The noisy fifth-grade boys of Laketon Elementary School challenge the equally loud fifth-grade girls to a "no talking" contest.

Award: Parenting Magazine Award; SLJ Best Book

Topics: Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, Atlantis Subscriptions; Recommended Reading, Atlantis Subscriptions September 2007; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2007 Summer Elementary; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2007 Summer Jr./Sr. High; School, Elementary; Sports/Recreation, Contests/Games

Main Characters

Dave Packer a fifth-grade boy who proposed a no-talking challenge between the boys and the girls
Ellen a fifth grader at Laketon Elementary School
Eric a fifth grader at Laketon Elementary School
Kyle a fifth grader at Laketon Elementary School
Lynsey Burgess the leader of the fifth-grade girls, who accepted Dave's challenge
Mr. Burton fifth-grade reading and language arts teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Abigail Hiatt the principal of Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Akers the music teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Burgess Lynsey's mom
Mrs. Escobar the fifth-grade math teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Henley the fifth-grade gym teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Marlow the fifth-grade science teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Overby the fifth-grade social studies teacher at Laketon Elementary School
Mrs. Packer Dave's mom
Rachel Morgan a fifth grader at Laketon Elementary School

Vocabulary

communication the exchange of thoughts, ideas, or facts; the act of presenting ideas or thoughts so that they are clearly understood; the sharing of thoughts and feelings
creative imaginative; original; artistic; inventive; fresh, unusual, or new; having a good or productive imagination; having the ability to think of new ideas
custodian a person responsible for the care and maintenance of a building; a janitor
hesitation reluctance; pauses; delayed action; doubtful waiting; uncertainty
honestly truthfully; without cheating or deceit
illegal unlawful; against the law; not allowed or permitted; prohibited by official regulations; against the rules; forbidden; acting in a prohibited or unlawful manner
immature tending to act childish or younger than one's age
logical sensible; following a consistent or reasonable order; making sense; intelligent; smart or wise
orderly organized; neat or neatly arranged; neither sloppy nor messy; controlled or easy to manage; peaceful; obedient; logical; not wild
recruits new members of a military or other group; those who have been invited to join

Synopsis

The teachers at Laketon Elementary School call Dave Packer's fifth-grade class "The Unshushables" because of their penchant for talking. The class is also unusually immature with regard to boys and girls getting along.
Dave reads about Mahatma Gandhi for social studies class and learns that Gandhi spent one day a week not speaking so he could bring order to his mind. Dave, who loves to talk, finds this intriguing and decides to try to keep quiet for a whole day. At lunch, however, Dave is unable to keep silent. He lobs an insult at Lynsey Burgess, who is also a loudmouth and the leader of the girls in his class. This leads to a bet between the boys and the girls, and the "no talking" contest rules are set. The boys and girls will attempt to say as few words as possible for two days. At school, they may answer adults with a three-word response, but no talking is allowed at home before or after school. They agree to operate under the honor system with Dave and Lynsey keeping score. The team that speaks the fewest words wins.

The staff at Laketon Elementary has mixed reactions to the contest. Several teachers welcome the quiet, but Mrs. Hiatt, the principal, feels as if she is losing control. This leads to a confrontation between Dave and Mrs. Hiatt. They resolve their differences after Dave invites Mrs. Hiatt to join the contest.

At the end of the contest, the girls are ahead as a result of the words Dave spoke in his confrontation with Mrs. Hiatt. Lynsey, however, gives a speech with exactly the right number of words to make the contest end in a tie.

Although the contest has many humorous and unintended consequences, the boys and girls learn valuable lessons about themselves and the adults in their lives. They also learn the power of words, both spoken and unspoken.

**Open-Ended Questions**

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

**Inferential Comprehension**

If this story were to continue, how do you think the fifth-grade class would be different?

Answers will vary but will probably mention that the boys and girls would get along better. The students would probably think more before they speak. Their reputation as "The Unshushables" would change.

**Constructing Meaning**

The fifth graders learn many lessons throughout the contest. Name some of the lessons they learned, giving examples from the story to support your answer.

They learned to compromise. Lynsey and Dave compromised concerning the rules of the contest and at the assembly when Lynsey, Dave, and the others said the Pledge of Allegiance. They agreed to give in to avoid a bigger conflict. Lynsey and Dave learned to respect each other. Dave gave Lynsey credit for asking about contractions, and Lynsey was impressed with his answer. The class learned a lesson in peaceful civil disobedience when Mrs. Hiatt forbade them to continue the contest. They chose to continue while still trying to respect the school rules. They learned to speak more concisely in their classes when they gave three-word answers to their teachers' questions.

**Teachable Skills**

**Recognizing Plot**

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning**

**Making Inferences**

**Recognizing Cause and Effect**