

PRIMETIME Discussion Ideas From March 26, 2006
Adult Literacy & ESL Program – Benicia Public Library

(This is an email discussion that took place between the Scholar and the Storyteller for session two of the PRIMETIME workshops. The books discussed were Why Mosquitoes Buzz In People's Ears by Verna Aardema, and The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka.)

So. Here are some thoughts about these books. First: mosquito. I find that I'm very sympathetic to the poor mosquito!!!! I mean, he didn't try to sting the iguana, he was just sharing information that he thought was interesting, and then the whole ripple effect occurred. Hardly his fault, as far as I can see. If you ask me, the fault lies with the iguana who was stand-offish and unfriendly: if he'd been nicer to the mosquito nothing might have happened.

As a result, my "questions" are along these lines:

- Who's the most important character in this story? Who is the one who really makes a difference/why?
- What's your opinion of the mosquito? Did the mosquito mean any harm?
- How would this story be different if were told from the mosquito's point of view?
- Is it fair that the mosquito is blamed for everything; what could have happened differently that might have made a difference -- could any of the animals react differently?
- How do you think the mosquito must have felt ... have you ever been blamed for something that wasn't really your fault? How did that make you feel? Do you feel sorry for the mosquito?
- What about the lion? He is wise/powerful -- he could have stopped everything but he didn't; sometimes having more power or authority can mean that you're more responsible for things that happen ...
- What's your opinion of the lion? (I think this is potentially a really interesting idea to discuss.)
- What about the baby owl who died because of the falling tree branch?
- Sometimes bad things can happen that aren't anyone's fault ... like when people become seriously ill or are hurt in an accident, etc. Do you think it made the other animals feel better to blame the mosquito?
- Was it easier for them that way? Was it fair?

In addition, I do think the example in the PrimeTime notes about being late, your mother hurrying, etc., etc. is good -- helps bring the ripple effect/chain of events idea home, so I think we should use that in the discussion, too, and then ask them to think/share similar things that have happened to them at home or at school (I would imagine school would be fertile ground for this kind of thing!).

About the True/3 Pigs -- I liked this one, but think we should begin with Mosquito since it's a little (I think) more accessible. Again, I think the theme is about fairness, being misunderstood, and especially jumping to conclusions based on what you expect instead of what you know/the evidence actually at hand.

Some questions would be:

- What's your opinion of the wolf? Is he telling the truth? What makes you think so? Does his side of the story make sense to you? (If yes) how do you think he feels about being in jail? Is there any real proof in the story that would make you feel he was either telling the truth or lying?

- If you were on the jury that heard this case in court, how would you have voted? What things would you say to try to convince the other jurors to see things from your point of view?

- What does this make you think about the idea that there are two sides to every story...? Think of a time in your own life when something happened that bothered you and you had a particular point of view and no one listened. How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?

(Then I'd want to introduce the idea of stereotypes.) -- Is it fair that the wolf is automatically considered guilty just because he's a wolf? What could have happened that would have enabled the wolf to tell his side of the story? Why do you think this didn't happen for the wolf? How does this story make you feel about wolves; does it change your mind at all about these animals?

(Then the two books together...) -- What do you notice that's the same about these two books? What sort of endings do they have -- are they happy endings? What do you think should have happened at the end of these books? How would you change the endings?