

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Member of the Wedding

by

Carson McCullers

Book Information

Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding
Quiz Number: 539
Bantam Books, 1946
ISBN 0-553-25051-5; LCCN
153 Pages
Book Level: 6.3
Interest Level: UG

Frankie Addams is a bored twelve-year-old madly jealous of her brother's impending marriage. Frankie is transformed into F. Jasmine and as F. Jasmine, she looks sixteen and accepts a date with a red-haired soldier.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

Topics: Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Marriage; Family Life, Weddings; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, ALA Outstanding Books for College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Berenice Sadie Brown housekeeper for Frankie's family

Big Mama Berenice's mother, who tells Frankie's fortune

Evelyn Owen Frankie's best friend, who had moved away to Florida

Frankie Addams a twelve-year-old girl who is trying to find where she belongs in the world, also known as F. Jasmine Addams and Frances Addams

Janice Evans the woman Jarvis will marry

Jarvis Addams Frankie's older brother, who has been in Alaska and is getting married

John Henry West Frankie's six-year-old cousin with whom Frankie spends a lot of time

Mary Littlejohn Frankie's new friend at the end of the book

red-headed soldier the soldier who asks Frankie for a date

Royal Quincy Addams Frankie's father, who owns a jewelry store and works many hours

Vocabulary

contage used in place of contagious

fatback the strip of fat from the back of a hog carcass usually cured by drying and salting

organdie a very fine, transparent muslin fabric with a stiff finish

Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Frankie Addams thinks there should be more excitement to her life than spending time with her cousin, John Henry, and Berenice, their housekeeper. She doesn't belong anywhere. Her lucky brother, Jarvis, is old enough to be in the army, where he has spent the last two years. Now he is back to marry Janice Evans. Frankie decides the answer for her is that Jarvis and Janice will take her with them after the wedding, and they will be a threesome.

As F. Jasmine Addams, she goes around town telling everyone about the wedding and how she will be leaving town never to return. She becomes acquainted with a red-headed soldier who asks her to meet him for a date. When the date actually arrives, she realizes the situation doesn't feel right, and she leaves the soldier behind.

The wedding day arrives, and F. Jasmine travels to Winter Hill on the bus with her father, John Henry, and Berenice. F. Jasmine makes a scene when the couple leaves without her, and she cries all the way home on the bus.

Back at home after the wedding, Frances (Frankie) decides she is going to run away from home. She packs her bag, takes her father's pistol, and types him a note. Before she can leave the house, John Henry says he is coming, too. As she runs from the house, she knows the commotion has awakened her father. Not knowing where else to go, Frances ends up at the Blue Moon Hotel. She is found there by an officer who notifies her father.

Everything changes for Frances. John Henry dies, her father and John Henry's parents decide to share

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a house in a new suburb, Berenice has given notice, and Frances has a new friend.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Even though Frankie complained about John Henry's company, she invited him to come for dinner and stay over several times. Why do you think she did this?

Her best friend had recently moved to Florida, and she wasn't part of the group of neighborhood girls. She was so lonely, and John Henry was better than nothing.

Literary Analysis

The author refers to the main character with a different name in each part of the book. What are the different names used in each part? Why do you think she did this?

The main character goes by Frankie in Part One, F. Jasmine in Part Two, and Frances in Part Three. Each name seems to go with the personality the main character demonstrates in each part. In Part One, she's willful and immature; in Part Two, she's trying to act grown up and be something she isn't; in Part Three, she seems closer to accepting herself as she is and being herself.

Inferential Comprehension

Frankie's father didn't seem to know how to deal with a girl Frankie's age. What were some instances from the book that might lead the reader to that conclusion?

He worked late at the jewelry store instead of being home for dinner. When Frankie told him she wasn't coming home after the wedding, he asked her about the screw-driver and the monkey-wrench.

Constructing Meaning

What do you think made Aunt Pet, Uncle Ustace and Father decide to move to the suburbs at the end of the story?

Several elements probably went into that decision. Aunt Pet and Uncle Ustace may have wanted to move away from a house that brought back strong memories of John Henry, and Father probably wanted to move Frances farther from the businesses at the center of town that could spell trouble for her.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization At the beginning of the book, Frankie's best friend had moved away to Florida. This was a major change for Frankie. She was bored and lonesome because she felt she didn't belong to any group. Tell the class to think about a time when they experienced a big change that had an impact on their feelings. Students should write a page telling about their feelings and how they dealt with changes.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story is set in the 1940s during World War II. There are several references in the book telling about events in the war. At one point, Frankie wished to be a boy so she could join the army. She also tried to donate blood to the Red Cross. Have the class research how the American people responded to helping with the war effort during World War II. Allow students to share their findings with the class.

Making Predictions Berenice told Frankie about her four husbands. Her first husband, Ludie, had been a wonderful husband to her. The three husbands who followed were not good matches for her. When she gave quit notice to Mr. Addams, she decided she may as well marry T.T. Have students write a letter from Berenice to Frankie telling about her first year of marriage to T.T.

Responding to Literature F. Jasmine goes to town to purchase a dress for the wedding.

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Berenice tells Frankie it won't do when Frankie models it. She implies that it is too grown up for Frankie, but that it could be altered to be appropriate. Students should make two drawings of the dress Frankie bought: one that shows what it looked like when she brought it home and one that shows how it looked after Berenice altered it. Have students design an outfit they feel would be appropriate for a thirteen-year-old girl to wear to a wedding today.