

Novel Resource #4

The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco by Janice Repka

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About the Author: The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco was Janice Repka's first book!!!! It has already been nominated for four major awards, including the Young Hoosier Book Award. The book has an inspiring message about sticking to your beliefs, however unpopular they may be.

Janice Repka was born the 7th of eight children in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Janice practiced law for many years, but never lost her desire to write. Then one day it hit her -- dodgeball! She started imagining what would happen if a shy, young boy suddenly found himself in the dodgeball capital of the world. The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco is her first book. If kids have half as much fun reading it as she had writing it, she'll consider it a huge success.

She has an interesting quote on her website from, of all people, the president of the national dodgeball league. It reads as follows -

"As President of the National Dodgeball League, I declare The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco a must read for all young dodgeballers. It has everything you could want in a story: drama, suspense, great characters, humor, and, of course, dodgeball." -- Ed Prentiss, President, The National Dodgeball League

Her website is very informative and has a section of games for children to play. A lesson plan is also available if teachers are planning on using her book with their class. Discussion questions for each section of the book are also available at her website.

Annotation:

Where will I work? How much will I get paid? How many hours will I work a week? Will I have a chance to work with any of my friends? Will I be bored? Will it be fun? These are just a few questions one asks when the time has come to get a JOB!!! Eleven-year old Phillip Stanislaw might be the only kid who wants to run away from his job!!!!

He works in the circus with his mom and dad, but he just wants to be a normal boy. He gets the chance to be in a normal home in the small town of Hardingtown – the unofficial Dodgeball Capital of the World, and live with his aunt and uncle. Dodgeball was not an activity in the circus, and Phillip immediately understands why. It is not fun getting smashed in the face with a ball! Especially if it has been thrown by B.B. Tyson, the junior dodgeball champion and school bully!

One of the toughest events a child goes through is moving. Phillip has to face a new town, a new bunch of kids, and new surroundings. Even though it was his choice to move, it made it no easier on him. He is struggling to find his place in the world and keep his "circus life" a secret. Standing up to peer pressure was not what he expected right off the bat.

After a very rough game and his glasses getting broken, Phillip decides to take B.B. to court. He suddenly realizes that he is in charge of defending himself and has no idea what to do. After some wild moments – his clown dad jumping out of a box in the courtroom, Phillip’s classmates learning he had a life in the circus, and a rain shower of dodgeballs flying from the sky – Phillip was satisfied with the outcome.

The dodgeballs that were made in the town were to be made softer, kids were allowed to play other sports besides dodgeball, and B.B. was helping Phillip get new glasses. Phillip put is best at the end of the book - the real world is like a dodgeball game - it is better to have your eye on the ball than a ball in your eye.

Several other important themes run through this book that all children will face in some form or another. Honesty is brought out in the court room scenes concerning how no matter what, it is best to tell the truth. Loyalty to family was my favorite theme due to the fact that I have a teenage son who sometimes forgets how important family is in your life. Phillip tried to keep his family history away from his friends, but at the end, he puts family before anything else. He is proud of his dad and his background and makes sure everyone knows that.

One of the most unique techniques the author used was at the beginning of every chapter. She started with an expression or a saying that has been used in the circus and use it to apply it to the main theme. *You can fill them full of hot air, but if you go to far, they'll explode* was one she used before the court room scene and she was referring to the judge. (My husband is an attorney so he especially liked that one). Great book for children at this level to read about some hard issues they will face as they grow up.

Booktalk:

Phillip Stanislav, whom you've probably heard of many times, caused a lot of trouble in a little town. If you haven't heard of him, you don't know what you're missing. Phillip Stanislav is a young boy who lives and works in the circus. Phillip has had a special life because his father is a clown and his mother is the fat lady. Phillip goes to live in the town of Hardingtown, the dodgeball capital of the world. He lives with his Aunt and Uncle, so he can experience a “normal life”. But what

happens to him is anything but normal. Phillip ends up hating the game of dodgeball and takes the school bully to court for breaking his glasses during a game. The bully is a girl and the best dodgeball player in the town which further complicates everything. To find out what happens in court and how the town handles the decision, be sure to read [The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco](#) by Janice Repka.

Characters: The main character is Phillip Edward Stanislaw. He is an eleven year old boy dreaming of running away from the circus. His dream comes true when his parents let him stay with his Aunt and Uncle in the town of Hardingtown, Pennsylvania. Dodgeball is the only thing that the town is interested in and Phillip is in for the fight of his life. Phillip is a nice, well-mannered boy who is just trying to fit in. He is faced with a difficult choice near the end of the book and he must hang on to his beliefs to make the right decision. B.B. Tyson is the gym teacher's daughter and the girl that Phillip takes to court! She is a strong, confident girl that is very popular and is one of the best dodgeball players in the school. Minor characters are Uncle Felix, Aunt Veola, Coach Tyson, and the lawyers.

Conflict and Resolution: Hardingtown calls itself the Unofficial Dodgeball Capital of the World (thanks to the dodgeball factory that is located in the town). Much to his displeasure, Phillip learns that every gym class features a sadistic form of the game. After his glasses are broken from a ball thrown by the mean-spirited coach's daughter, Phillip decides to sue for damages and ends up serving as his own lawyer. He does a really poor job of it and just as the case is being decided a mishap, an airplane drops several dodge balls on the citizens of this small town, injuring many. In the end, Phillips wins the case. But the story doesn't end there. Phillip learns some very valuable life lessons. He learns to stand up for himself, he learns to not be ashamed of his parents and what they do for a living, and he finds way to co-exist in both worlds: life inside the circus and outside of the circus.

Genre: This realistic fiction book was very enjoyable and would be a great book for an entire class to pick apart and learn some life lessons along the way.

If you enjoyed The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco, I also recommend the following realistic fiction books:

Secrets of a Mid-life Mom by Jane Cabaniss Jarrell

The Liberation of Gabriel King by K. L. Going

The World According to Humphrey by Betty G. Birney

The SOS File by Betsy Byars

Interest Level: grades 3-6

Reading Level: 4.7

Read-Aloud Passages – Chapter 10, Page 64- This is a great passage to read out loud because it explains the basis for the rest of the book. Phillip is fed up with having to play dodgeball in gym class so he comes up with an idea to start a petition against it. “You aren’t the first kid to get picked on by a dodgeball bully, but you’ll be the first kid to do something about it”.

Chapter 17, Page 102- This is a great passage because everyone changes their mind about Phillip. He catches B.B.’s ball during the game in gym class and no one can believe it! “Holy Cow! You caught it....That was cool.” B.B. even changes her attitude and everything works out in the end.

Setting: This book takes place in the present day and time. To help understand the setting, place yourself in a small town with only small schools, like McCordsville or Pendleton. If you have ever been to a circus, try and remember the children that helped out around the animals and that was what Phillip did before he moved to the little town of Hardingtown.

Point of View: This story was told in third person limited omniscient.

Theme: The main idea or central theme of this book was clear throughout. Phillip wanted to live like a “normal boy”, but had to go through many things that normal boys go through, such as the fears associated with moving, a new school, standing up for your self, and doing what is right even if it is not the most popular move. In a humorous way, Janice Repka leads the reader through several stressful events that most children will face at sometime during their childhood. She also tries to show the ups and the downs that children will face at different points in their lives, and the possible ways to get through.

Across the Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies: 1. An activity dealing with our court system and how it works. A mock trial would be great for this book. Members needed would be a judge, a lawyer or lawyers for both sides, a defendant, witnesses to be called, jury, policeman, bailiff, and a circus clown. Children would learn how our justice system works and have a great time doing it. Supplies needed: circus clown costume, a gavel, a judge’s robe, tables for the prosecution and the defense, and a policeman badge and or costume.

Language Arts/Life Skills: One of the main ideas going through this book was respect for yourself and your family. An activity would be to make a poster about your family. Family Name, adjectives describing the family, fun things you like to do together, etc. Supplies needed: poster board for each student and markers.

[Kids Go To Court](#) is a great video about the justice sytem.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2371132289507680068&q=children%27s+videos+on+jury+trials&total=51&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=0>

Activity #1: The following activity helps meet these Indiana Academic Standards:

Functions of government 4.2.3 and role of citizens 4.2.7

Divide the class into groups of three. Have the group decide on roles: judge, plaintiff, or defendant. Have the students role-play the situations. The judge may ask questions. The plaintiff speaks first, then the defendant. The judge makes his/her decision. Have the judge explain his/her decision to the class.

JUDGE: The judge must be sure both sides have an equal chance to present their cases. The judge must also decide if a law has been broken. If so, he/she must uphold the law.

PLAINTIFF: The plaintiff is the person who requests the court to hear the case. This person has accused another person (the defendant) of doing or not doing something which he thinks is not fair.

DEFENDANT: This person has been accused by the plaintiff. He/She has been summoned (called to court). He/She listens to the charge and then either tries to give reasons for his/her actions or tries to prove that the charge is untrue.

Example of a court case:

1. Plaintiff is a babysitter.
2. Defendant is a parent.
3. The Plaintiff agreed to baby-sit for the Defendant's two children for \$1.50 cents an hour. When the babysitter arrived, there was a third child, a cousin, present. Plaintiff said nothing about an increased rate, but demanded \$2.25 cents an hour when the Defendant returned home two hours later. Plaintiff claimed the rate to be 75 cents per child. The Defendant refused to pay the additional 75 cents per hour. Plaintiff sued.

What is the issue?

How do you decide? Judgment is for the Plaintiff or Defendant.

Why?

Possible class discussion questions:

1. Which is the most difficult role to play? Why?
2. How well did the students play their roles?
3. What were the issues in the cases?
4. Were the decisions fair?

Activity #2:

Indiana Academic Standard for Language Arts

4.7.12 Make informational presentations that:

- focus on one main topic.
- include facts and details that help listeners focus.
- incorporate more than one source of information (including speakers, books, newspapers, television broadcasts, radio reports, or Web sites).

Have each student select one court case that has been in the news within the last year. Find out facts and details about the case – through the internet, newspaper articles, etc. Make an oral presentation to the class explaining the case and the verdict. Discuss the topics we have covered in class and explain one relation to The Stupendous Dodgeball Game trial.

Continuation of Novel Resource #4

Discussion Questions for Chapters:

Chapter 1 : Pre-reading: Have you ever been to a circus?

During: Why was Helena so mad at Phillip? Page 8

Post: If you were to be in a circus, what would you want to do?

Chapter 2: Pre-reading: Have you ever moved away from your home? What was good about it? What was bad?

During: Why does Phillip want to get out of the circus life so bad? P. 12-14

Post: Have you and your parents ever had a major difference of opinion?

How did it turn out?

Chapter 3-5 Pre-reading: Have you ever traveled anywhere on your own? Were you nervous?

During: How did Aunt Veola explain what dodgeball was? Page 24

Post: What happened during the first dodgeball game? Why do you

think Phillip played that way?

Chapter 6-8 Pre-reading Have you ever had a friend that was blind or deaf? How did you communicate with them?

During: How did Phillip “run” into B.B.?

Post: Would you help a new child at your school? Why or why not?

Chapter 9-12 Pre-reading Have you ever thought no one liked you? What did you do?

During: Which of the 3 choices on pages 52-53 would you choose?
Why?

Post: Have you ever had to go to the principal’s office? What did you do and what was your restitution?

Chapter 13-15 Pre-reading What caused Phillip to have to go to the court house?

During: Who ended up being Phillip’s lawyer? Do you agree or disagree with Phillip’s choice? Page 93-94

Post: How does Phillip grow up at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 16-18 Pre-reading: Would you be brave enough to sue anyone? Take them to court?

During; What really happened with Phillip’s mom years ago?
Pages 108-109

Post: Would your family support you in such a crazy court Situation?

Chapter 19-21 Pre-reading: Would you continue with a law suit if it was harming
your family emotionally?

During: How did B.B. tell Phillip he was an OK guy? P. 117

Post: Why do you think Phillip went ahead with the lawsuit
Even after he befriended B.B.?

Chapter 22-26 Pre-writing Have you ever had to get up and go somewhere that you
Were very nervous about? How did you calm down?

During: How did Phillip end up representing himself? P. 133

Post: Do you think Phillip felt embarrassed or relieved when
His father jumped out of the box?

Chapter 27-29 Pre-writing: Have one of your parents ever done something that
embarrassed you? What?

During: Why was everyone “running for their lives”? p.165-165

Post: Have you ever been really good at a sport? Which one?
Do you still play?

Language:

Fiasco-(cover) a fiasco is a situation that turns into a large commotion, like the courtroom scene in this book.

Diverted-(page 8) to change your attention to another event, like the crowd diverted their attention from Helena falling down to the high wire act

Embroidered-(page 25) a type of sewing that is usually used to make sweaters or artwork, like the sweater Phillip’s mom was wearing in a picture

Petite- (page 32)- small in all areas, like the petite girl who jumped into the dodgeball game and Phillip later learned was B.B.

Snickers- (page 68) a type of quiet laughter that can be taken as rude, like the snickers that the children made when B.B. was making fun of Phillip

Lulled-(page 74) to be put into a sort of trance or space, like Phillip was put into by his teachers voice stating al the elements in the periodic table

Transgression-(page 77) a punishment for a wrong doing, like the 4 day suspension that the principal was going to give to Phillip for sending around his petition

(My daughter is going into 6th grade in the fall so she picked out most of these words as ones she did not understand.)

Indiana Academic Standards met by The Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco:

Most of the standards were in the reading categories , with a few in social studies

3rd grade: 3.1.3,3.1.6, and most of the 3.2 and 3.4 standards were all met with this book.

Reading grade level material and working on vocab are major objectives in 3rd grade and obviously, this book would help meet that standard. Predicting and comprehension were also met in all categories in this book.

Writing multiple paragraph papers is a main objective in 4th grade, and that would be a requirement in my class. Whether working by themselves or with a partner, composition writing would take up a great deal of time. Standards 4.1.1,all the 4.2's, 4.3's, and 4.4's would be met.

5th and 6th grades delve into deeper literary books but still have to master the basics of good writng. Most standards would be met during language arts/reading of this books and more difficult ones. The social studies standards on dealing with people and socializing would also be met and discussed during the reading of books from the hoosier list.