

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Moorchild by Eloise Jarvis McGraw

Book Information

Eloise Jarvis McGraw, The Moorchild
Quiz Number: 15500
Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1996
ISBN 0-689-80654-X; LCCN
241 Pages
Book Level: 5.5
Interest Level: MG

Feeling that she is neither fully human nor "Folk," a changeling learns her true identity and attempts to find the human child whose place she had been given.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Golden Kite Award/Honor Book; Newbery Honor; Parent's Choice Award/Honor Book; State Award

Topics: Family Life, Growing Up; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Interpersonal Relationships, Neighbors

Main Characters

Anwara Saaski's human "mother"
Bruman a tinker who lives near Torskaal
Fergil Moql's birth father, who is human
Lekka Anwara and Yanno's human child who was stolen by the Folk; also called Leoran
Moql'nkkn (Moql) Saaski's name when she lived among the Folk
Morgan and Eluna Saaski's human "cousins"
Old Bess Saaski's human "grandmother," who suspects Saaski may be Folk
Pittittiskin one of the adult Folk who cares for the Folk children
Saaski a girl, half-Folk and half-human, who is raised by human parents after she has been exchanged for a human child
Talabar Moql's birth mother, who is Folk
Tam an orphan boy who lives with Bruman and becomes Saaski's one true friend
The Prince leader of the Folk
Tinkwa one of the Folk who helps Saaski and Tam get into and out of the Mound

Yanno Saaski's human "father"

Vocabulary

byre a barn
contrarious perverse, antagonistic
malice a desire to cause pain
moor a boggy area
reciprocate to pay back for what one has received
runes a character from an alphabet used by Germanic people in the third to thirteenth centuries

Synopsis

Moql'nkkn is a girl born to a Folk mother and a human father. When she is a child, it is discovered that she cannot make herself disappear or change shapes. Since the safety of the Band depends on their ability to stay hidden from humans, this inability puts the group in jeopardy. It is decided that Moql'nkkn will be switched with a human baby, an act which will protect the group from Moql'nkkn's visibility and provide the Folk with a human to serve them.

As she grows up, Moql (now known as Saaski) is taunted and abused by the villagers of Torskaal because she looks and acts differently from the other children. Saaski has only dim, fleeting memories of her life as Moql'nkkn, and Old Bess, the grandmother of the child who was exchanged for Saaski, is the first one to suspect that Saaski may be Folk.

When she is eleven, Saaski meets Tam, an orphan who lives with a tinker outside of Torskaal. Tam, too, suspects that Saaski may be Folk, but he accepts her just the way she is.

Once she remembers her life as Moql'nkkn, Saaski is determined to return to Anwara and Yanno the human child who was exchanged with her. After enlisting the help of Fergil and Tinkwa, she and Tam rescue Lekka and return her to Torskaal. Realizing she will never be accepted by the villagers, Saaski

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goes away with Tam before the villagers can harm her on Midsummer's Eve.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How do you think Old Bess feels when Saaski returns Lekka and leaves Torskaal with Tam? Support your answer.

Answers will vary, and since this is an opinion question, there are no wrong answers unless the student does not support his or her opinion with facts from the book. Common responses will include: Old Bess was sad at Saaski's departure, but glad for Lekka's return; she was worried about how Anwara, Yanno and the rest of the villagers would react to Lekka, and was concerned for Saaski's welfare.

Literary Analysis

Saaski is told that she is "neither one thing nor yet quite t'other." What does this mean?

She was half-Folk and half-human and that she didn't really fit in well in the Folk society or in the human society.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare Old Bess and Saaski. How are they alike? How are they different?

Some of the correct responses include: Both are independent, both never knew their birth parents, and both could read; however, Old Bess was more accepted in the village than Saaski was.

Constructing Meaning

Which character reminds you most of yourself? Why?

Answers will vary, and no answer can be wrong unless it is not supported. Some characters and character traits the students may identify with include: Saaski--feels out of place, has few friends, is determined and independent... Tam--friendly and accepting of other's differences, has no family, willing to help a friend... Old Bess--helps others, is not fully accepted by the villagers, is concerned for and accepting of someone who is different...

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Several places in the book are described in detail (the inside of Saaski's home, the inside of the Mound, etc.) Choose a scene from the book and discuss it with the students. How does the author use detail to help the reader picture the scene? Have the students choose a scene from the book and draw a picture or make a model of the scene, including as much detail as possible.

Understanding the Author's Craft The people of this story have a distinct dialect. Have the students write a page of dialogue between two characters in the story. Are they able to capture the dialect in the dialogue? Have them read their dialogue with a partner and revise it if needed. Another activity that may be fun for the students is to create a dictionary of words from the Folk dialect.

Understanding the Author's Craft In this story, the author points out how people of the village think Saaski is "different" and treat her accordingly. Have the students think of a statement they would like to make about a society. Let them become authors by writing several paragraphs, creating and describing characters, conflict and resolution. Have them read the papers aloud and describe what they want their readers to understand about the society in their story. Are they successful in communicating their point?

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Comparing and Contrasting Neither Saaski nor Tam is accepted by the other children in the village, yet they react in different ways. Both have adults in their lives, but these adults treat them quite differently. Divide the students into two groups. Have one group make a list of all the examples they can find of how Saaski and Tam are different. Have the other group make a list of all the things they can find that show Saaski and Tam's similarities. Which list is longer? Have a class discussion and add anything to the lists that was forgotten. Are Saaski and Tam more alike or different?