

Literature Circle Questions

Use the questions and activities that follow to get more out of reading *The Zebra Wall* by Kevin Henkes.

1. In the beginning of the story, what kind of preparations has the Vorlob family made for the new baby?
2. What kind of names does Mrs. Vorlob like?
3. On the day she stays home “sick” from school, Adine accidentally overhears a phone conversation that Aunt Irene is having with a friend. What does she learn about her aunt’s feelings toward her nieces in this conversation?
4. Sometimes Adine is embarrassed and irritated by her parents. What are some of the things her parents do that frustrate her?
5. What does Aunt Irene look like, and how does she act?
6. How does the Vorlob family celebrate the day that Baby Vorlob comes home from the hospital? How do the older Vorlob children feel about having a new baby brother in the house?
7. Do you think it is better to be the firstborn child in a family, the middle child, or the baby of a family? Explain your answer. Be sure to use examples from this book, and another book that has a family with many children.
8. How would you react to the news that your parents are having a new baby? Would you be excited by the news? How would your response compare to Adine’s?
9. Adine, Bernice, and Carla come up with a plan to create a series of unflattering drawings of Aunt Irene. What feelings does Adine have about this plan? Why does she eventually hide the drawings from Aunt Irene?
10. More than anything, Adine fears storms. How does she respond when a storm comes? Why do you think she feels this way? Do you think she learns anything when Aunt Irene shows her how to make a “storm in a teacup”? (p. 137)
11. How do you think growing up as the firstborn of six children will affect Adine? Does she seem like a typical firstborn child?
12. Adine realizes that her feelings for her aunt are “a jumbled mess, just like the ‘junk drawer’ in the pantry.” (p. 94) In your own words, explain what this simile means.
13. Why is Adine so frustrated by Aunt Irene’s presence in the home? Give at least three reasons why Adine wishes her aunt would go home.

14. Do you think Aunt Irene would welcome advice on how to improve her relationships with her sister's children? If you could give Aunt Irene some gentle advice about how to win over her nieces, what would you say?

15. To Mrs. Vorlob, names are very important; in fact, she doesn't give Baby Vorlob a name until he is several months old. In Aunt Irene's opinion, names don't matter too much. What do you think? Does a person's name affect who he or she becomes? Do you think you would be a different person if your parents had named you differently?

Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-13; Evaluation: 14-15.

Activities

1. Choose one scene with conversation between the characters in this novel to illustrate in a comic strip or in storyboard style, using balloons for the characters' dialogue. Try to draw your characters according to the author's descriptions, and try to capture the mood in the scene with your drawing.
2. Take a survey of classmates your age, asking what the ideal number of children in a family is. As you talk to classmates, ask them to give reasons for their answers. Tally your results, and create a pie chart or bar graph to show your survey results. Be ready to share your findings with your class, and also explain how you imagine Adine would answer your survey.
3. For a baby or toddler you know, create a poster-size mural like the ones the Vorlobs made for each of their daughters. Use colorful drawings to make your mural exciting, and share it with the child. What is his or her reaction to your mural? Write about how the child responds to your gift.

Author's Web Site:

www.kevinhenkes.com

Also by This Author:

Olive's Ocean, HarperCollins, 2003

The Birthday Room, HarperTrophy, 2001

Protecting Marie, Puffin, 1996

Sun & Spoon, Puffin, 1998

Two Under Par, HarperTrophy, April 2005

Words of Stone, HarperTrophy, September 2005

