A FRIEND LIKE ZILLA: Teachers' Guide

SUMMARY:

Ten year old Nobby, short for Zenobia, is visiting Prince Edward Island with her mother and father and meets a seventeen year old girl, Zilla, who is developmentally delayed. At first reluctant to play with the outgoing and friendly Zilla, Nobby soon discovers that Zilla is a lot of fun; Zilla feeds seagulls, she knows where to pick wild strawberries, and she can cook. They soon become friends but tension fills the air when the rest of the family -- Grandma, Uncle Chad and his wife Aunt Alice -- arrive. Uncle Chad is stiff, patronizing and a perfectionist. Nobby can't stand him and resents his attitude towards Zilla. As Uncle Chad's discomfort with Zilla grows, he triggers a series of events that almost destroys the girls' friendship. But when Uncle Chad gets lost in a wild Atlantic storm, it is up to the two girls to help him.

GENERAL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS:

1) Friendships

2) Developmental Delay

3) Forgiveness

4) Respect for others and acceptance of others

* respect without patronising
* the difference between compassion and patronizing pity
* having compassion even for the difficult people in our lives

5) Responsibility

* responsibility for ones own behaviour, even in difficult circumstances

6) Natural History

* Seagulls
* Wild strawberries
* Flora and fauna of Prince Edward Island

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1) Topics of Discussion

* Discuss "developmental delay" and how the term can apply to a variety of degrees and conditions. Discuss how we all have strengths (things that we excel at) and weaknesses (things that we are not so good at).
* Why is Nobby reluctant at first to play with Zilla? What do you think she fears? Are her fears justified? What would you feel if you first met Zilla?
* What do you think Uncle Chad feels and thinks about Zilla? Why do you think he reacts that way?
* Discuss the concept of respect. Discuss how respect needs to be without patronization or pity for it to be real.
* Further concepts of respect: discuss or make a list of your strengths. How do you feel about others who are not as skilled as you in your strength (eg, any academic area, or sports, or art, or video games etc). How can you show respect for them without being patronizing or pitying? Why do you think people like to patronize/pity others? Can this be a way to make themselves feel better? How do you feel when someone pities you or looks down at you?
* What does Nobby feel about Uncle Chad? Discuss how her feelings shift and change. Why does Nobby's mother want Nobby to try and understand Uncle Chad? What does Nobby learn at the end of the story about her own feelings for Uncle Chad?
* Discuss the concept of feeling sorry for others. How does Uncle Chad feel sorry for Zilla when he first meets her? After Nobby and Zilla rescue Uncle Chad, what are the different ways in which Nobby feels sorry for Uncle Chad. Discuss the ways in which they are respectful or not. (ie: empathy and concern vs. contempt)
* Discuss the concept of feeling sorry for one's own errors and hurtful actions (ie acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions). Discuss how sometimes we feel sorry only when we are caught. Discuss how this is different from genuine regret and remorse at having done or said something hurtful.

2) Writing Exercises

* Write a journal entry that Nobby might write about a day spent with Zilla before Uncle Chad and the rest of the family come to the cottage. Include some specific activities they share.
* Make a feelings chart: list what Nobby feels about Zilla at the start of the story; after she and Zilla fight; and at the end of the story. Make a similar chart for Uncle Chad and Zilla.
* Write a journal entry as written by Nobby after the events of this story. What might she and Zilla do together? How would she now feel about Uncle Chad? How might she interact with him?

* Write an account of the kind of Island you would like to holiday in. It can be a real or imaginary place. What would you most like to do there?
* Pretend that you are a newspaper reporter and write an account of Uncle Chad's dramatic rescue.
* Write a letter Nobby might send to a friend back home describing some of the events of this story.

3) Art Activities

* Draw a picture of Nobby and Zilla feeding the seagulls.
* Draw a picture of any scene from the novel.
* Make a reading tree house in the corner of the classroom. Stick leaves with titles of books read by students to fill out the tree house.
* Find pictures of Prince Edward Island, or draw them, and make a poster showing the bright colours of the Island.
* Draw a picture of Nobby, or Zilla or Aunt Alice doing a pig face.

4) Drama activities

* Break up into small groups and have each group act out different parts of the story.
* Write and act out a scene that is not explicitly shown in the story: eg: Zilla going home after overhearing Uncle Chad's mean remark. Or a conversation between Nobby's mother and Uncle Chad after Zilla overhears Uncle Chad.

5) Extra Study and Research activities

* Research the Province of Prince Edward Island and do a written or oral report.
* Research the kind of seagulls found on the east coast of Canada and describe some of their characteristics. Include illustrations.
* Research the Canada Food Guide and report on what makes a healthy meal. Plan a menu that would include all the Food Guide items.
* Research tofu. Describe what it is, how it is made and in which parts of the world it is most used. Find one tofu recipe.

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