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Activity Guide

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Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart

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ABOUT THE STORY

Essie and Amber are sisters. They live with their mother in an apartment where they wait for their father to come home from prison. In a series of poems, Vera B. Williams tells the heartwarming and heartwrenching story of two sisters who take care of each other through thick and thin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Vera B. Williams was born in California and went to school in North Carolina. She has worked as a cook and baker, a teacher, and a graphic artist and has written and illustrated many books for children. Two of her books, *More More More*, *Said the Baby* and *A Chair for My Mother* are Caldecott Honor books. She lives in New York City.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children to tell about their siblings. Do they take care of their sisters and brothers, or do their sisters and brothers take care of them? Explain that the book they will read is about two sisters who help each other in many different ways.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “Who are Essie and Amber?”
- “What is a “best sandwich”?”
- “What is Amber’s question?”
- “What happens at the end of the book?”
- “What are two ways Essie and Amber are similar? What are two ways they are different?” (Compare and Contrast)
- “How do you think Essie and Amber’s lives will change after their father’s return?” (Make Predictions)

Vocabulary

Write these words and sentences on the chalkboard. Have children select the word that best completes each sentence. Ask volunteers to circle the words in the sentences that are context clues — hints of the meanings of the words.

radiator turret grocery script equator

- The _____ room made Nata-lee feel like a princess in a tower.
- Amber just printed, but Essie wrote in _____.
- The imaginary line around the middle of the Earth is the _____.
- The heat rose from the furnace to the _____ in the bedroom.
- Amber’s mother bought food for a feast at the _____ store.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Language Arts: Neighbor Poem

Some of the poems in *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart* describe the girls’ friends and neighbors. Ask children to write their own poems to describe a friend or neighbor. Children can draw a picture to go with their poems. Collect the poems in a class *Neighbor Poems* book.

Art: Poem Picture

At the end of the book, the artist draws a series of pictures that illustrate scenes from the poems. Encourage children to choose another scene from the poems to illustrate. Display the illustrations around the classroom.

Math: Circle Fractions

Nata-lee knows her fractions. Help children learn theirs. Have them work in small groups, and provide each group with five construction paper circles. Ask groups to cut the circles into the fractions that Nata-lee knows: halves, thirds, eighths, and sixteenths. Then groups can cut out the last circle into whatever fractional parts they choose. The rest of the class can try to identify each group’s final fraction.

Language Arts: Write a Summary

Amber and Essie’s story is written in poems. To be sure children understand the events in the book, have them write a one- or two-line summary of each poem. Then ask them to work in pairs to write a brief summary of the whole book.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords suggested below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Turret Pictures

Have children use the Internet to find pictures of turrets like Nata-Lee’s. Using the keywords “turret” or “tower houses”, children can search for pictures of turrets. When they find one they like, they can print it out, label it, and show it to the class.