

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World

by
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Book Information

Mildred Pitts Walter, Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World

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Book Level: 3.9

Interest Level: MG

Suffering in a family full of females, Justin learns real lessons in what "women's work" is, when he spends time on his beloved grandfather's ranch.

Award: Coretta Scott King Award/Honors

Topics: Emotions, Misc./Other; Family Life, Grandparents; People, African American; Places, Countryside/Rural; Places, Farms; Places, Ranches; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3

Main Characters

Anthony Justin's best friend

Evelyn the older of Justin's two sisters

Grandpa Mama's father and Justin's grandpa, who owns and lives on a ranch; Justin's favorite person

Hadiya the younger of Justin's two sisters

Justin the principal character of the story, a ten-year-old boy who lives with his mama and two older sisters

Mama Justin's mother

Vocabulary

prosperous having success

sorghum a syrup made from a grain of the same name

tribulation terrible suffering

Synopsis

Justin is a ten-year-old boy who lives with his mama and two older sisters, Evelyn and Hadiya. His father had died in a car accident when Justin was six. Justin feels left out at home because he is the only

man in the house. He feels as if he can never do anything right and is always being bossed around. He hates doing what he considers "women's work."

Justin's grandpa comes to visit and invites him to spend some time at his ranch because it's festival time. There would be a big rodeo, games to play and a parade. Mama allows him to go even though he hasn't cleaned his room very well.

At Grandpa's, Justin rides his favorite horse, Black Lightning, and helps Grandpa do the chores. Grandpa teaches Justin to clean fish, wash dishes, make a bed, fold clothes properly and many other things. Grandpa tells Justin many stories of famous black cowboys from the past. Justin also finds and reads a book written by his great-grandpa telling how he and his family had come to Missouri fifteen years after the slaves had been freed. Part of the way through the book, Justin is ready to stop reading because the story is so sad, but Grandpa continues reading it to him. Grandpa feels it is important for a person to know where he's come from in order to know where he wants to go.

Justin and Grandpa go to the festival in town. Grandpa wins the blue ribbon in the Best Biscuit Competition, and Justin wins some ribbons for games he had played. They watch the rodeo featuring black cowboys and a parade. Justin also wins a cowboy hat--just what he wanted--for taking a red ribbon from the tail of a baby Brahman bull.

The festival is over, and it is time for Justin to go home. Before he leaves, Justin asks Grandpa to teach him to make his famous biscuits. Grandpa shows him how to make a whole meal, including the biscuits. When Justin gets home, he surprises his mama and sisters by preparing a delicious meal and cleaning up afterward. He also cleans his room and has an "open house" to show them his ribbons and the new cowboy hat he has won. Justin realizes that any task can be easy when you know how to do it.

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Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Describe and explain all the different feelings Justin had as he made and served the meal he had made for his family.

He felt excited because he was going to surprise them. He was afraid and nervous because he thought he might ruin something he was cooking. He was proud because he had actually cooked a meal by himself. He was pleased by his family's reaction to the meal. Students may have other answers, but should be able to support them.

Literary Analysis

How did Justin change from the beginning of the story to the end? What brought about this change?

Answers should include the idea that Justin didn't feel as if he could do anything right at first. He didn't have much confidence in himself. Grandpa showed him how to do many things and encouraged him to keep trying. By the end of the story Justin has more confidence and is able to do many things he couldn't do before.

Inferential Comprehension

Describe some of the ways life was different at the time Justin's great-great grandpa lived.

The following are some possible answers. People traveled by horse and wagon. They didn't have indoor bathrooms. Black people had trouble buying and selling things. Some of the food was different.

Constructing Meaning

When Justin wanted to play with Anthony instead of clean his room, he took some books on magic to Hadiya's room. The author said that Justin was "armed with those books on magic." Why did the author say that Justin was armed? What does this mean?

Answers should show an understanding that Justin was carrying out his plan to keep his sisters busy. He was almost like a prisoner plotting his escape. The books were his weapon against Hadiya.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Grandpa's ranch was in Missouri. Justin's great-great grandfather had come from Tennessee. They traveled on the Mississippi River. To give students a better understanding of the story, have them locate these places, as well as any others mentioned in the story, on a map. Trace the path that Justin's ancestors followed.

Understanding Characterization In the story, Grandpa teaches Justin how to do many things by demonstrating how to do them. It might be fun for the students to demonstrate something they know how to do for the rest of the class. They might demonstrate how to play the piano, how to make a favorite snack, or how to make a craft. The ideas are limitless.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story makes reference to several famous black cowboys such as Nate Love, also known as Deadwood Dick. Students might enjoy looking for information on these famous cowboys. They could share what they discover with the rest of the class. The book portrays black people in a very positive way. It could be read with other books about black people during Black History Month. A couple of books by the same author are *Because We Are* and *My Mama Needs Me*.

Understanding the Author's Craft This story was told from the third person point of view. It might be interesting to tell some parts of the story from the first person point of view. Ask students to

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choose one of the characters from the book and rewrite the story from that person's viewpoint. One example would be pretending to be Justin and telling what it was like to chase a greased pig. Another student might choose to be Evelyn and tell what she is thinking when Justin refuses to clean his room.