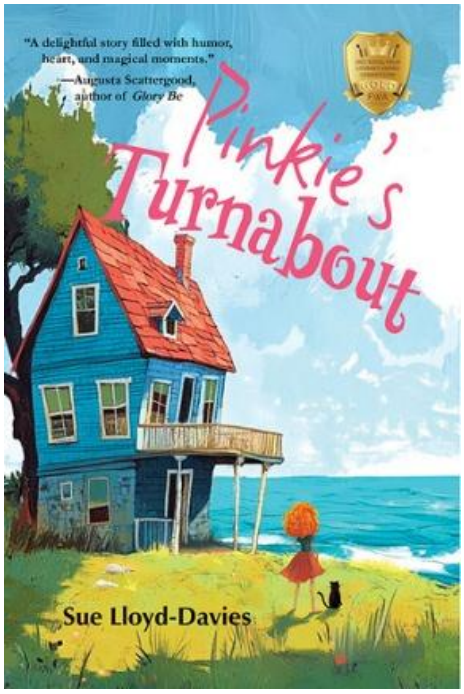
Pinkie's Turnabout



Classroom Guide

Discussion Questions

Pinkie's relationship with her great-grandmother has changed over time. One of Pinkie's biggest struggles is that she misses her old GG, the one who baked cookies and laughed and took walks in the marina with Pinkie. Alzheimer's disease affects not only the person with the disease but also the family members.

1. Pinkie has a lot of responsibility and helps to care for her great grandmother who has dementia. What are some of the things GG does that lead us to understand she has Alzheimer's disease? How does GG's behavior make Pinkie feel? What every day things does Pinkie do to help her GG? Do you have anyone in your life who has trouble remembering people or places or other things? What can you do to help them?

2. Sometimes Pinkie tries to put herself in her GG's shoes, imagining what it's like to have dementia. What are some examples of this in the book? What do you think it's like to have trouble remembering friends, get mixed up about time, and even forget where you are sometimes?

3. For people with dementia, whatever they think about the world is true for them. If they think it's bedtime when it's really only lunchtime, that's what it is for them. What are some things not to say to a person with dementia?

4. When Pinkie's best friend goes away to unplugged camp, Pinkie is lonely. Why do you think Pinkie has just one good friend? What does she learn about making other friends?

5. Pinkie's relationship with Leo starts with bullying, but over the course of the story, they develop an unexpected connection. Pinkie made fun of Leo on his first day of school. How did that affect him? How did that affect her? What important things does she learn about Leo that changes her mind about him? How does that experience influence how she thinks about the other people she knows or meets?

6. Sometimes we just don't like someone without getting to know them first. How did that happen to Pinkie? We don't always know why people behave the way they do until we get to know them. How can you do a better job of being open to people who are new to you or different from you?

7. Pinkie has a good heart but she makes some big mistakes. One of her mistakes is blaming Leo for something she isn't sure about. How does it make Pinkie think differently and grow? Why is apologizing so important? What are some other mistakes she makes? How does she handle them? Have you ever made mistakes that affected your family or friends? What did you do about it? Did you apologize? How did it feel and what did you learn from it?

8. Pinkie faces a lot of fear—fear of her great-grandmother losing her memory and the fear of facing the consequences of her own actions. What do you think Pinkie learns about confronting her fears throughout the story? How do you deal with fear in your life?

9. Pinkie learns about how animals help to heal and comfort people who are sick or lonely or just getting old. How does Jack help GG? How do animals affect Leo and how does that influence how Pinkie sees him? Do you have a pet? How do you take care of your pet? How does your pet take care of you?

10. Pinkie fights to adopt Jack. What does she do to convince her mother it's a good idea? What steps does she take to demonstrate she will be a responsible caretaker?

11. Being a caretaker means caring for many things in life. Caretaking can be about a person in your family, rescuing an animal, or respecting the environment we live in. How do you caretake? How can you be a better caretaker?

12. In Pinkie's family, there are things they don't talk about, especially a big secret. How does Pinkie react when she first learns about the secret? How does her attitude change and why? Why do people have secrets? How did Leo cover up who he really was? Why do people hide who they are, how they feel?

13. Throughout the story, Pinkie learns to empathize with others, including Leo and her GG. What happens that makes Pinkie realize people aren't always who we think they are? How did Leo cover up who he really was?

14. At the end of the book, Pinkie accepts that even Jack can't cure her great-gran's Alzheimer's. But she finds ways to cherish their time together. What ideas does Pinkie have to spend time with her GG? How will she keep her great-gran in her heart in the future? What ideas do you have for having fun with someone who has dementia?

Classroom Activities

Examples of Dementia in Daily Life

In ***Pinkie's Turnabout***, Great Gran has good days and bad days. Have students list the symptoms they noticed Great Gran struggling with as they read the book.

Alzheimer's Disease

Pinkie's GG has Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes her great-gran can't remember simple things, like how to use the TV remote control or put a puzzle together. Time gets away from her and sometimes she thinks it's night when it's daytime. She forgets who her friends are and sometimes confuses people, like believing Pinkie is her daughter when she was young.

Break the class into groups and assign research topics:

What are the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?

What are the causes of Alzheimer's disease?

How to talk to people with Alzheimer's disease, what not to say and why.

Be creative and come up with fun things to do with people who have Alzheimer's disease. How can you include art, reading, dance, story-telling, exercise, and music?

Resources:

What is Alzheimer's Disease? Symptoms & Causes | alz.org

Alzheimer's disease - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic

Alzheimer's Disease Fact Sheet | National Institute on Aging

What not to say to somebody with dementia | Alzheimer's Society

What Not to Say When Talking to Someone With Dementia - Dementia Help

Do's and Don'ts: Communicating With a Person Who Has Alzheimer's Disease | National Institute on Aging

https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/kids/family-activities

Epigrams

GG uses a lot of epigrams when she speaks. They help to define her character, and she doesn't seem to forget them like she does other things. Using epigrams is a tradition in her family.

Define epigrams and divide the class into groups. Have them find and write down the epigrams GG uses in the book and epigrams they've learned in their own lives.

Examples:

GG says expectation is like an eggshell. The harder you hold on to it, the more likely it is to crack.

An apology is the duct tape of life.

GG says friends are easier lost than found.

Language Skills

Similes and metaphors are comparisons that make stories colorful. What's the difference between a simile and a metaphor?

Simile

Page 1: *A breeze ruffles his fur, and the leaves quiver like mice around him.*

Page 1: *She rocks forward in her recliner, floundering like a baby bird, all tiny bones and crinkly skin.*

Page 3: *My best friend is leaving for unplugged camp to live like Australopithecus.*

Metaphor

Page 2: *GG's the little piece of Dad we have left.*

Page 3: *We're two pieces of a puzzle that click together…*

Page 15: *My feet are blocks of ice.*

Imagery

Details help readers immerse themselves in stories. Vivid images make stories interesting.

Page 4: *When I smooth my hand over his back, the skin feels tight against the sharpness of his spine.*

Page 4: *My sneakers drag on the gritty concrete. Right foot, left foot, right foot, left, past a rainbow of squatty cottages, skinny palm trees, and sprawling, hundred-year-old oaks. Heat rising off the sidewalk toasts my legs.*

Page 7: *The paint is scabby and the porch sags, but walk through the door and it has a warm bread, candy apple smell to it.*

Personification

When inanimate objects are given human qualities, a story becomes more interesting.

Page 3: *The car whispers into the street…*

Page 5: *Her door creaks open, and a puff of stale air smacks me in the face.*

Page 31: *I choke down the smallest brussels sprout so I don't have the full effect of chewing it…The sprout strangles me.*

Active Verbs

Using strong words instead of passive verbs (is, was, were, etc.) make a story more exciting.

Page 2: *I wrestle my bike out of the shed…*

Page 10: *I jolt three quick-steps backward and slam my tailbone into the stove.*

Page 46: *I crawl to the front of the cage. Jagged pebbles and sticks bite into my palms. Sweat stings my eyes…*

Writing Your Own Story

One of the most important elements in a story is sharing how your characters feel about the things that happen to them, the people they meet, and the places they live and visit. Readers can relate to characters who have the same feelings they do. We learn about characters' emotions through their body language, what they say and how they react to the things around them.

What emotions do the following sentences convey?

Body Language – Page 38: *Jack creeps into the room, ears laid back, tail thrashing in the air.*

Dialogue – Page 85: *The baby octopus in my stomach slides its tentacles up into my throat. "Mom? I'm really sorry."*

Setting – Page 21: *The water glitters in the sun the same as when Bella's here. But it's not the same. A cloud rolls overhead turning the water gray. Gray is the loneliest color.*

What are ways in which you can *show* emotion?

Write a poem expressing how Pinkie feels when she says goodbye to Isabella for the summer.

Write a journal entry from Leo's point of view after he learns he will be Pinkie's mentor at the animal shelter and another one after he has dinner at Pinkie's house.

Write a letter from Pinkie at the end of the book telling Isabella about what she's learned and how she feels about Leo.

Choose your favorite chapter, write a summary of it (what are the key events in it?) and show why it's your favorite.

Write a letter introducing yourself to Pinkie, tell her who you are, and send it to the author. (Use the contact form on suelloyddavies.com.)

*Teacher's note: I love getting letters from your students, so please use the contact form on my website (suelloyddavies.com) if you'd like my mailing address. I promise to read every letter but can only respond to the class as a whole. I may even post some of them on my website, Instagram, or on FaceBook.

Common Core Standards

Common Core Language Arts Standards are designed to prepare students for their lives after school. They emphasize critical thinking and encourage young readers to examine the intricate themes, complex characters, strong word choices, and well-crafted plotlines exemplified in *Pinkie's Turnabout*. This classroom guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 4–7 in conjunction with reading the book as a group or independently. For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.