Teaching Notes written by Christine Sarandis

Book Description

Kate is twelve years old, and chats to God about everything – her parents and their new baby, her friends, getting used to her new glasses, even about the ants that drown in the puddles in her driveway. If God exists, why doesn't he teach ants to swim?

Kate also talks to God about Stephanie, the new girl in her class. Stephanie isn't the sort of girl Kate is usually friends with; she's too 'nerdy' for a start. And she looks weird, too. But getting to know Steph proves to be unexpectedly interesting for Kate, making her look at friendship in a new way.

Things get serious when Steph becomes ill, Kate is seriously worried and lets God know. Steph's a good person, so why isn't she getting better? And surely God could send Kate a sign and let her know she's been heard? Just when Kate's ready to give up on God, she finds the answers to her questions in an unexpected place.

Author Biography

Moya Simons has been writing for children for over fifteen years. She has been shortlisted in the Young Australian Best Book Awards twice, and also in the West Australian Young Readers Book Awards. She writes mainly for eight- to twelve-yearolds, and her books are concerned with science fiction and family life. Moya's books have been published in the USA, throughout Europe and Taiwan.

About the Illustrator

Lisa Coutts studied Graphic Design at Swinburne, but after graduating, decided to follow her passion for illustration and has worked as a freelance illustrator for15 years. Lisa works in various areas including design, advertising book and magazine publishing. Most of her commissions are based on children's themes. It is here she loves to work the most as there is scope for character development, humour, and story telling.Lisa also creates large pastel illustrations which she exhibits in Melbourne. These artworks also depict young girls and deal with emotions and innermost thoughts and feelings.Lisa creates her illustrations with different mediums, depending on the look required. These include watercolour, acrylic, pastel and coloured pencil. These illustrations are scanned given some finishing touches in Photoshop then emailed to their final destination.

Teachers Please Note

While reading a novel involving sensitive issues, children are often motivated to express their own concerns or worries. Teachers need to be aware that any discussion or revelations of a personal nature or concerns children may have must be handled sensitively and anonymously if necessary. In addition, teachers should be mindful of group discussions around these issues and carefully note the individual circumstances relevant to the children in their care. Similarly when discussing death, children may relate incidents such as the loss of a grandparent or even a pet, identifying these as their experience of loss. These discussions may help them make sense of these often confronting issues.

Characters

Kate, Kate's parents, Steph and her family, Stacey, Danielle, Nan, Mrs Kettlesmith, Adam, Matt, Dr Curry, Mr Walters, Mr Daley

Themes

Friendship, peer pressure, confusion and worry, accepting differences, illness – cancer, death and dying, grief, family life, change, guilt, ageing grandparents

Writing Style

* This story is written in a kind of diary format using the voice of Kate as the first-person narrator. This way we learn about her thoughts, feelings and reactions to different events. Describe why the author may have used this style and its effectiveness in this novel?

* Why do you think the author quoted sections from the story Steph was writing? See pp. 95, 105, 110, 120-121, 141. What is the significance of their placement in the latter part of the novel?

General Questions

* To help relieve her worries Kate talks to God, her mum, the doctor and Steph. What sorts of responses do you think Kate expects? Throughout the novel, how did Kate resolve some of her concerns?

* If you are worried about something, what things might help dispel that worry?

* Who might you go to for help and how important is it to have someone with whom to share your worries?

Is it always necessary for other people to answer our questions? Discuss

* How might writing things down help to reduce worry? Any other suggestions for dealing with tricky problems like how to make friends or being true to yourself.

About Kate

Talk about school life, family life (especially the introduction of a new baby), friendship, loneliness, peer-pressure, confusion, finding answers

* Describe Kate's personality. You could work in small groups to brainstorm a list of words that best describe her.

* How are Kate's worries different or similar to yours?

* Kate's parents say her name is strong and wonderful but she doesn't feel strong or wonderful a lot of the time. Discuss.

* According to Kate, being a kid, wanting to be liked, worrying about how you look and feeling alone "... gets in the way of feeling lucky"?

* On p.54 Describe Kate's mixed feelings when she realises she's no longer part of the in crowd. Can you relate to this feeling? Why or why not? Also discuss the meaning behind Kate's sardine tin analogy on the same page.

* Why do you think Kate hiccups when she is worried about something? What other symptoms could be a result of worry? Eg. tummy aches, wanting to stay home from school etc.

* Dr Curry told Kate she had mind hiccups. What did he suggest to prevent them? As time passes, Kate's hiccups do begin to subside and only occur when she's really upset. Discuss.

* What did Kate learn about Stephanie during the day at the beach?

* What did Kate hope might happen to prevent Stephanie and her family from coming to dinner at her place?

* When Stephanie was sick, how did Kate's assessment of Stacey and Danielle change?

- * When they were in Stephanie's tree house, what secrets did Kate and Steph share?
- * How did Kate react to the news that Steph had cancer?
- * What did Kate think might help Steph get better?

* How did Kate feel after she visited Steph in hospital and realised that she was not going to get better?

* Soon after Steph's death, what things felt 'right' to Kate?

About God

Talk about Kate's belief in God and whether voicing her problems had a positive impact for her

* Kate believes in God but she wants to know if He believes in her. Discuss. Do you think she expects answers from him and how does she react when there are none?

* Describe Kate's relationship with God?

* Re-read some of the questions that Kate asks God and discuss what sorts of answers He might give. Eg. "Why doesn't God fix things up?" "Why does he leave a lot of important things to us?" "Why do you give people the right to make up their own minds and stand back ...while we mess things up?" "If you have the power to make things different, (in the world) why don't you?" "Why do good people get sick when a lot of bad people don't." "What is it you do anyway? Create us and then leave us to make sense of our crazy world."

* At the beginning of the novel, what reason did Kate give for talking to God? Could there be other reasons?

* Why didn't Kate talk to God every night?

* What reasons did Kate imagine God might have for not answering her questions or sending her a sign?

* What did Kate see as the first sign from God that He was actually listening to her?

* What did Kate mean when she said to God on page 123, "Your silence is deafening."

* Discuss Kate's belief that Steph's death coinciding with the birth of her baby sister was a sign from God.

About Steph

Talk about special talents, being different, friendships, being sick, bravery.

* After reading the novel, describe what you know about Steph and what kind of person she is?

* When she was new at school, how did Stephanie try to make kids like her? Did it work? What things did help her to make friends? Discuss.

* When Kate first noticed the bruises on Steph's legs, why did she feel guilty and why did she think God should take some of the blame for Steph's illness?

* Before her death, what had other people learnt from Steph and what had they gained form her friendship?

About friendships

Talk about the importance of friendships, fitting in, being yourself, recognising and celebrating differences

* How did Kate feel about her friendships at school?

* From your experience, is school life like playing snakes and ladders? (See the description on pg. 8.) Discuss.

* How did wearing glasses change Kate's behaviour towards some kids at school?

* How did Kate react and feel when Danielle called her a loser? Discuss.

* After being called a loser, describe Kate's feelings at lunchtime? How did she attempt to alleviate them?

* What did Kate miss about her friendship with Danielle and Stacey?

* After her friendly encounter with Stacey at the library, how did Kate reassess her feelings about 'in' and 'out' crowds?

* Initially, why was Kate afraid to hang around or become friends with Stephanie? What caused her reservations?

* Once Adam became part of her group, how did Kate see him differently?

* At the end of the first evening on camp, things felt special to Kate. Why?

* Discuss the thoughts Kate had about Matt and Adam on camp?

* As a result of her anger about Steph's illness and in support of her friend, how did Kate change her appearance and what was the reaction of her family, friends and the hospital staff?

* In what ways had Steph's friends benefited from her friendship and from knowing her?

About family

Talk about family life, new babies in the family, confiding in family members

* Why did Kate have mixed feelings about the imminent arrival of a new baby in her family?

* What was her mum's response when Kate said she was partly to blame for Steph's illness?

* What reason did Kate give for wanting a brother rather than a sister and why was she insulted when her mum said the baby would make their family complete? Also discuss her later thoughts in relation to having a sister.

* How did Kate feel about babies after her visit to the baby doctor with her mum?

* Describe Kate's feelings just after the birth of her baby sister.

About the world

Talk about issues affecting people and the planet and discuss positive ways of getting involved in causes and charities (See activities below.)

* Kate worries about starving children in different parts of the world, drowning ants, etc. Can she prevent any of these problems by worrying about them?

* How did Kate interpret the news item on TV describing the rescue of stranded whales?

Activities

* Write a review of the novel and create a poster to highlight the things you liked about it and why you would recommend it to others.

* Research one of the charities that raise funds for cancer patients and write a report to share with the class. <u>www.worldsgreatestshave.com/</u>

* Write a profile of one of the characters in the story. Include as much detail as possible and then draw or paint a picture of that person to accompany your character study.

* Choose a world issue related to the environment or a disadvantaged group within or beyond Australia. Together as a class or in small groups, and after extensive research, children decide how to get involved in their chosen organsiation. See examples below: Eg. Sponsor a child, support a wildlife project, and etc.

www.wildlifewarriors.org.au

www.makeawish.org.au/kids/resources.asp

www.savethechildren.org.au

www.unicef.org.au

Talking to children about death: http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/health_advice/facts/death.htm www.hospicenet.org/html/talking.html www.allroadsleadtoheaven.com.au/pdf/children.pdf

Talking to children about cancer www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/for-schools/students

Talking to children about the planet <u>www.environment.gov.au/education/</u> <u>www.planetark.org.au/</u> Fiction books with similar themes

- * Charlotte's Web by E. B. White
- * Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson
- * Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr
- * Old Pig by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks
- * Being Bee by Catherine Bateson

Other books by Moya Simons

- * Totally series
- * Dead series
- * Rocketship of Dreams
- * The Boy Who would Live Forever
- * Remember Me?
- * Gypsy Magic
- * Camel Face
- * My Amazing Poo Plant
- * Whoppers
- * Even Bigger Whoppers
- * Monkey Talk
- * Sit Down Mum, I've Got Something to Tell You?