

Universal Experiences

Companion Text: If You See the Moon, by Zia Wells
Subject Area & Grade Level: Language Arts, 5th Grade

Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the balance of universal and specific human experiences in a text
- Recognize how universal experiences in literature are used to advance a plot
- Draft a story with a clear beginning, a middle, and an end

Pre-Writing Activity #1

Read the story once through without stopping. Ask students to identify some part of the story to which they could relate. Explain how good literature—that which sticks in people’s memories, affects cultures, and changes lives—is often a blend of universal experiences and specific examples. Universal experiences are things that happen to the characters, or positions they hold in life, to which many or most readers can relate. Specific examples are when unique experiences occur in the life or lives of a specific character or characters. These experiences may be completely unfamiliar to readers, or else familiar only to a certain subset of readers.

Pre-Writing Activity #2

Have students take out a sheet of paper, and draw a line down the center of it. Label one column “Universal Experiences” and the other column “Specific Experiences.” Flip through the story a second time with students, this time asking them to take notes on the characters’ experiences in the appropriate columns.

Point out how some of the specific experiences are truly personal, such as becoming raindrops (p. 27), but that others are what we call “culturally-specific,” that is, experiences that are common to the members of a particular culture while being uncommon or unfamiliar to those outside of that culture. Have students go back to their lists and put a star by any of the experiences that Cirra or Nimbu had which may not be universal, but which might have been common to members of their Native American culture.

Writing Activity

Use the following statement as a prompt in students’ writing-response journals, or as an independent assignment:

“One of the main universal experiences explored in this story is the experience of dreaming of a specific solution to feeling bored. Boredom is usually a combination of feeling tired while also feeling agitated, and people experiencing boredom often have very specific ideas about what will relieve it for them. Tell the story of a time when you were bored, and how you fought your



boredom. Your story does not need to be realistic, but it does need to be told in first-person, that is, from the perspective of the speaker. Be sure your story has an introduction, some action, and a conclusion.”



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