienna steals a skiff and tries to get to the island herself. When she fails, she returns to shore and calls her mother. She leaves a message about their whereabouts and tells Marianna to come right away. Caleb approaches Sienna and eventually decides to bring her to the island despite the rough water.

On the island, Hugh and Sienna debate his future and his love for her. Hugh tells Sienna that he wants to reach out to her, which makes Sienna feel very loved. Over a bowl of clam chowder, the two discuss their art. The next day, Hugh decides to open his studio on the island. He and Sienna talk about art again, and Hugh asks Sienna to draw him.

The next day, Hugh asks Sienna to go to the mainland and get some oil paints for him. She and Caleb go, and she calls her housekeeper. Sienna lies and tells Liesel that she and Hugh are heading north. When Sienna and Caleb return to the island, they notice wooden flowers in the snow that are painted with brilliant colors. Sienna rushes to find her father, only to discover that he has committed suicide by walking into the ocean. Sienna is somewhat comforted to know that her father has ended his life the way he wanted to. When she returns home, Sienna realizes Hugh intended her to have the new oil paints, and she decides to start painting.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When Hugh and Sienna stay at Evelyn's home, Sienna sees her father kiss Evelyn. How does Sienna react to this? What seems to bother her the most? Do you think she acts appropriately for the situation?

Sienna is surprised and angered by the kiss. She is convinced that her father is betraying her mother. She later confronts her father and learns the true nature of her parents' relationship. Students' opinions of her actions will vary, but many would probably feel the same way she did if they witnessed one parent being unfaithful to another.

Literary Analysis

Throughout the last half of the story, Hugh wants to go to Maine to die. Why do you think this setting is important to Hugh?

The island in Maine has always been a place of good memories and creativity for Hugh. It is a place where his somewhat overbearing wife, Marianna, does not frequent. By choosing this island, Hugh surrounds his last days with happy memories. Marianna does not bother him, and he may die at his own pace.

Inferential Comprehension

During the course of the novel, Sienna is forced to make many difficult decisions concerning her father. Examine the choices that Sienna makes. What alternatives does Sienna face? If she had made different decisions, how might the story have changed?

There are many possible answers to these questions. If Sienna had stayed home instead of helping her father reach the island, he may have died at the studio or found another way to reach the island. Sienna also chooses not to tell her mother about Hugh's plans. If she had revealed their plans, Marianna would have undoubtedly done everything she could to prevent Hugh from dying in peace. Without the trip to the island, Sienna would not have met Caleb and may not have grown enough to be able to open up to the world.

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Constructing Meaning

When Sienna feels uncomfortable and out of place, she turns to her sketchbook. What do you do when you are uncomfortable? How does this activity bring you comfort?

Each student will have a different answer. Some students may draw or write about their feelings. Other students may play a musical instrument or do a physical activity. Some students may seek the company of their friends or family, while others may seek solitude.

Teachable Skills

Describing Actions or Events In this story, Hugh is afflicted with a brain tumor. Ask your students to research brain tumors and discuss their findings in class.

Responding to Literature Ask students to choose the scene in the story that is the most frightening and uncomfortable to them. Then, ask the students to write a short response explaining why they felt frightened when they read that scene.

Recognizing Setting Provide a blank map of the following states: New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. Then divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to plot Sienna's course to Birch Cove Island. They should include Manhattan, Portland, and Route 1.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Ask a local artist to come to your classroom and talk about his or her occupation. Then, provide your students with paints, crayons, pencils, or clay and ask them to create something that reminds them of the story. They could create a picture of the wooden flowers, a boat, the cabin, or even a sculpture like Hugh's.