



Discussion Guide for

ALWAYS MY DAD

Author:

Sharon Dennis Wyeth

Illustrator:

Raúl Colón

Publisher:

Apple Soup/Knopf

In all activities involving families, it is important to be sensitive to the family situations of all students. Some of the activities suggested here may need to be adapted.

THEME:

Families have many different configurations, but it's the people who make up a family that makes it unique.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

"Always My Dad" examines the wonderful, complex and multifaceted relationships that make everyone's family unique. The story warmly explores a young girl's special relationship with her father, despite the fact that she does not see him frequently. LeVar drops in on a neighbourhood "Family Day" picnic and pairs up with a young friend in a "Dad and Me" three-legged race.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Pose the question, "What is a family?" Make a list of the children's ideas and formulate a definition. Have students relate favourite activities they do with their fathers, other older male family members, or an older male family friend. The little girl in the story had certain things that reminded her of her father whenever she saw them. Discuss with students what reminds them of their parents.

The children in the story participated in lots of summertime fun. Discuss the students' favourite summer activities. Have students share affectionate or "pet" names their parents or grandparents call them that no one else uses.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Make a Venn diagram of the roles and responsibilities of mothers and fathers. Since the ideas will come from the students' own experiences and perceptions, there will likely be lively discussion about the unique nature of families.

Brainstorm a list of words that name family members (e.g. great-grand-mother, cousin, stepfather, uncle, sister, etc.). Include synonyms on the list (e.g., father, dad, daddy, papa, etc.).

Discuss the relationships of these family members. Have students interview a dad (their own, an uncle, grandfather, family friend etc.) regarding the great joys or moments and the difficult things about being a dad. Share the interview information in class.

Have students write a biography of their father (or stepfather, uncle, grandfather, family friend, a "famous" dad). Discuss the types of information usually found in a biography and ways they might find out what they need to know. Illustrate the biographies with drawings or photographs. Involve the students in a survey of individual family members to determine their "favourites" in categories such as the following: food, game/toy, TV show, animal, book, and family activity. Prepare a survey sheet, with the categories written down the left side, for students to take home and complete by writing the names of family members across the top and each person's "favourite" in the intersecting boxes. Invite students to share their surveys in class and discuss ways that their families are alike and different.

Go to the playground or a nearby park (a grassy area is preferable) and participate in some activities such as those in the 'Family Day' picnic from the video. These activities might include: three-legged race; sack race; water balloon toss (students form two lines a few feet apart and toss a water balloon to their partner directly across from them; after each toss, they take step back); spoon relay (team members balance an egg on a spoon and walk quickly across a designated distance to pass the spoon to the next team member); and others.

Obtain a copy of the book and have students examine the artistic technique used by the illustrator. Discuss how he might have achieved the "scratchy" effect. (According to a note in the book he used watercolor, charcoal, coloured pencils, and lithograph pencils, and etched the surface with tools including an empty ball-point pen and a scratcher.) Have students draw a scene with crayons or coloured pencils and experiment with the scratch technique, using a variety of tools to etch away some of the colour.

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RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

- Through Moon and Stars and Night Sides
- A Chair for My Mother
- Little Nino's Pizzeria
- The Patchwork Quilt

RELATED THEMES:

- families
- intergenerational relationships
- summer season

About The Author:

"Always My Dad" is based on Sharon Dennis Wyeth's relationship with her own father and their summertime visits to her grandparents farm. She is the author of several middle grade books and has worked as a voice teacher, family counselor and writer for daytime television.

About The Illustrator:

Raúl Colón's art ranges from puppet design to short animated films for television. His illustrations have appeared in several magazines and in the New York Times. "Always My Dad" is his first children's book. He lives in New York City with his wife and children.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

BOUNDLESS GRACE by Mary Hoffman, illus. by Caroline Binch (Dial)

TAXI! TAXI! by Cari Best, illus. by Dale Gottlieb (Little, Brown)

THE PERFECT SPOT by Robert J. Blake (Philomel)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

DADDY, DADDY BE THERE by Candy Dawson Boyd, illus. by Floyd Cooper (Philomel)

THE PAINTER by Peter Catalanatto (Orchard)

WHEN WE MARRIED GARY by Anna Grossnickle Hines (Greenwillow)

FAMILIES: A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY COMMITMENT AND LOVE by Aylette Jenness (Houghton Mifflin)

LIKE JAKE AND ME by Mavis Jukes, illus. by Lloyd Bloom (Knopf)

IF I'D KNOWN THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW by Reeve Lindbergh, illus. by Kimberly Bulcken Root (Viking)

THE DADDY BOOK by Ann Morris, photos by Ken Heyman (Silver Press)

FAMILIES ARE DIFFERENT by Nina Pellegrini (Holiday House)

MY OL'MAN by Patricia Polacco (Philomel)

MY FATHER'S HANDS by Joanne Ryder, illus. by Mark Graham (Morrow)

TODAY I'M GOING FISHING WITH MY DAD by N. Sharp, illus. by Chris Demarest (Boyd Mills)

DADDY PLAYED MUSIC FOR THE COWS by Maryann Weidt, illus. by Henry Sorensen (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

Programs Details

Length:

30 minutes

Subject Areas:

Families/ Relationships

Audience Levels:

Agnes 6 - 11

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