

Teacher Notes on Rain May and Captain Daniel

Catherine Bateson, University of Queensland Press, 0 7022 3337 4 Pb

(Notes by Ray Turton.)

SYNOPSIS:

Rain (not named after the weather by ‘dippy hippy parents’ but with reference to an e.e.cummings poem) and her mother are shedding their old life to begin anew in the country. Dad leaving to live with Julia is the catalyst but Mum also has yearnings for a simpler more naturally fulfilling life. Rain May is not convinced. Starting a new school mid-year will not be easy and what on earth does one do in the country anyway? Country life, however, turns out to be surprisingly full of things to do, school is another matter. The big move has taken place in the school holidays and in that time Rain May makes friends with her neighbour, a strangely non-active younger boy whose head is full of fascinating ideas, loves chess and is a Trekkie. Daniel is tormented at school and expects Rain May to shun him once term begins. She doesn’t, sticking by him at the expense of joining the ‘in’ crowd. Then everything comes to a head when Daniel is taken to hospital, a growth spurt has reactivated his cardiac problem.

THEMES:

Relationships between family and friends are explored in a very positive manner. Gradually Rain May and her father, mother and Julia come to realise that relationships change and new alliances need to be accommodated without inflicting damage to the old, that friendships are to be treasured and that loyalty is a desirable commodity. The story also celebrates the simpler life, one more in tune with nature and which allows space for reflection.

PREVIEWING:

Look closely at the cover for clues as to what the book may be about—make sure this includes both front and back covers. From the cover deduce: main characters and relationships — for example, what does the spine of the book constitute? gender, hints to their interests (check inside the houses). Do they appear friendly towards each other? Setting — country or city?

STORY CONSTRUCTION:

The story is told by Rain May in the first person. Interspersed in her narrative are entries from Daniel’s logbook (diary) and the poems that Rain May and her Mum make up and, using fridge magnets, leave for each other.

Accompany reading the story by constructing a story line outlining events. Across the top detail Rain May’s feelings, across the bottom add Daniel’s.

For example... Chapter one: Dad moves out. House sold, Maggie and Rain move to country.

CHANGE OF TONE:

On Daniel’s feelings chart, mark where his logbook changes from the impersonal to the personal. With what in the storyline does this coincide?

INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS:

Discuss specific interests of members of the class. Ask each student to deliver a short speech outlining an interest or hobby of their own and tell what it is about it that draws them to it.

SCIENCE:

Research platypus and produce a wall chart depicting a platypus with arrows pointing to special features, and showing their habitat. Write a brief description of the animal's normal behaviour.

HEALTH AND SOCIETY:

Differences, perceptions and prejudices:

Re-read the section beginning on p.55 *I am the most unpopular kid...* to the end of the chapter.

As a class discuss:

- Would Daniel have been treated the same way if the class had known of his medical problem? Should it make a difference to his treatment by the other kids? Why do you think Daniel did not want it generally known?

For another view re-read pp.94-96 beginning *How are you going D1 and D2...* ending *And he's cool too.*

How true is Tom's comment, *He doesn't want friends otherwise he'd make more of an effort. He's a snob.*

- Do you think some of Daniel's problems could have been caused by his own behaviour? Or is some of his behaviour a reaction to bullying?

Discuss:

- What friendship means: for example — friends do... friends don't...

- What civilised behaviour should be like. For example — behaviour towards kids in school that may not be close friends.

FAMILY:

Family units come in different configurations. Daniel's is a typical nuclear family. Rain May finds herself in a disrupted family situation. Both of these families have positive aspects.

In groups discuss the things various members of the two families do and list three things for each family which are, in their opinion, examples of valued family behaviour.

Gather all the ideas together in one list of positive family behaviour.

WRITING:

Rain May and her mother communicate well, the poetry they write to each other is a heightened form of expressing their feelings. Write a poem using a similar system. Make a list of the words from the poems that appear in the book. Write each one on a separate card (include additional cards for duplicated words). Working in pairs, each student produces a poem, or a short narrative—a sentence or two—on the theme of either families or friendship. Before beginning, each pair of students can, after discussion, add an additional 10 words to their word-pool. Remember Mum's advice that it doesn't have to rhyme.