

A Girl Called Harry

Author: Philippa Werry

Synopsis

Harriet Jasmine Emerald Florence Mabey McDonald (Harry for short) is an interesting girl who lives up to her unusual name. Her family has been going through hard times lately as both her parents are unemployed but Harry's vivid imagination allows her to escape this grim reality. The only problem is that Harry often allows her imagination to run away from her and this can sometimes get her into trouble. When a new girl called Mallory starts at her school and takes over Harry's best friend Jessica, Harry's imagination runs riot. When Harry's mum is employed by Mallory's father, Harry's theories about the new girl and her family become even wilder. Is Mallory's father a drug dealer or an animal smuggler? Surely this would explain his mysterious trips overseas. Harry doesn't like Mallory right from day one. And first impressions are always right - aren't they?

Text Type

A Girl Called Harry is a funny, fast-paced novel which will appeal particularly to girls. Told in the first person point-of-view, the narrator in the story is Harry McDonald, an interesting young lady who has to deal with issues such as her parents' unemployment, her overactive imagination and drifting apart from her friend Jessica, who is developing vastly different interests from her. Throughout the story we learn about Harry's thoughts and feelings regarding her experiences. Her natural enthusiasm and humour make her a hugely likeable protagonist.

A challenge that Harry faces occurs when Mallory starts school and Harry's circle of friends and school life changes. At first Harry blames Mallory for the rift, but soon she begins to realise that she and Jessica are very different people with different values and interests.

In A Girl Called Harry Werry examines relationships within families, between friends and the inevitability of change as people grow older. A main theme in the story is that people's first impressions of others can be wrong and it is important to really get to know someone before you make a judgement about them.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7- 19), Chapters 3- 13 (pp. 20- 102), Chapters 14- 26 (pp. 103- 193) and Chapters 27- 40 (pp. 194- 303).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them make predictions about what is going to happen and wherever possible encourage them to try and relate their experiences and lives to Harry's. Students should be able to explain how Harry's character develops and changes as the story progresses and be able to identify the main ideas and themes in the novel.

Introducing the Novel

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

- Why do you think Harry has so many names?
- What is an imagination? How can letting it run away from you be a dangerous thing?
- What happens when the new girl starts school?
- How does the cover design connect with the blurb about the story?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7- 19) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp 7- 19)

- How do Harry and Jessica react when they realise that a new girl is about to start school?
- How does Mallory immediately begin to affect Harry's relationship with Jessica?
- Why is Harry annoyed when the other students are intrigued by Mallory's name?
- Why do the students call Angus Cameron Mr Cool?
- What leadership team are Jessica and Harry part of?
- Why is Zoe so interested in Mr Cool's new girlfriend Carmen?
- Who does Mr Cool pair Harry up with for the conservation assignment? How does Jessica react to this?

Discussion

- How do we know that Harry is looking back on the events that have happened?
- What do we learn about Harry in these first two chapters?
- How do you think Harry's life is going to change now that Mallory has started at school?

Students read Chapters 3- 13 (pp. 20- 102) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3- 13 (pp. 20- 102)

- Why do Harry and Mr Cool have an ongoing battle about her projects? Is presentation as important as content? Why/why not?
- How do the other girls in the class respond to Mallory? Why do you think Harry is immune to her charms?
- What sports does Mallory play? What is she best at? What new sports team does she organise? Why is Harry surprised when the boys agree to play in the team?
- How does Mallory's new sports team affect Harry's life?
- In what ways is Harry different from her friends? Why does she have difficulty imagining herself fitting into one of the other groups at school?
- Why does Harry's family have money problems? What does Harry tell her friends about her Uncle Arthur? Why do you think she tells them this?
- What does Jessica tell Mallory that betrays Harry's trust?
- What is Harry "famous" for? How did she end up with so many names?
- Why does Harry like Uncle Theo so much?
- Why doesn't Harry's family have any pets? Why does Uncle Theo have so many? How did Harry's family end up with all of Uncle Theo's cats? How does Harry feel about this development?
- What does Harry want to do when she leaves school?
- Why does Harry's mum feel like she's too old to work in a law firm?
- Who are Harry's new neighbours?
- Where does Ellie go to school? Why is Adam home-schooled?
- How does Harry feel about Jessica's rejection of her?
- Why does it take Harry so long to start her graph?
- What does Mr Cool notice about Harry's drawing? Why does he advise her to curb her imagination?

Discussion

- What evidence is there of Harry's vivid imagination in the story? Is it possible to live too much in your imagination?
- What kind of person is Harry? What are her likes and dislikes?
- Describe Karl. What is Harry's relationship with him like?
- How are Harry and Jessica different? Do you think that if Mallory hadn't come along that the pair would have remained friends? Why/why not?
- Why doesn't Harry like change? Why can change be scary?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 14- 26 (pp. 103- 193) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 14- 26 (pp. 103- 193)

- Why is Harry's mum in such a good mood when she gets home from school?
- What does Harry find out about Adam and Ellie when they come to visit? Why does she decide that they might not be so bad after all?
- Why is Harry shocked when she finds out who will be employing her mother?
- What two important announcements does Mr Cool make at school? Why is Harry so unenthusiastic about the announcements?
- Describe Harry's encounter with Mallory and Jessica while she is out shopping.
- Why does Mr Cool move Mallory and Harry into the Recycling Team?
- Describe Mallory's father. Why does Harry take an instant dislike to him? Why do you think that Harry never mentioned to her mother that Mallory is in her class?
- Who else drops Harry's mum home from work? Why doesn't Harry like him?
- Why does Harry begin to get suspicious about Mallory's father? What makes her think that he might be a drug smuggler?
- What is Harry's idea for the conservation project? What does Mallory want to do? Why do both of them insist on going with the other's idea?
- How does Harry get thrown out of Mallory's group? Where does she go?
- Why do Harry, Adam and Ellie decide to go and check out Mallory's new house in Forest Road? Who turns up while they are there?
- Why does Harry's mum offer to look after Mallory's cat? How does Harry know that Mallory is not very happy about the idea? Why is Harry surprised about Mallory's reaction when she sees all the cats?

- Why is Harry annoyed when Mallory calls a meeting of the Recycling team? What does she decide to change the name of the team to? What other ideas does she have? Why does Harry regret not going on the Tip Trip?
- Why is Harry so worried when she stops coming up with new ideas for her team?
- Why does Harry start spending time at her mother's work? What does she find there that she thinks confirms her suspicions about Mallory's dad? Who catches her in Mr Woz's office?

Discussion

- Have you ever moved houses or towns and started at a new school? How can this be difficult? Why does Harry keep thinking about Paige after she leaves?
- Why doesn't Harry like Mallory? Are her feelings warranted? Why/why not? Imagine being Mallory. Would you want to be friends with Harry? Why/why not?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 27- 40 (pp. 194- 303) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 27- 40 (pp. 194- 303)

- How does Harry feel when she finds out that Tina has invited Mallory to her birthday party? Describe the birthday party. How does Mallory break the ice between them while they are waiting for the elevator?
- What does Harry offer to do for the Sports Exchange? Why does she change her mind after she talks to Ellie and Adam?
- How does Harry deal with the problem of not being able to play chess?
- Why does Harry feel like it's too late to change her mind about Mallory? Is it? Why/why not? What is it about Mallory that is starting to appeal to Harry?
- How do the girls at Harry's school react when they see Adam?
- Why is it a problem for Harry when it starts to rain? What game is the deciding factor in the Sports Exchange? How does Harry win the game?
- What is the class's new topic?
- Why is Harry excited when she sees that Connor O'Connor is going to do a book signing? What does Harry witness when she arrives at the book signing early? Who does she bump into at the shop? What does Harry learn from this experience?

- Why does Harry's class build a wall? Who ends up in East Berlin? Who ends up living in West Berlin? What are the guards responsible for? What is the point of this exercise?
- Describe life in the East. How does Mallory manage to tunnel through to the other side of the wall? Why do you think she decides to share her secret with Harry? How do Harry and Mallory "mobilise" the East Berliners? Who barges into the classroom at the end of the day?
- What startling discovery does Harry make when she sees Mallory at the airport? Who else does she bump into there? What does Harry imagine happens when she sees the sniffer dogs? What actually happens?
- Who goes back to Harry's house after the airport? How does Harry further embarrass herself? What realisations does Harry come to about Mallory's father after this incident?
- What is Karl's middle name?
- What news does Harry's dad announce? What is Adam's good news?
- Why is it surprising that Mallory doesn't hate Harry after this episode? Why do you think she assumes that the pair will be friends? How does Mallory convince Harry to play indoor netball? Describe the game.
- Why does Harry believe that there is still something special between Jessica and herself?

Discussion

- In what ways was Harry wrong about Mallory? Why is it important to get to know someone before you judge them?
- Describe Karl. Describe Harry's relationship with him. Do you think that this might change in the future? Why/why not?
- What lessons do you think Harry has learnt from her experiences?

Activities

Static Image - Design a promotional poster for the novel *A Girl Called Harry*. Your poster should be suitable to be displayed in your school library. Remember that your poster should encourage people to read the book. Combine verbal and visual features to convey your message.

Plot - Complete a plot graph for *A Girl Called Harry*. Label the vertical axis "Level of excitement", label the horizontal axis "Events". On the horizontal axis list ten important events that occur in the novel in the order that they happen. Plot each event according to its level of excitement.

Writing - Write a book review for A Girl Called Harry. Include a brief plot summary; discuss the characters, the setting and the themes. Explain the climax of the story, your favourite part of the story and remember to include your personal opinion of the story.

Writing - Write a letter to the author explaining what you liked about the book.

Conflict - Harry is constantly in conflict with Mallory during the story. Write a paragraph explaining why this conflict occurs and why it is important to the story.

Character - Draw a picture of Harry on a large sheet of paper. Divide the picture in half. On one side list all of Harry's positive characteristics; on the other, all of her negative characteristics. Use examples and quotes from the story to illustrate your ideas.

Character - Imagine that you are Mallory and she is asked to give a speech about herself to her class on the first day of school. Write the speech and present it to the class in role. Include information about her family, where she comes from, things she enjoys doing and what kind of person she considers herself to be.

Character - Devise five questions with answers for Jessica.

Theme - Identify an important theme in the story and design a static image that depicts it. Include quotes and images from the story to back up your ideas.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd