

Ella and Ob

Author: Sarah Johnson

Synopsis

Bella's family is kind of unusual. Her father is constantly renovating and improving the rambling old house that they live in. Her mother is a scientist, obsessed with recycling. It is not uncommon for Bella's mother to disappear for days on end, so when she goes missing, no one notices at first. When Bella's father finally realises that his wife hasn't come home he becomes very upset. Bella and her father search everywhere they can think of but to no avail. As the weeks turn into months Bella's father gets stranger by the day. He stops renovating the house and eventually he doesn't even go outside. It's as if he can't see the point in carrying on if his wife is not by his side.

All of this is very hard on Bella. She is forced not only to take care of herself, but care for her father as well. On top of all of this Bella hears a strange sound one night and is astonished to see a large pink boot disappearing through the door. It turns out that the boot belongs to a ghost who calls himself "ob" (his name's really Bob but the "B" is silent). It turns out that with ghosts you can only see what *isn't* there. Ob is missing a foot and that's all Bella can see (encased in a lovely pink boot). Ob introduces Bella to the unusual world of ghosts and their nocturnal activities. She changes her name to ella (with a silent "B") and takes ob to the vacant lot that has fascinated her for so long. Ob loves to collect things that humans have lost or discarded. Ob tries to help ella with her father; he has a roomful of "oomph" that has been thrown away by people. Ella hopes that with a bit of "oomph" her father might finally be able to track down her mother and bring her home.

Text Type

Ella and Ob is a fast-paced short novel that will appeal to boys and girls aged 8+. The book contains wonderful illustrations by Jenny Cooper that help add interest and reinforce the storyline. The story is a light-hearted and amusing tale about family, ghosts and missing persons. Bella is a likeable character who slips into being friends with a ghost with all of the ease and open-mindedness of a child. The author has created a wonderfully imaginative fantasy world where ghosts exist and thrive on the waste left behind by humans.

Themes include family, childhood innocence, loss of a parent, ghosts and a more serious message about the environment and the need to recycle.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-15), Chapters 3-7 (pp. 16-52) and Chapters 8-10 (pp. 53-86).

During the shared sessions have students ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Encourage students to make the leap of imagination necessary to understand the world of ghosts and how their world is different to that of humans. Students should make inferences and predict what is going to happen next in the story. Have students identify the main themes and explain how they are developed in the novel.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb on the back.

- Why is the first part of the blurb written in a different font to the second part?
- The main character's name is Bella. Why do you think the novel is called "ella and ob"?
- What is the name of the ghost that Bella meets? What images come into your head when you think about ghosts?
- Why is Bella's father so upset?
- What do you think happened to Bella's mum?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-15) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-15)

- Why does Bella's mum rummage in rubbish bins at night?
- Why does Bella believe that what she hears is "no ordinary bump"?
- What does Bella see disappearing through the door when she goes to investigate the noise? What does she find under the grandfather clock?
- How does the voice that Bella hears feel about children?
- What does Bella's father like doing around the house? What does Bella's mother do for a job? Where is Bella's mother?
- How does Bella feel about her mother's obsession?

Discussion

- Bella's mother is fanatical about recycling. What sorts of thing can be recycled? Why is recycling good for the environment? What other things could you do that would benefit the planet?
- How would you feel if your mother disappeared and you had no idea what had happened to her? How would you go about trying to find her? What do you think happened to Bella's mother?
- Who do you think the voice that Bella hears in the hall belongs to?
- What will happen next in the story?

Students read Chapters 3-7 (pp. 16-52) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-7 (pp. 16-52)

- Why is Bella lying awake when the strange noises start up?
- How has Bella's mother's disappearance affected her father?
- What is the voice that Bella hears in the night complaining about?
- Why doesn't the ghost think that he has to be polite?
- Why is Bella so surprised when she sees the ghost? Why doesn't she think that he is very scary?
- Describe what the ghost's boot looks like. Why are ghosts the opposite of humans? How will he become invisible again?
- What does the ghost mean when he says to Bella "in between are ghosts"? Why hasn't Bella ever seen a ghost before?
- What does the ghost tell Bella is behind her back door? What does she need to do to see it?
- What is the name of the nightclub? Describe what Bella sees when she walks through the door.
- Why does Bella have to leave the nightclub? What does she see while she is there that makes her think of her mother?
- What is the ghost's name and what is unusual about it?
- Why doesn't Bella tell her father about the ghost?
- Why does Bella love the industrial estate so much? What is it about the vacant lot that she finds intriguing? Why hasn't she ever explored it?
- How has Bella's father's behaviour changed since her mother disappeared? What does Bella think is the one good thing about her father's change in behaviour?
- What does Bella see when she peers through the bushes at the vacant lot?
- Why does Bella change her name?

- How does ella end up in the vacant lot? Describe what she sees there.
- What does ob mean when he refers to the "human problem"? Why has the problem become worse? What do the ghosts have in common with ella's mum?
- Where does ella take ob? Why does he disappear? What does ob decide to take with him?
- What attacks ella on the way home? How does she escape? What does ob do to help her?

Discussion

- Do you believe in ghosts? Why/why not? What do you think a ghost would look like?
- What is the ghost's opinion about humans? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Do you think that the glasses Bella sees in the nightclub belong to her mother? If so, where do you think the ghosts found them?
- In what ways does Bella take on the role of caregiver to her father when her mother disappears? How do you think this affects her? What do you think would have happened to her father if Bella wasn't around?
- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?

Students read Chapters 8-10 (pp. 53-86) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 8-10 (pp. 53-86)

- What does ella mean when she says that "empty spaces were opening up all around her that she didn't know how to close up"?
- Why does ella move the clock? What is she doing when she hears the bump?
- Why did ob get bored with his foot?
- How does ob know that something is going on with ella's father? What suggestion does he come up with that he thinks might help ella's father?
- What do the ghosts store in the rooms off the hallway that ob takes ella to?
- What is an "organic" and "inorganic"?
- What do the ghosts do to the rude words?
- What else is kept in the oomph room? What does oomph look like? What does it feel like? What does ella have to do with the oomph?
- Why does ella have so much trouble getting her father to inhale the oomph? How does she finally succeed?
- How does the oomph change ella's father? How does ella feel about these changes?

- What plan does ella's father come up with to find his wife? Where does he take ella to begin the search? What does she find in the middle of all the mess? How does she know that it belongs to her mother?
- Why does ella begin to feel so discouraged?
- What does ella's father find in the glass section? Why does he pick it up?
- How does ella know that ob is at the recycling centre? What advice does he give ella?
- Why does ella rush back to the metal section? What does she see poking out of the baked beans tins?
- How does ella's mother react when she sees her husband and daughter? What did she find in the skip that had made her so excited?
- What has ella's mother been doing all the time she has been missing?
- How does ella feel about having her mother home? Why is she so grateful to ob?
- What does ella insist that her father let her do when he is walking her to school? What does she find in the vacant lot?
- Why does ella decide to change her name back to Bella?

Discussion

- What do the illustrations add to the story?
- What important messages does the story contain?
- What do you think that Bella learns from her experience?
- What do you think might have happened to Bella and her father if they didn't find Bella's mother?
- Describe Bella's mother. How did she manage to lose track of 6 months?

Activities

Static Image - Design a "Missing" poster for Bella's mum.

Static Image - Design a poster advertising the Missing Bits Ghost Club.

Oral Book Report - Write a book report that can be presented orally to the class. Include information about the storyline, characters, your favourite scene and the author's message. Include an extract from the novel in your presentation.

Research - Conduct a research assignment on the damage that human beings do to the environment and the importance of recycling. Present your research findings on a poster.

Writing - Imagine that you are Bella. Write a letter to your missing mother telling her what has been going on while she has been gone and your thoughts and feelings about her disappearance.

Plot - Design a storyboard that shows 10 important events that occur in the novel. Under each illustration write a brief description about what is happening.

Police Report - Fill out a missing person's report for Bella's mother. Include information about what she looks like, where she was last seen, what she does for a job, her interests and hobbies, her family and any other relevant information.

Debate - Conduct a whole class debate on whether ghosts really exist.

Character - In the middle of a large sheet of paper, draw a picture of what you imagine a whole "ob" might look like. Around the picture write lots of adjectives that describe what he is like. Also include quotes from the story that tell the reader something about him.

Personal Effects - Put together a collection of Bella's personal effects - favourite things, bedside table, desk, treasure chest. Explain the significance of these items to Bella.

Board Game - Make up a board game based on events that occur in the novel. For every good thing that happens, reward the player; for every negative thing that occurs, penalise the player. Illustrate your game with settings and characters from the story.

Notes written by Vicki Williams