

Novel Resource #1

Book: Winnie at Her Best

Author: Jennifer Richard Jacobson

Illustrator: Alissa Imre Geis

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Company

Copyright Year: 2006

Young Hoosier Book Award Nominee



Genre: Realistic Fiction

Themes: self-acceptance, jealousy, competition, death, friendship

Point of View: Third person (told by narrator)

Main Characters:

- ❖ Winnie (Winifred) Fletcher: fourth grader, artist
- ❖ Zoe Johnson: fourth grader, Winnie's best friend, smart
- ❖ Vanessa: fourth grader, Winnie's best friend, actress
- ❖ John Stuart: kindergartner, Winnie's reading buddy, shy
- ❖ Marissa: kindergartner, Vanessa's sister
- ❖ Mr. Fletcher: Winnie's dad, teacher
- ❖ Mrs. Godowsky: John Stuart's mom, very sick

Setting: Winnie's school and town (Boston), no specific time period—Winnie is a fourth grader

Conflict: The conflict in this story is internal. Winnie is struggling to find out what her talent is. Meanwhile, she is watching her friends who are succeeding with their talents. At the same time, she meets John Stuart who seems to have troubles at home. When she finally finds something she is good at, she struggles between being a good friend and following through for herself.

Resolution: At the last minute, Winnie decides to follow through for John Stuart. However, her father sees that Winnie receives her second place reward for her artwork.

Interest Level: Grades 3-9

Reading Level: Ages 9-12

(Book talk)

Have you ever wondered what it is that makes you different from your friends? What is your true talent? Winnie, a fourth grader, is having a hard time figuring that out herself. Her two best friends are occupied with either rehearsals or spelling bee practices. She feels left behind, forgotten, and confused.

Just as she starts to figure out her talent, a little boy named John Stuart shows up. He is a mysterious kindergartner with a secret that Winnie is determined to figure out herself. Winnie begins teaching him how to read, but notices that is as close as he will allow her to get to him.

Why won't John Stuart communicate with her? Why is he so shy and scared? What is her talent that sets her apart from her friends? Come along with Winnie as she finds the answers to all of her questions. Watch as she starts to realize what is important to being a "talented" person and a good friend at the same time.

(Annotation)

Jennifer Richard Jacobson writes a story about Winnie Fletcher, a fourth grader struggling to find herself. Jacobson tells the story of how Winnie is facing the fact that she isn't exactly like her friends, but doesn't know what makes her "talented". In the midst of working on her new found talent of drawing, Winnie meets John Stuart. John Stuart is a kindergarten with "strange" tendencies. Winnie is determined to find out what has shut him down. When Winnie is finally about to get the recognition she has been waiting for when John Stuart needs her to be by his side the most. Winnie is forced to make the hardest choice for a fourth grader, her own recognition or friendship. Winnie follows the gut feeling she has, she stays with John Stuart. She learns more about herself than she could have ever imagined.

Jacobson's story is set in a tone that is easy for young children to relate to. She portrays the characters the exact way that they would be in reality. Young children could easily relate to many of the situations that Winnie is faced with in the story. Although there are not many pictures, the few illustrations done by Alissa Imre Geis allow the reader to see the emotions that are felt by the characters. I was very intrigued by the way the story and illustration fit together.

About the Author: Jennifer Richard Jacobson



Photograph by: Chris Balsa-Omeara

Author's Homepage: <http://www.jenniferjacobson.com/>

Email Address: Jennifer@jenniferjacobson.com

Interesting Facts/Background:

- ❖ Grew up in New Hampshire
- ❖ Originally wanted to be a teacher, only wrote in diaries
- ❖ Won a school essay contest
- ❖ Went to college to be a teacher at Lesley College, favorite class was Children's Literature (where writing started to interest her)
- ❖ Master's Degree at Harvard Graduate School of Education
- ❖ Taught first grade in Maine, where she wrote her first book (never published—"just for practice")
- ❖ Has two children
- ❖ First book sold "A Net for Stars"

Other Books Published:

Picture Books: [A Net for Stars](#)

[Moon Sandwich Mom](#)

Intermediate Books: [Winnie Dancing On Her Own](#)

[Truly Winnie](#)

Young Adult Book: [Stained](#)

Awards:

- ❖ Winnie Dancing On Her Own: chosen as a Top Ten Novel by Booklist
- ❖ Stained: Publisher's Weekly Best Children's Book, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age, and Maine Lupine Award

Discussion Questions

Pre-reading:

- ❖ How do you feel when your friends have a talent/skill that you wish you had?
- ❖ What would you do if your friend needed you and you had something that was important going on?
- ❖ How important is friendship to you?

During reading:

Chapter 1:

- ❖ Why do you think that Winnie thinks Cynthia is a poor sport? (page 5)
- ❖ What is a Spelling Bee? (page 1)

Chapter 2:

- ❖ How do you think Winnie feels when Vanessa can't think of what she is good at? (page 8)
- ❖ What do you think Winnie is going to start doing now that her friends tell her she is good at drawing? (page 9)
- ❖ Based on what Winnie said to John Stuart, why do you think he ran away? What did she say wrong? (page 11)

Chapter 3:

- ❖ Why do you think Winnie immediately knows what book to choose for John Stuart? (page 17)
- ❖ Can you think of a book that you would read with John Stuart? (page 17)

Chapter 4:

- ❖ Let's make a list of things that could be going on with John Stuart. Why do you think he is acting the way he does? (page 19)
- ❖ How do you think Winnie will feel about working with him again? (page 21)

Chapter 5:

- ❖ Why do you think Winnie is hiding her notebook from her friends? (page 27)
- ❖ What do you think she is going to do next? (page 29)

Chapter 6:

- ❖ Now that her dad has reminded her how she learned to read, what do you think Winnie will do the next time she meets with John Stuart? (page 33)

Chapter 7:

- ❖ What is the feeling that Winnie has about Vanessa and Zoe being interviewed? Why does she feel that way? (page 36)

Chapter 8:

- ❖ What do you think Winnie is drawing? What makes you think that? (page 40)
- ❖ How do Winnie's feelings towards Vanessa change? (page 47)
- ❖ Why is John Stuart so worried about his mom? (page 43)

Chapter 9:

- ❖ Why won't Winnie tell her teacher she doesn't want to work with John Stuart? (page 49-50)
- ❖ What is she excited about? (page 48)

Chapter 10:

- ❖ If Winnie chose a matt that reminded her of the sun, what does that tell us about the picture? (page 56)
- ❖ Why does she think the next week seems so long? (page 57)

Chapter 11:

- ❖ Why do you think Winnie decides not to tell her two best friends about the contest? (pages 61-63)
- ❖ How do you think her mood has changed? (pages 63-64)

Chapter 12:

- ❖ How do you think John Stuart is feeling? (pages 65-67)
- ❖ What do you think Winnie will do since she is supposed to be going to the museum? (page 68)

Chapter 13:

- ❖ What would you have done if you were in Winnie's position? (page 69)
- ❖ How do you think Mr. Fletcher is feeling about his daughter's decision? (pages 74-75)

Chapter 14:

- ❖ How do you think Winnie and Mrs. Godowsky feel when they hear John Stuart read by himself? (page 77)
- ❖ What exactly is Winnie feeling when her dad hands her the ribbon? What are the thoughts running through her head? (pages 79-80)

Chapter 15:

- ❖ Why does second place feel better now? (page 83)
- ❖ What two things do her friends say she is good at? (page 84)

Post-reading:

- ❖ What are the lessons that Winnie learned throughout this story?

Vocabulary List

- (page 2) margarine: cooking fat made into butter
- (page 3) mountainous: full of mountains
- (page 4) persnickety: too particular or precise; fussy
- (page 6) celebratory: to perform a celebration publicly
- (page 10) marigolds: a plant with red, yellow, or orange flowers
- (page 25) eligible: able to be chosen
- (page 25) imitations: the act of imitating; to copy
- (page 25) submissions: turning something in

- (page 34) silhouette: an outline; a profile portrait
- (page 35) trepidation: trembling movement; anxiety
- (page 61) arduous: difficult to do; using a lot of energy
- (page 62) exacerbate: to irritate or annoy very much
- (page 74) bureau: a writing table or desk with a drawer for paper

Read-Aloud Passages

Passage 1:

Page 7-Page 9 (Start at "Not true...")

This passage sets the tone for why Winnie is feeling the way she does in this story. All of the emotions start from the things said by her friends on these couple of pages.

Passage 2:

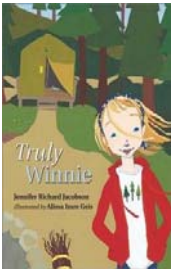
Page 69-Page 74 (Stop at "The nurse called the museum and talked to Mr. Fletcher.")

Here is where the reader is able to see the growth of Winnie. We, and Winnie, find out what she is feeling and what is most important to her.

Anticipation Statements

<u>Before</u> True/False What do you think?	<u>Anticipation Statement</u>	<u>After</u> Were you correct? Why or why not?
	Best friends have the same talents.	
	You can't be friends with someone if you aren't good at the same things.	
	Fourth graders can't teach younger students how to do things.	
	Jealousy is a negative feeling you get towards someone.	
	Friendship is something that you can be good or bad at.	

If you enjoyed reading Winnie at Her Best, you'll love...



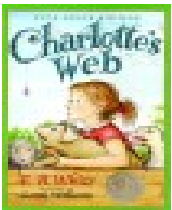
Truly Winnie By: Jennifer Richard Jacobson

Winnie Fletcher and her two best friends, Zoe and Vanessa, go on a camping trip together. Winnie is faced with her worst fear. She has to stay in a separate cabin from her two friends. However, Winnie finds herself liking the experience.



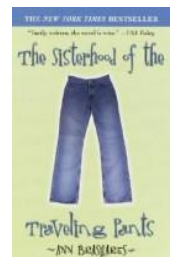
Winnie Dancing On Her Own By: Jennifer Richard Jacobson

Winnie Fletcher and her two best friends, Zoe and Vanessa, are all signed up to take dance lessons together. Winnie is very unsure of herself as she enters this new experience.



Charlotte's Web By: E.B. White

Like Winnie, Fern is learning to deal with issues of growing up. She is learning to choose between things that make her happy, friends, and responsibility. The only difference in this book is that most of her best friends are animals.



The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants By: Ann Brashares

A group of best friends are getting ready to have a summer like none ever. They are going to spend their first summer apart. The one thing they have to stay connected is the pair of pants that they all like.

Indiana State Standards: Language Arts

Grade 3: 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.8

Grade 4: 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.5, 4.1.7, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6, 4.3.7

Grade 5: 5.1.1, 5.1.6, 5.2.3, 5.2.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.8

Grade 6: 6.1.4, 6.2.7, 6.2.9, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.8, 6.3.9

Across the Curriculum Connections

Activity 1: Art

- ❖ Students will create a picture that portrays feelings and experiences they have had. Students have to pick the appropriate color matt to go with the mood of the picture. Also, students will be able to depict the feeling/emotion within others pieces of artwork.

Materials needed:

- Artwork showing feeling or expression
- A variety of colored mattes
- Paper for drawing
- Pencils, crayons, and/or markers

Art Standards:

Grade 3: 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.7.2, 3.12.1

Grade 4: 4.3.2, 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.7.2, 4.7.3, 4.12.2

Grade 5: 5.1.3, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.7.1, 5.7.2

Grade 6: 6.3.2, 6.6.2, 6.7.1, 6.7.2

Activity 2: Spelling/Language Arts

- ❖ Students could play a game of "Sparkle" using the spelling words or vocabulary words of the week. (Kind of like having a Spelling Bee.)

Materials needed:

- Spelling list
- Room to line up in a straight line

How to Play:

Students line up all facing the front of the room. The teacher says one of the spelling words on the list. The first person says the word. The next people in line take turns giving the next letters (example: person 1-cat, person 2-c, person 3-a, person 4-t). After, the word has been spelled, the next two people have to say sparkle (person 5-sparkle, person 6-sparkle). After two sparkles are given, the next person is out and has to sit down (person 7-out). Now, the next person starts with a new word from the teacher. The last person standing wins the game.

Standards:

Grade 3: 3.6.8

Grade 4: 4.6.8

Grade 5: 5.6.7

Grade 6: 6.6.5

Resources to Supplement Activities

James, JoAnne. Three Quest Plays: for Children. Red Deer Press, 2003

*A book of three plays that show real life situations that deals with the realities of friendship.

Because of Winn-Dixie. Dir. Wayne Wang. Perf. AnnaSophia Kobb, Jeff Daniels, Cicely Tyson, and Eva Marie Saint. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2005.

*A movie that is about friendship, lies, love, and loss. (Ties in with the theme of this book.)

Babe. Dir. Chris Noonan. Narr. Christine Cavanaugh, Miriam Margolyes, and Danny Mann. Kennedy Miller Productions, 1995.

*A movie that is about friendship and pursuing your dreams. (Ties in with the theme of this book.)

Book Activities

Activity #1: Journal Entry, Individual Assignment

Directions: You have to have read the book Winnie at Her Best in order to complete this assignment. Write a one page journal entry. The entry should be three paragraphs long.

Paragraph 1: Describe what your feelings were when Winnie was upset about her talent not being recognized.

Paragraph 2: Tell about a situation where you could compare to Winnie. Explain what happened and how you felt.

Paragraph 3: Describe how this experience/story has helped you to become a better friend.

*Be sure to use neat handwriting and the grammar rules learned in class!

State Standards:

Grade 3: 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.6, 3.4.7, 3.4.8, 3.5.2, 3.5.7, 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.6.7, 3.6.8

Grade 4: 4.4.2, 4.4.10, 4.4.11, 4.4.12, 4.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3, 4.6.4, 4.6.6, 4.6.7, 4.6.8

Grade 5: 5.4.2, 5.4.8, 5.4.9, 5.4.10, 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.6.8, 5.6.3, 5.6.4, 5.6.6, 5.6.7

Activity #2: Create a Play, Group Assignment

Choice 1: Create a play using the story Winnie at Her Best.

- *You must use the same characters.
- *You must use the same emotions that you read from the book.
- *You must have props and a script.
- *The audience must be able to see the moral in the play.
- *You will perform this to an audience.

Choice 2: Create a play that is your own story, but similar to that of Winnie's story.

- *You must create your own characters.
- *Your character must show emotions that are appropriate to the situation in your story.
- *You must have props and a script.
- *The audience must be able to see the moral in the play.
- *You will perform this to an audience.

State Standards:

Grade 3: 3.7.2, 3.7.5, 3.7.6, 3.7.7, 3.7.8, 3.7.13

Grade 4: 4.7.2, 4.7.15, 4.7.5, 4.7.8, 4.7.9, 4.7.11

Grade 5: 5.7.2, 5.7.4, 5.7.5, 5.7.6, 5.7.13, 5.7.9, 5.7.11

My Informal Bibliography

Author's (Jennifer Jacobson) Website: <http://www.jenniferjacobson.com/>

Indiana Department of Education (Standards) Website:
<http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome.html>

Book reference: <http://amazon.com>

Dictionary:

"Michael Agnes." Webster's New World College Dictionary. 4th ed. 1999.

Movie Titles (Reference Information) Website: <http://www.imdb.com/title>