

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Flip-Flop Girl

by  
Katherine Paterson

### Book Information

Katherine Paterson, Flip-Flop Girl  
Quiz Number: 10244  
Puffin, 1994  
ISBN 0-14-037679-8; LCCN  
120 Pages  
Book Level: 4.6  
Interest Level: MG

A nine-year-old girl comes to terms with death and shattered dreams after her father's illness.

**Award:** ABA Children's Book Council; ALA Notable/Best Books; SLJ Best Book; State Award

**Topics:** Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Death; Family Life, Illness; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Family Life, Sisters; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice

### Main Characters

Dr. Munchen the principal of Vinnie's school

Grace Matthews (Momma) Vinnie and Mason's mother who is newly widowed

Grandma Vinnie's and Mason's step-grandmother who offers to share her house after Daddy's death

Heather a girl in Vinnie's class who is told to help Vinnie find things at the new school

Lavinia Matthews (Vinnie) the principal character in the story, a nine-year-old girl who must move after the death of her father

Maria Guadalupe Mahoney (Lupe) a girl in Vinnie's class who, because of her father's arrest, lives outside of town with her grandmother

Mason Matthews Vinnie's five-year-old brother who has been mute since his father's funeral

Mr. Clayton Vinnie's teacher

Mr. Sharp the assistant principal of Vinnie's school

Mrs. Paxton Mason's teacher

### Vocabulary

**machete** a large heavy knife

**malicious** a desire to cause suffering

**noxious** physically harmful to living beings  
**vandalism** willful destruction or defacing of public property  
**variegated** having markings of different colors

### Synopsis

Vinnie Matthews is a nine-year-old girl whose father has just died. Her five-year-old brother, Mason, has been mute since his father's funeral.

Following the funeral, for financial reasons, Vinnie, Mason and their mother move from Washington, D.C., to Brownsville, Virginia, to live with Vinnie and Mason's step-grandmother. Vinnie and Mason begin attending a new school and try to cope with the changes in their lives. Vinnie is angry and jealous because Mason seems to get all the attention.

At school, Vinnie meets Lupe - a girl who also lives with her grandmother and has no father in the home. Vinnie and Lupe become friends, but the friendship is strained when Vinnie scratches her teacher's car and Lupe is blamed for it.

While trying to deal with her guilt, Vinnie tells Mason she never wants to see him again and Mason runs away. Lupe and Vinnie rescue Mason from a railroad trestle, and the book ends with Vinnie and Mason sharing memories of Daddy.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

Why was Vinnie pleased to have Mr. Clayton for a teacher?

*Correct answers will probably include at least one of the following: Mr. Clayton was nice and reminded her of Daddy; Mr. Clayton liked her; she met Lupe in his class; she was far away from Mason's classroom.*

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#### Literary Analysis

How did Vinnie change during the course of the book?

*She becomes more accepting of her father's death and her move to Virginia; she learns not to prejudge people; she realizes she can and should help Mason remember Daddy; and she stops being angry at Mason.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Why did Lupe tell Vinnie she didn't have to tell Mr. Clayton what she had done?

*Lupe didn't care if Mr. Sharp thought she was guilty because she knew she was innocent, and Lupe didn't want Vinnie to get into trouble.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Think of a time when you were angry because you felt someone had betrayed your trust. How was your reaction like Vinnie's? How was it different?

*Correct answers will vary. Vinnie became angry and decided to get revenge. The fact that she wrote her initials without realizing it shows she may have wanted Mr. Clayton to know who was responsible.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Plot** This story is about Vinnie's trying to adjust to the many changes in her life following the death of her father. Have the students identify a major change in their lives (moving, the birth of a sibling, the death of someone they knew, a parent's unemployment, etc.) and write a one page paper describing the event, explaining their feelings about the event, recounting how their lives changed and how they coped with that change.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** In the story, the author tells us more about how Vinnie feels than about the feelings of any other character. For example, we know Vinnie feels Mason is receiving a lot of attention and is being fussed over way too much. Have the students pick an event from the book and write it from another

character's point of view. For instance, how did Vinnie's mother feel when she realized Mason had not spoken since the funeral? How did Vinnie's grandma feel when she found Vinnie in the laundry hamper? How did Mason feel when he left the store? Let the students read their papers aloud and let the other students try to identify which character's point of view it is. Have them identify what clues they used to come to their conclusions.

**Comparing and Contrasting** In the story, Vinnie and Lupe have some things in common. Both live with their grandmothers; both have no father in their home; both live in the same town and are in the same class in school. But there are also some differences. Have the students compare and contrast Vinnie's life with Lupe's life. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What situations or feelings of Vinnie's or Lupe's are similar to those experienced by the student?

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** In the story, the author writes that to Vinnie, asking to join Lupe in hopscotch would be like "asking the Wicked Witch of the West if you could play with her monkeys." A simile is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things using "like" or "as" (black as the night ... eyes like sapphires). Make a list of twelve nouns. Have the students create similes using pairs of the words. Example: morning - paper: Morning is like a blank sheet of paper because they are both unmarked and waiting to be filled.