

Hannah

by
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Book Information

Gloria Whelan, Hannah
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Hannah, a blind girl living in Michigan in the late nineteenth century, doesn't go to school until a new teacher comes to board at their house.

Topics: Community Life, School; Disabilities, Vision Impaired/Blind; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Carl Kleino a classmate, who teases Hannah at school and later helps her to win the potato harvest contest

Effie classmate of Hannah

Hannah Thomas the principal character of the story, a nine-year-old blind girl who has a talent for telling creative stories

Johnny Thomas the six-year-old brother of Hannah

Mama Hannah's mother, who wanted Hannah to stay home from school to keep her company

Miss Lydia Robbin the new schoolteacher, who lives with the Thomases and helps Hannah to learn and to become more independent

Papa Hannah's father

Verna Thomas the eleven-year-old sister of Hannah

Vocabulary

abacus a frame with beads that slide on wires or in grooves, used to add, subtract, multiply, or divide

Braille a system of printing for blind people in which the letters are formed by raised dots

privy an outdoor toilet

pupil a student; a person who is studying in school or with a teacher

slate a small chalkboard used by students in the 1800s to write their lessons

stylus a sharp, pointed tool used for writing, marking, or engraving

Synopsis

Hannah Thomas is a nine-year-old girl who lives on a Michigan farm in 1887. Because she is blind, Hannah is treated differently than her siblings, Verna and Johnny. People often call her "poor Hannah." Then Miss Robbin, the new schoolteacher, comes to live with the Thomases. Miss Robbin has different expectations of Hannah. She teaches her to put her finger into her cup so she can pour her own milk. She shows her how to get around the farm by counting her steps, and she persuades Mama and Papa to let her go to school.

Hannah has a difficult first day at school. Carl teases her about her unkempt appearance. She throws a book at him, and he trips her. Later, Verna jumps rope with the other girls and leaves Hannah standing alone. Hannah runs away from school and becomes lost in the woods. After he finds her, Papa realizes Hannah needs school to help her become independent. Miss Robbin sews a pretty dress for her to give her the courage to return to school, and Mama gives her a haircut and a new hair bow.

Hannah's return to school is successful. She is able to answer many of Miss Robbin's questions because she is used to listening carefully. The girls compliment her on her appearance, and Carl apologizes to her. Hannah is now excited about school. Miss Robbin teaches her how to count on an abacus and tells her about a Braille machine for writing that costs five dollars. Hannah would love to have the machine, but her family cannot afford it.

In late October, the kids are given a few days off from school to participate in the potato harvest. Aside from Christmas, the potato harvest is the biggest celebration of the year. The families share big meals, sing, dance, and have a contest to see

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who can harvest the most potatoes. Hannah wins the contest and the five dollar prize. Carl had asked all the kids to put their potatoes in Hannah's basket so she could purchase the Braille machine. Hannah is thrilled. This is the best day of her life, and soon she will be able to write about it.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When they awarded the prize to Hannah, Carl was nowhere in sight. What reason did Miss Robbin give for Carl running off?

He did not want to lose his reputation for being a bad boy.

Literary Analysis

In the beginning of the story, Hannah was called "poor Hannah." Do you think the other characters saw her as "poor Hannah" in the end? Explain your answer.

They would not call her "poor Hannah" in the end. In the beginning, everyone focused on her disability. By the end, they saw her ability, as shown by their willingness to let Hannah win money for the Braille writer. They wanted her to have the Braille writer because they had confidence in her ability to learn.

Inferential Comprehension

How was Carl like Mama?

Answers may vary. Some students might feel Carl was like Mama because neither of them liked to show emotion. Carl and Mama both underestimated Hannah's ability at first, and they saw her need to become independent by the end.

Constructing Meaning

Which part of the story made you most happy? Why?

Answers will vary. Most people will think the end is the happiest. Not only did Hannah win enough money for the Braille machine, but the efforts of her classmates showed that they accepted her.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Miss Robbin was determined to use the modern technology of the time to help Hannah read. She planned to use Braille books and encouraged Hannah to hope for a Braille writer. The Braille system is still in use today in a slightly modified form, and watches, decks of cards, and other useful things are made using Braille. Blind people are also helped by Seeing Eye dogs and computers with voice-activated software. Students would find it interesting to learn about the technology that is available to blind people. Borrow a Braille book from the library to show the class. Contact the National Federation for the Blind to learn more about blindness, and invite a knowledgeable person to talk to the class. It might also be fun for the class to raise money for Braille books or other educational aids for a blind person.

Recognizing Details Hannah told Miss Robbin a story about Billy the horse, who could take a rider to see wonderful places and wonderful things. The story seems especially imaginative when you consider that Hannah was blind. Ask the students to use their imaginations to write a story about something that would take them to see wonderful places and things. What would they ride on? Where would they go? Remind them to use many details so the reader can see what they have written. Another twist to this activity would be to have each student draw a picture of a magical place. Ask each student to write a detailed description of his or her picture. Before the pictures are shown, divide the class into groups of two. Have each student read his or her description to a partner. The partner will draw a

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picture based on the description. Compare the partner's picture to the reader's picture.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Hannah had a wonderful imagination, which the author demonstrated by her use of similes. For example, Hannah thought Miss Robbin might be "heaped into a round, soft shape like the big pile of laundry Mom does on Mondays, or she might be tall and straight and hard like the oak tree that grows next to the porch." A character with less imagination would wonder if Miss Robbin would be short and heavy, or tall and thin. Find other examples of similes in the book. Discuss how similes can say more than a plain description using adjectives. Find an object for the students to describe. First, describe the object using adjectives only. Next, ask the students to describe the object with a simile. It might be fun to blindfold the students and ask them to describe an object based on the way it feels.

Responding to Literature Before Miss Robbin came to stay with the Thomases, most of the characters greatly underestimated Hannah's ability. Later, Hannah was able to answer many questions in school because she was used to listening carefully and memorizing what she had heard. The students might want to test their ability at listening by covering their eyes or wearing a blindfold while a paragraph or story is read. Ask questions about what was read. Repeat the exercise several times so students can practice careful listening.