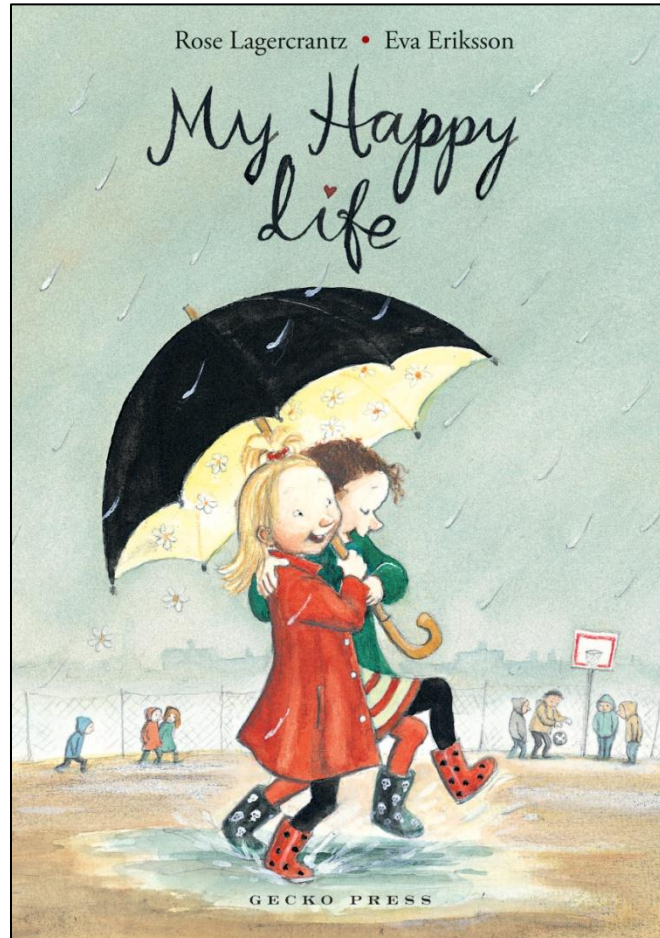


## Teaching Notes: *My Happy Life*

by Rose Lagercrantz and Eva Eriksson



### Synopsis

Dani is probably the happiest person she knows. She is especially happy because she is going to start school, something she has been waiting her whole life for. Then things get even better – she meets Ella Frida by the swings. Dani and Ella Frida do everything together. They stick together through wet and dry, sun and rain, thick and thin. But then something happens that Dani isn't prepared for and suddenly she is very, very sad. But with the help of her Dad, a couple of hamsters, a bookmark and some letters, Dani overcomes the bad times and can go on living her happy life once more.

## **The Author**

Rose Lagercrantz is a popular Swedish author of books for children as well as for adults. Her first book was published in 1973. She has received many of the top Swedish literary awards, including the August Prize and the Astrid Lindgren Prize.

## **The Illustrator**

Eva Eriksson is one of the best-loved illustrators of children's books in Sweden. Her awards include the Astrid Lindgren Prize and the prestigious August Prize.

## **Themes**

This sweet and funny illustrated chapter book about an optimistic young girl, Dani, explores several themes. These include family life, friendships, loss and grief, and optimism.

The book portrays a happy domestic and family life. With a positive and loving relationship between Dani and her single father, as well as her Grandmother and Italian cousin, the book explores how the love and support of family can help overcome sadness and adversity.

Another theme explored in the book is that of friendship. Dani learns how to make friends at school. She discovers that there are many types of friendships, such as a best friend, other sorts of friends, and even pet friends. Dani finds that each type of friendship has its own qualities, advantages and fun.

The book also deals with the themes of loss, grief and death. From a young age Dani has had to cope with, and try to understand, the death of her mother. Then when Dani's best friend moves away she has to come to terms with a different kind of loss and the new type of grief that accompanies it.

A further theme which is demonstrated throughout the book is living life with optimism. Dani's optimistic personality, her positive view of the world and her upbeat take on life, help her to overcome the hurdles she encounters, with courage, hope and joy.

## Activities

1. Before reading, think and talk about times when you have felt either happy or sad. What was the cause?
2. Look at the cover image and title. What do you think this story might be about?
3. Can you remember your first day of school? Choose one of your first memories. Write and illustrate a descriptive paragraph or poem about it.
4. Dani likes lots of things about school. What do you like/dislike about school? Write a letter to your teacher or school principal about what you dislike and how you think it could be changed and improved.
5. Dani and Ella become best friends. Write a description and draw an illustration of one of your friends. Then write a short story about something you have done together which made you happy.
6. There are some opposites (antonyms) listed in the book. Find three examples from the book and then think of five more.
7. Dani 's mother has 'passed away' (p. 56). This figure of speech is called a euphemism. A euphemism is when you use or replace a word or phrase with another one that you think is less offensive. Think of some more examples of euphemisms.
8. Dani writes a book called 'My Happy Life' (p. 107). Write your own version of the book. Include your top five happiest moments. Then illustrate, bind and publish your book.
9. Dani learns two Italian words from her cousin which she translates into English as 'flower' and 'love' (which are nouns) (p. 117). Using Italian, or another language of your choice, design an illustrated dictionary which translates twenty more nouns into English.
10. Design and make a friendship necklace (p. 35) and/or an angel bookmark (p. 124) like the ones Ella gives Dani.
11. Alongside happiness, which other emotions can you find in the book? For example, being scared, brave or sad. When you find an emotion in the book examine the illustrations that accompany it. How has Eriksson interpreted the

- feeling in the illustration? (Think about size, composition, etc). Draw your own picture that expresses another emotion, such as, anger, joy or love.
12. What attracts your attention to a particular picture? What kind of lines and textures are used? Do the pictures mirror the text or go beyond what the story tells you?
  13. Who is your favourite character in the book? Why? Write a character study of your choice.
  14. Which is your favourite chapter in the book? Why? Write a plot summary of your chosen chapter.
  15. In groups, choose one of the chapters from the book. Devise a script and act it out for your class. If you have access to a video camera, tape it.
  16. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. Give it a rating. For example, using stars or numbers 1-10.