

Touching Spirit Bear by Ben Mikaelson (Published by Harper Collins)

Approved for use in Communication Arts, Grade 7

Summary

After his anger erupts into violence, Cole has to avoid going to prison. He agrees to participate in a sentencing alternative based on the native American Circle Justice, and he is sent to a remote Alaskan Island. During this time, he encounters a huge Spirit Bear that changes his life.

Connection to the Curriculum

Students can examine the rich characters and Mikaelson's development of those characters. In addition, *Touching Spirit Bear* is an incredible book about persevering through the struggles of growing up in a dysfunctional home and facing the consequences of one's actions. It addresses how to resolve issues that cause negative behaviors. Examining the theme of a novel is a key reading skill, and finding the Spirit Bear (goodness) within you is the main message of the novel.

Standards

Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

Reading: 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

Literature: 2.1- The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text.

Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)

Reading:

1.3.5- The student determines the meaning of words or phrases using context clues from sentences or paragraphs.

1.4.10- The student identifies characteristics of narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive texts.

1.4.14- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after reading the text.

1.4.15- The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions.

1.4.17- The student compares and contrasts varying aspects (e.g., characters' traits and motives, themes, problem-solution, cause-effect relationships, ideas and concepts, procedures, viewpoints) in one or more appropriate-level texts.

Literature:

2.1.1- The student describes different aspects of major and minor characters (e.g., their physical traits, personality traits, feelings, actions, motives) and explains how those aspects influence characters' interactions with other characters and elements of the plot, including resolution of the major conflict.

2.1.2- The student identifies and describes the setting (e.g., environment, time of day or year, historical period, situation, place) and analyzes connections between the setting and other story elements (e.g., character, plot).

2.1.3- The student identifies major and minor elements of the plot (e.g., conflict, crisis/turning moment, climax, resolution, rising action, falling action, subplots, parallel episodes) and explains how these elements relate to another.

2.1.4- The student understands aspects of theme (e.g. moral, lesson, meaning, message, author's ideas about the subject) and supports with implicit/explicit information from the text.

2.1.5- The student identifies the use of literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, figurative language, irony, metaphor, tone/mood, symbolism).

A Note on the Text

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

The main character, Cole, is punished for criminally assaulting another boy. The text also contains references to anger (Cole), alcoholism (Cole's parents), violence (a bear attack), and suicide (thoughts of his victim). Cole does, however, learn many important life-changing lessons.

Additional Unit Design Connections

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities