

Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

Bowling, D.

Aven and her parents move to take over a rundown Western-style theme park in Arizona and meeting new schoolmates is difficult as she was born without arms and is stared at and called a "freak". She befriends Connor, who withdraws from most social activities due to his Tourettes syndrome, and her and her parents easy acceptance of Connor helps him greatly, together they befriend Zion, and the three find their place in school and in their community. The novel deals with diversity, self-confidence, family structures, love, and encouragement, and can be used for independent reading, small group instruction, guided reading groups, and class read-aloud.

Collections: ARC-BC

Subjects: English Language Arts
Grades 4-7

Evaluation Date: Jun 2018



[ARC-BC](#)




Social Considerations

Resource Evaluation

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

 Extensively

The book relates to the English Language Arts curriculum as it fits nicely with the Big Ideas of text bringing creativity and joy, exploring multiple perspectives and exploring text and stories to help make connections and understand ourselves better.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

Suitable for independent reading, small group instruction or guided reading groups, class read-aloud, and as a springboard for further investigation into the Core Competencies.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gender Roles, Identity & Sexual Orientation

In the times these scientists lived, there was great gender imbalance. For example, girls were expected to marry and be homemakers. Girls could not apprentice to paint or work with oils. If married, they could paint but their work could not be hung on the walls. In Maria Mitchell's story, even as the first female professor of astronomy at Vassar, her work was restricted by many rules that applied only to women.

Ability/Disability

The protagonist of this story, Aven, is a middle school student who was born without arms. She has not let this stop her from doing what she loves, and at one point is crushed when a friend calls her "disabled. " She has a friend with Tourette's whose tics cause people to "look at him. "

Belief System

This story mentions both Christian and Jewish faiths. These religions are juxtaposed because of their relationship with the war raging on.

Language

The characters are called "freaks" by their classmates. Their ability to cope and stand up for themselves is positive.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?




Extensively

Aven's "armlessness" and her friend Connor's Tourette's Syndrome have impacted their lives and well-being in different ways. While Aven acknowledges that she needs more time to do most things, she does not see herself as "disabled. " She is self-conscious about a few things, but for the most part she views herself as capable. She befriends Connor, who chooses to withdraw from most social activities due to his "barking, " a vocal tic that embarrasses him. The easy acceptance of Connor modelled by Aven and her parents helps him to overcome his reluctance to engage, and together they befriend a third friend, Zion. The trio ultimately find their place in school and in their community.


GENERAL CONTENT

Content


Is the resource engaging?

 Extensively


Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

 Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?


 Extensively

Is the content relevant and important for student broad understandings?


 Extensively

Audience


Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

 Extensively


Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

 Moderately

Is the level of detail appropriate?

 Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

 Extensively

The content and reading can be differentiated by reading aloud to a student or partner reading with discussion and clarification. The plot and characters are such that middle-school children could easily relate.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Is the use of font, text size and presentation suitable?



Extensively

The novel is very easy to read with consistent and appropriate font size and spacing.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?



Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?



Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?



Extensively

Plot description

Aven moves with her parents to take over the management of Stagecoach Pass, a rundown Western-style theme park in Arizona. Meeting new schoolmates is made more difficult as she was born without arms and is stared at, called "freak," and then ignored. Her empathy allows her to befriend Connor, who has largely withdrawn due to his Tourette's, and together they set out to solve a mystery at the theme park. Their kindness and easy acceptance of one another promote a supportive relationship in which they both grow, overcome their insecurities, and find the strength to re-engage in school and community activities.

Genre

- Contemporary

Literary Highlights

- Point of view

Type

- Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Reading Level

- At intended grade level(s)

2018 Mock Newbury List for 2018 Newbury Award contenders. The novel includes discussion questions at the back of the book.

GRADES AND SUBJECTS

Subjects

- English Language Arts: 4-7

ADDITIONAL INFO

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