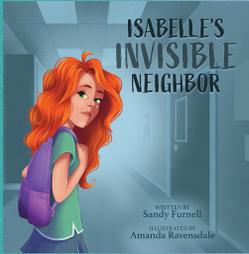


Isabelle's Invisible Neighbor | Teacher Guide



Summary & Standard: Isabelle and her fourth grade classmates are challenged to solve a riddle about who their invisible neighbors are. Students will read to understand homelessness and learn to empathize with and express compassion toward those experiencing it.

Author: Sandy Furnell
Genre: Narrative Fiction

Word Count: 2000+
Theme/Idea: seeing the needs of others

Making Connections: Text to World

Students may have seen or interacted with people experiencing homelessness or may have experienced it themselves. Ask students how they would feel if they did not have a place to live. Extend the discussion by explaining that people can experience homelessness for many reasons (i.e., job loss, health problems, abuse, family instability). Ask: *What do you think people experiencing homelessness need and how could you help?*

Discussion Resource:

Questions included at the end of the book may be used for guided discussion and as writing prompts.

Vocabulary

(definitions from Merriam Webster)

anticipation - the act of looking forward

attentively - being mindful and observant

advantage - superiority of position or condition

apprehensively - feeling or showing fear about the future

concentrate - to bring or direct toward a common objective or focus

homeless - having no home or permanent place of residence

invisible - hidden to view; not openly made known

judgment - forming an opinion or evaluation

mysterious - exciting wonder, curiosity or surprise while baffling efforts to comprehend or identify

neighbor - one living or located near another

Story Elements

Setting: the physical location and point in time in which the plot takes place

Conflict: the problem that drives a story forward.

Questions:

Where and when does the story take place? (*in a community in the US during modern/current times*)

Who are the main characters in the story? (*Isabelle is the primary protagonist and Sofia is secondary - a deuteragonist*)

Protagonist: the main character whose journey we follow

Antagonist: any person, place, thing or situation that presents a tremendous obstacle to the protagonist

Theme: the "why" behind the story, the big idea

What problem is Isabelle trying to solve? (*the riddle - who is my invisible neighbor? - is the antagonist and provides conflict in the story*)

What does Isabelle understand and learn by the end of the story? (*Invisible neighbors are people experiencing homelessness that we don't easily/readily see. People can experience homelessness for many reasons. Treating them with kindness and understanding is a good way to help them.*)

Reading Comprehension

Questions:

What does it mean to imagine, and where do you find examples of this in the story? (*i.e., Madison's creepy house, Michael's superheroes*)

What does it mean to blush? *To whom does this happen and why?* (*Sofia*)

Think about what it means to be surprised. What are some ways Isabelle was surprised in the story? (*i.e., Ms. Jenaye looks a lot like Isabelle's mom*)

What are some of the clues that helped Isabelle solve the riddle? (*i.e., the pastor's story, Sofia's secret*)

Extending Meaning and Problem Solving Through Writing

Ask students to write a paragraph about what the word *home* means to them.

Ask students to write their own riddles. Then have them exchange riddles and encourage them to work together to solve them.

Empathy Exercises

Art activity: Give students paper circles and colored pencils and have them create various emojis that express feelings. Then ask them to choose emojis that show how they would feel if they were in a situation like Sofia's. Discuss.

To extend the activity, ask students to think about a time when they felt afraid, and have them draw the situation. Give students the opportunity to discuss what it felt like and if/how someone helped them through their fear.

Encouraging Compassion (SEL)

Compare and contrast: Using a T-chart or Venn Diagram, brainstorm possible answers for the question: What do you think of when you hear the words "homeless person" and "neighbor", and what do you think each needs? Help students compare and contrast, paying close attention to the areas of

overlap, with the goal of "seeing" people experiencing homelessness as neighbors.

Activity: Have a bag containing several items --- needed and impractical, necessities and luxuries (i.e., granola bar/candy bar, water/gaming controller, washcloth/sticker, jewelry/hand sanitizer). Ask students to separate out the items they think would be most helpful for someone experiencing homelessness and explain why they chose those items.

Consider extending the activity by assembling basic necessities bags and taking a field trip to a local organization that serves people experiencing homelessness.

Developing Understanding Through Role Play

(SEL)

Some students will portray roles while others participate as audience members.

Skit: *"I've had a bad day" - A student has an emotionally challenging experience at home (i.e., argument with sibling and a privilege taken away). The next day, the student acts negatively at school (i.e., grabs a book from another student and won't give it back). Other students see the incident and respond to it in different ways: avoid, criticize, judge, ask questions to understand, speak kindly and offer help, seek outside support to intervene.*

After the skit, process with students, helping them understand the importance of "seeing" beyond the surface, being curious about the "why" behind someone's actions.

Geography and Mathematics Connections

Teacher: Research your state's data on the number of children experiencing homelessness - <https://nche.ed.gov/data-and-stats/> . Ask students to write a fraction showing the number experiencing homelessness out of the total number of students in their region (may include several different counties). Students will then reduce the fraction and determine the percentage. Using a blank state map (with county outlines), have students place percentages in the appropriate counties for your region of the state. If desired, complete the activity on a larger scale with a US map, comparing states instead of local regions.

Additional Resources for Teachers:

National Center for Homeless Education - <https://nche.ed.gov/>

SchoolHouse Connection: <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/youth-resources/>

HUD Exchange Continuum of Care (CoC) Program - <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/>