

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

More Than Meets the Eye

by

Jeanne Betancourt

Book Information

Jeanne Betancourt, More Than Meets the Eye
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Book Level: 4.1
Interest Level: UG

Elizabeth's romantic interest in an Asian American student angers a prejudiced bully named Brad.

Topics: Community Life, Prejudice; Community Life, School; People, Asian

Main Characters

Ben Lee a teenage Chinese American who becomes Liz's boyfriend

Brad Mulville an old friend of Liz who causes trouble for Ben

Dary Sing a new student from Cambodia who is taught English by Liz

Joey Terry's boyfriend, who is good friends with Ben

Liz Gaynor a teen who helps Dary learn English and learns much about herself

Mr. Hadley a local businessman who is against the Kwon's business endeavor

Mr. Madison a teacher at Liz's school who convinces Liz to help Dary

the Kwons a Korean family that wants to open a store

Vocabulary

holocaust a great destruction of life

prejudice intolerance or hatred of other people based on preconceived ideas

racism the practice of mistreating people because of their ethnic origins

refugee a person who flees from his or her home country to find safety in another country

Synopsis

Liz is a young teen who is competing with her good

friend Ben for academic first place. She and Ben are lab partners and have become good friends. Liz becomes jealous when she learns there is a new girl in their school. The new girl, Dary, is from Cambodia, and Liz assumes that since Ben is Asian American, he will fall in love with Dary. However, Ben wants nothing to do with the new girl. When Mr. Madison asks Ben to show Dary around the school, Ben refuses. Liz accepts the job, and she and Dary begin to become friends.

During this time, Brad Mulville, an old friend of Liz's from grade school, tries to get Liz to go out with him. At the Valentine's Day dance, Brad cuts in on Ben and Liz's dance, and when he is rebuked, he yells racial slurs at Ben. Ben leaves the dance early and Brad blames him for spiking his truck tire. Having had nothing to do with the tire, Ben attempts to find the real cause of the flat. He and Liz find the tire and try an experiment on it in her bathtub. When he cannot come up with a scientific explanation, Ben decides to trick Brad with an intelligent-sounding hypothesis. Brad, who is not a good student, believes Ben until he finds out from his friends that he has been made to look like a fool. Brad threatens Ben and is suspended.

While Ben and Brad argue over their differences, Liz finds herself falling in love with Ben. She asks Terry, her best friend, to set up her and Ben on a double date. Terry, Joey, Ben, and Liz go out on a double date. At the end of the date, Ben asks to be dropped off several blocks from his home. Liz discovers that Ben must tell his parents he is studying at the library in order to go out.

Throughout most of the novel, Liz teaches Dary English. She points to objects, then spells and says the words slowly. Liz also places Post-it notes on objects in her room for Dary to learn. Dary learns these words quickly and is very grateful to have Liz help her. One afternoon, Liz and her mother take Dary to the mall where Dary buys a new pair of "American" jeans. She is very excited about her new clothes and her new friend. Soon after the mall excursion, Dary paints a disturbing picture in art class. She paints a picture of bloody bodies,

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decapitated heads, and a baby lying in a pool of blood. Liz discovers that the picture depicts what happened to Dary in Cambodia under Pol Pot, a murderous dictator. After this event, Dary and Liz become even closer friends.

When new Korean children, the Kwons, come to Liz's school, Mr. Madison once again asks Ben to help show them around. Ben refuses, but Brad volunteers. Everyone is surprised by Brad's gesture and questions his sincerity. Brad asks Liz to help him teach the new kids English. It is at this point that Liz realizes she may have misunderstood Brad. When Brad defends the Kwons at Mr. Hadley's store, he begins to see his own racism. Brad realizes that Asian Americans are not very different from himself.

When the Kwons attempt to open a twenty-four hour store on Main Street, there is much opposition from other Main Street merchants. At a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, Brad stands up and defends the Kwons, claiming they have the same rights as anyone else. His racist boss, Mr. Hadley, storms out of the meeting. The Chamber of Commerce accepts the Kwons' business and Liz's father welcomes them into the association. Ben, impressed by Brad's speech, shakes Brad's hand and the two former enemies reconcile. Then, Liz, Ben, Brad, Dary, and the Kwons go to Seward's Dairy for ice cream. On the way home, Ben and Liz admit to Brad they are a couple.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does Ben hate to be associated with Dary and the Kwons?

Ben believes that everyone sees him as they see all other people of Asian heritage. He does not want to be grouped with the Asian immigrants because the association makes him feel like a foreigner in his own country. Ben wants people to know that he was born in Chicago and is a normal American teenager. It was very important to Ben that he be accepted as an "American," not an "Asian."

Literary Analysis

Explain the central conflict in *More Than Meets The Eye*.

The central conflict in More Than Meets The Eye deals with racism and prejudice. Almost every character in the story has to deal with his or her feelings about race and stereotypes. Liz tries throughout the story to help her parents accept Ben for more than just her friend. Her parents simply see Ben as her competition in school. They have a hard time accepting that their daughter may be in love with someone who is not Caucasian. Ben also finds he himself is a racist. He realizes his and Brad's opinion about other Asians are similar. Ben also finds he is prejudiced against those who are not as smart as he is. Throughout most of the story, Brad is the antagonist. He constantly uses racial slurs. By the end of the novel, Brad finally realizes his mistake and stands up for the Kwons to help correct it.

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Inferential Comprehension

Ben and Brad are very different characters. Much of the conflict in the story exists because of these differences. In the end, the two overcome their problems and learn to tolerate each other's differences. In what ways are Ben and Brad alike?

In the beginning, both Ben and Brad have an affection for Liz and both are prejudiced. Brad makes racist comments about Ben, while Ben is prejudiced against those who are not as smart as he is and also against Asian American immigrants. At the end of the story, both boys learn how to be tolerant of others.

Constructing Meaning

Which part of the book was most unsettling to you? Describe the scene, then explain why you thought it was unsettling.

Students will have varied answers. One possible answer will be the scene in which Dary paints her depiction of the massacre of her family in Cambodia. She paints bloody bodies, decapitated heads, and a baby's body lying in a puddle of blood. This is unsettling because until that point Dary is very quiet, shy, and is usually quite happy. Now, it seems as if she is a different person. Another possible answer is the aspect of the racial slurs. Throughout the beginning of the novel, Brad calls Ben rude names directed at Ben's race. Brad's actions nearly result in violence and may make the reader feel very uncomfortable and apprehensive.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Ask your students to create a skit highlighting the climax of the book. Have them reread the section that takes place at the Chamber of Commerce and rewrite this scene as a skit to present to the class. The students may also want to write alternative endings to the climax to show how the story could have been different.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Some of the characters in this book are from Cambodia. Have your students research Pol Pot and the

Khmer Rouge. Have them compare their research with the story of Dary's aunt in the book. Ask them to discuss their results in class.

Making Predictions Ask your students to create a one-page outline for a sequel to *More Than Meets The Eye*. Be sure the beginning of the sequel can be woven into the end of this book. Then have your students write the first chapter to the sequel.

Responding to Literature This book deals with racism in a small town. Have the students think about their lives and describe any times they have encountered racism. Have they witnessed discrimination against others? Has it happened to them? Ask them to report on their findings.