

Educator Discussion Guide

Fort

By Cynthia DeFelice

Louisiana Young Reader's Choice Award Nominee 2018
Grade 3-5

Submitted by Bernard De Santis III
School of Library and Information Science, LSU, Baton Rouge

ABOUT THE BOOK

For the last three summers, 11-year-old Wyatt and his father have traveled to upstate New York for Wyatt's dad's job teaching summer courses at a local college. A couple of weeks before the summer ends, Wyatt and his best friend Augie are getting into mischief and finally deciding to build the fort they had been planning all summer. With some help from Augie's uncle Heindel and his junk yard owning friend Al, the boys get to work. After the weekend, they return to the fort finding it has been despoiled. After a confrontation with Gerard, a local boy who has an unspecified mental disability, they figure out that the real culprits are the local bullies that have given them, and Gerard a hard time. They boys decide that the bullies aggression will not stand and go to the library to hatch a plan that will use all of their respective skill sets and resources in preparation for "Operation Doom."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia DeFelice grew up with three siblings and credits her mother, who was an English teacher, as the reason she eventually became a writer. She did not begin writing until 1987 when she was 36 years old while working as an elementary school librarian. She was drawn to writing because she wanted to write the kinds of stories that children loved. She has won many state awards and has many starred reviews in addition to awards such as School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, and ALA Notable Book.

Biographical information and more can be found at

www.cynthiadefelice.com.

Accessed 10 June 2017.

BOOK AWARDS

Children's Choice Book Awards 2016 Finalist

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Mental Disability and Stigma

In the book, one of the characters has a mental health disorder. This character tends to be avoided and even picked on by other kids. Ask your students if they know what a stigma is. According to Merriam-Webster, stigma is a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something.

<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/stigma>, accessed on 8/31/17

How can someone recognize a stigma? Gather their ideas on where a stigma comes from. See what kinds of negative things they have heard about people with mental illness or mental health disorders. See what kinds of positive things they have heard about people with mental health disorders. Ask them why they think people with mental illnesses are stigmatized. Common mental health disorders they may be familiar with include: anxiety, mood, eating, obsessive compulsive, etc. You can discuss famous people who have a mental disorder and how it shapes that person's life. Inquire if they can think of other kinds of health conditions or social issues have been stigmatized throughout history.

Camping / Forts

In the book the main characters build a fort in the woods. Ask students if they have ever been camping in the wilderness and what kinds of things they needed to survive. Invite students to share stories about building a fort or a hideout somewhere. Have each student write about what their ideal fort or hideout would be like and who would be allowed to go there. Students can be paired up with other students to share the details about their ideal forts and then asked to present their partner's ideal fort to the class time permitting.

Bullying

In the book the main characters are bullied. Before beginning a discussion on bullying, consider speaking with your school counselor for resources on the school's policy on bullying. Perhaps ask your councilor if they would assist with this discussion in person. Have students imagine what it feels like to be bullied. Have them list actions they could take if they are being bullied. Have them role play a situation where they see someone else getting bullied, have students play multiple roles to experience the situation from multiple points of view.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the book Wyatt's parents are shown to act very differently. Describe the parenting styles of each of Wyatt's parents with specific examples from the book.
2. Write the advantages and disadvantages for each parenting style. Which parenting style do you think is better? Why?

3. If you were in Augie's place and had ruined your Uncle's beloved owl, how would you have handled the situation differently?
4. Why were Wyatt and Augie hesitant to invite Gerard to their fort?
5. If you were Wyatt and Augie, would you have invited Gerard to the fort? Why or why not?
6. Augie and Wyatt have many differences. What do you think makes them such good friends? Support your answer with examples from the book.
7. What common ground do Augie and Wyatt have with Gerard that enables them to become friends?
8. Why do Wyatt and Augie go to the library to help plan Operation Doom?
9. Why do most people believe that Gerard burned down the shed at the junkyard?
10. Why is it difficult for Gerard's mother to let him spend the night in the fort with Wyatt and Augie?
11. Why do Augie and Wyatt think it's important for Gerard to be there for Operation Doom?
12. When Ms. DuLuth is dropping Gerard off at the fort, she starts to have second thoughts about letting him go. Why does she ultimately decide to let him spend the night in the fort?
13. What do you think about the adults like Al, Unk, and Aunt Hilda letting the boys go ahead with Operation Doom by themselves?
14. Why do you think Wyatt and Augie decided to limit the kinds of things their trip wires would do?
15. How did Wyatt and Augie know where to put the trip wires?
16. Did you like the way that Wyatt and Augie dealt with the bullies? Do you think the bullies will leave them alone now?
17. What was your favorite part of the book? Why?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies:

Wyatt and Augie took some time to think about where the best place for their fort would be. They kept the geography of the area in mind as well as proximity to water (for fish) and how likely it would be for someone to stumble upon their location. Historically forts, also known as castles, were built to protect cities. These strongholds had to be well planned keeping the geography of the land in mind. They were often built in places that were easy to defend and had access to water.

Have students study a map or location to determine the best place to build a fort to defend a city. They should support their choice with research. There are many books and online articles on this topic. Below are links to two online lessons plans from Portland State University and the National Park Service for Fort McHenry.

- <https://www.pdx.edu/geography-education/sites/www.pdx.edu.geography-education/files/Sweeney.pdf>
- https://www.nps.gov/fomc/learn/education/upload/Grade4_half.pdf

Language Arts:

Wyatt and Augie are upset that Gerard was tricked into singing a song that made fun of himself. The boys decide to make up a new song for Gerard. In conjunction with a lesson on haiku or other kind of poem, have students write a poem about who they are using their own name.

Science:

Augie teaches Wyatt how to make a lantern from a flashlight and a jug of water. Augie learned it from his grandmother, who uses it when there is no electricity. The following lesson teaches about the light refraction which makes these lanterns possible and touches on issues of providing light inside during the day in places without reliable sources of electricity.

http://www.scienceinschool.org/2014/issue29/solar_bulb

Art:

- Wyatt and Augie use a lot of Unk's leftover paint for their fort. They end up mixing a lot of different colors together to get a greenish brown that they use as camouflage. Had they known more about mixing colors together they might have come up with something different. The following lesson teaches students how to mix different colors together to get desired results starting with primary colors.

http://www.teach-nology.com/teachers/lesson_plans/arts/35/colorwheels.html

- Wyatt and Augie build a fort out of scraps from the junkyard. Have your students build their own mini-fort dioramas out of materials that would have been thrown away at their own houses. Here is an article on how to build dioramas,

<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Diorama>. Another option would be to divide the class into groups to build their own fort out of cardboard and other recyclable objects. After building their fort, the groups will report out to the class describing their fort.

Health and Physical Education:

During fort construction Wyatt cuts his hand. Aunt Hilda asks him if he's had a tetanus shot. What is tetanus and why should people be vaccinated for it? Students can explore this and other common vaccines using the following lesson plan,

<http://www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans/common-vaccinations.cfm>.

Math:

Create word problems that have students find out how much string they need to buy to complete trip-wire traps like the ones Wyatt and Augie used. Given prices of materials and startup funds, they could also determine how much their supplies would cost and how much money they would have left over.

VOCABULARY

Exasperation	Dismissively	Apparatus	Frivolously
Diversion	Appliances	Acronym	Monofilament
Hysterics	Rummaged	Diabolical	Crestfallen
Anxiously	Torment	Fiendish	Dismemberment
Girdle	Lockjaw	Mournfully	Disoriented

RELATED WEBSITES

8 Awesome Inside Fort Ideas

<http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/activities-for-kids-8-awesome-indoor-fort-ideas/>

A resource to build forts that anyone can use even if miles from the wilderness.

Snickerdoodle Recipe to Make with Kids

<http://www.woojr.com/snickerdoodle-recipe-to-make-with-kids/>

Want to know what Aunt Hilda’s cookies taste like? Follow this recipe!

Great Horned Owl

<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/great-horned-owl>

Information about Herkimer, the stuffed owl that Unkle Heindel loved.

DIY Weekend Project: How to Make a Slingshot

<http://www.artofmanliness.com/2012/05/14/diy-weekend-project-how-to-make-a-slingshot/>

Instructions on how to make a homemade sling shot just like Augie.