

Cloud Busting

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Synopsis

Sam is the class bully. He and his best friend Alex enjoy picking on anyone who is different. When Davey starts school he makes the perfect target. He has an eccentric way of looking at the world. Davey believes that “the worse thing in the world – no, the worse thing in the universe, would be to look and walk and talk and think like everyone else”. Nothing seems to upset him and he has no idea what effect his lack of reaction has on his tormenters. It makes Sam and Alex want to hurt him more. They call him names like “fizzy feet” and push him around.

Davey lives two doors down from Sam and their mothers become best friends. Sam’s mum wants him to become friends with Davey and encourages him to call for Davey on his way to school. Sam does as his mother asks but to show his disapproval he pushes Davey, who snaps and pushes him back – right into the path of an oncoming car. At the last minute Davey pulls Sam out of harms way. Sam is confused. Davey saved his life, even though the two of them aren’t friends.

This moment signifies a shift in Sam and Davey’s relationship. Sam begins to see things differently – through Davey’s unique eyes. Of course in front of Sam’s friends Davey is still “fizzy feet”, but when the pair are alone, they are friends. Soon, however, Sam’s friends start hassling him about the time that he is spending with Davey and he is forced to choose between them. He chooses Alex and in the process hurts Davey’s feelings. It is then that Sam realises that he needs Davey more than Davey needs him. The two become friends again and share their dreams and secrets.

It is the sharing of a secret that almost leads to tragedy. Even though he promises not to, Sam tells Alex one of Davey’s secrets. Alex uses the information to play a nasty prank on Davey – one that almost costs Davey his life. Things are never the same after this. Davey changes – he becomes like everyone else. Six months later he disappears without even saying goodbye. What Davey will never know is the profound effect that he had on Sam. He changed his whole way of thinking and of looking at the world.

Text Type

Cloud Busting, winner of the Smarties Silver award, is a truly unique story. Told from Sam's point of view the story is written completely in verse. At the start of the story Sam's teacher Mr Mackie sets the class a task to "write a poem about someone near to you". The story follows Sam's poem about his friend Davey, who is no longer at school. Soon it becomes clear that Sam was a bully who made Davey's life at school a misery – something that he now deeply regrets. Through the poem the reader learns about Davey's unique personality and his eccentric way of looking at the world. It is clear that Davey has had a profound effect on Sam and Sam changes immeasurably as a result of their friendship.

At the end of the story we learn that Davey's near-death experience and the constant bullying have a soul-destroying affect on him. He is no longer an individual; his creative spark has been snuffed out. Sam, who has learned so much from Davey, sees this as a tragedy and regrets the role that he played in Davey's transformation.

Cloud Busting will appeal to both boys and girls aged 10+ years. The story contains illustrations that help reinforce events and ideas presented and provide added interest. The story is funny, sad and moving with a poignant message about the devastating effects of bullying. Themes include peer pressure, individuality versus conformity and regret.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 3-11), Chapters 2-11 (pp. 15-75) and Chapters 12-26 (pp. 79-161).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them explain the effect of 1st person point of view and the unique way that the story is told entirely in verse. Encourage students to examine the main characters presented in the story. They should look at their emotions, actions and motivations, as well as how they develop and change throughout the course of the story. Students should identify the main themes presented in the story and be able to explain why these are important.

Introducing the Novel

Discussion

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who do you think the two boys on the front cover are? What do they appear to be doing?
- Why do you think the novel is called *Cloud Busting*?
- Why doesn't Sam like Davey? Whose fault is it that Davey has gone? What do you think the terrible thing that happens might be?

- The story is told completely in verse. What does this mean? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in this way?
- Use a dictionary or the computer to find the definitions of the following poetic devices and make up a glossary: repetition, alliteration, simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, rhyme and rhythm.

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 3-11) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their book.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 3-11)

- What assignment does Mr Mackie give the class? How do different members of the class react to the assignment? What does Mr Mackie tell the class about poetry?
- Who does Sam decide to write his poem about?
- Who is Alex?
- Who does Sam blame for Davey's departure?
- What is Davey's nickname?

Discussion

- Many students in Mr Mackie's class react negatively to the poetry writing assignment. Why do you think this is? What is your opinion about poetry? Why do you feel this way?
- Mr Mackie uses a number of similes when he tells his students to "let your words flow". Identify examples of these and describe the effect of them.
- Why do you think Sam decides to write about Davey? Why does Davey make Sam feel uncomfortable and uneasy?
- Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 2-11 (pp. 15-75) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-11 (pp. 15-75)

- How does Davey get the nickname "Fizzy feet"? Who doesn't let him forget the nickname?
- What are Haikus? How does Alex react to Mr Mackie's statement that they will be writing them?
- How does Sam describe the school bully? How does he describe Davey?
- In what ways does the school bully pick on Davey? How do you think his nasty words make Davey feel? Why does the bully despise Davey so much?
- How does Davey react to the bullying? What effect does his behaviour have?
- Who is the class bully?

- Why does Sam go and knock for Davey on his way to school? What happens on this morning? Why is Sam so surprised about what Davey says to the pedestrian? What does Davey mean when he says “your life belongs to me”?
- Describe the emotions that Sam feels as he looks at the rainbow. Why does Sam run away to school?
- How does Sam treat Davey when they are alone? How does he treat him while his other friends are around? Why is there such a difference?
- What does Davey encourage Sam to do when they are together? What does Davey believe the “worst thing in the universe” is?
- How is Sam’s friendship with Davey different to his friendship with Alex? What evidence is there to suggest that Sam is beginning to feel that his friendship with Alex is superficial?
- Why does Sam deny his friendship with Davey to Alex? How does Davey react when he overhears what Sam says? How do we know that Sam regrets his choice?
- What realisation does Sam come to at the end of this Chapter?

Discussion

- Describe Alex. What do we know so far about his character? How does Sam behave around Alex? Why do you think he behaves in this way?
- How do you feel when you find out that the school bully is Sam? Were you surprised? Why/why not? How do you know that Sam now regrets his behaviour? What makes some people bully others? What do you think the best way to deal with a bully is?
- Describe Davey. In what ways is he unique? What does he encourage Sam to do while they are together? What positive effect does he have on Sam?
- Write a Haiku poem about your favourite place.
- Find an example of alliteration in this section of the story.
- Find an example of a metaphor in this section of the story.
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 12-26 (pp. 79-161) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 12-26 (pp. 79-161)

- What advice does Sam’s mum give him? Why is Sam so reluctant to follow her advice?
- How does Sam know that he has hurt Davey’s feelings? What does he give him as a peace offering?
- What does Davey tell Sam when they swap snacks? Why do you think Davey doesn’t want Sam to tell anyone else his secret? Why do you think Sam tells Alex? Why does he repeat “Big Mistake” over and over again?
- How does Sam know that Alex is planning on using the information that he has given him to do something to Davey?

- How does Davey react when Alex approaches him and offers him one of his sandwiches? How does Alex's attention make him feel?
- Describe what happens to Davey after he eats the sandwich. What does Mr Mackie do to try and help him? How does Alex react when he realises what he has done? How does Sam feel about himself after the incident?
- How do the others in the class behave towards Sam when they learn that he betrayed his friend? Why do you think they blame Sam more than they blame Alex? Who do you believe is more responsible for the incident? Justify your answer.
- How does Davey's mum react after the incident? Is her reaction justified? Why/why not? How does Davey convince his mother to allow him to return to school?
- What changes does Sam notice in Davey after he gets out of hospital? How does Sam feel about these changes?
- What is cloud busting? What does Sam imagine that he and Davey talk about while staring at the clouds?
- Why does Sam believe that Davey became "one of them" after the peanut incident? Why does Alex allow Davey to hang around? What do you think Sam means when he says, "Everyone forgot about Alex and the peanut. But no one forgot about Davey and me"?
- When did Davey leave school? Why do you think he didn't tell anyone or say goodbye? What does Sam believe that Davey left behind?

Discussion

- Have you ever broken a promise that you made to someone? Why did you do it? How did it make you feel? Did the other person find out? How did they react? Were there any consequences to your actions?
- Sam has many regrets regarding how he behaved towards Davey as he looks back. Explain the things that Sam has done that he now regrets. What motivated him to behave this way at the time?
- How does Alex's prank change Davey? Why do you think the incident has such a profound effect on him?
- When does Sam decide that he no longer wants to be "secret best friends" with Davey? Why is it too late? What could Sam have done differently that might have meant things worked out differently with Davey?
- How has Davey's friendship changed Sam? Why have all of his former friends walked away from him? Do you think Sam likes himself better how he is now or how he was before? Explain your answer. What do you think Sam has learned from his experiences?
- Identify an important message that the author of the story wanted to teach her readers.
- Find an example of repetition used in this section of the story. Why has it been used?
- Identify a simile used on page 133 and explain the effect of it.

- On page 60 Sam uses many metaphors that describe how he feels about life. Come up with 5 metaphors of your own to describe how you feel about your life.

Activities

Poetry Anthology – Read the note from the author at the end of the novel. Here she explains the conventions of 4 different types of poems. Your task is to write 4 poems – a haiku, a limerick, a shape poem and a poem written in blank verse. Your poems can be about any topic you like. Publish your poems using the computer and present them in a booklet.

Letter to the Author – Write a letter to the author of *Cloud Busting*. Explain what you liked about the story and what lessons it taught you.

Story Writing – Write a short story based on a personal experience. Write your story entirely in verse.

Static Image – Design a static image that shows an important theme from *Cloud Busting*. You may wish to create a collage using words and images from the story or you could make a poster.

Theme – Identify 2 important themes and explain how they are developed in the story. Use quotes and other specific evidence from the story to back up your ideas.

Advice Column – Imagine that you are Sam. Write a letter to an agony aunt asking for advice about the problems that you are having with Davey. Now imagine that you are an agony aunt. Write a reply to Sam offering him advice.

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Sam. Write a diary entry for the night after Davey has his allergic reaction at school and ends up in hospital. Include a summary of the events that happened that day and remember to explain your thoughts and feelings about them.

Plot – Choose 8 important events that occur in the story. Create a storyboard that shows these events visually in the order that they occur. Under each illustration write a brief explanation that explains what is happening.

Poster – Create an anti-bullying poster that could be displayed in your classroom.