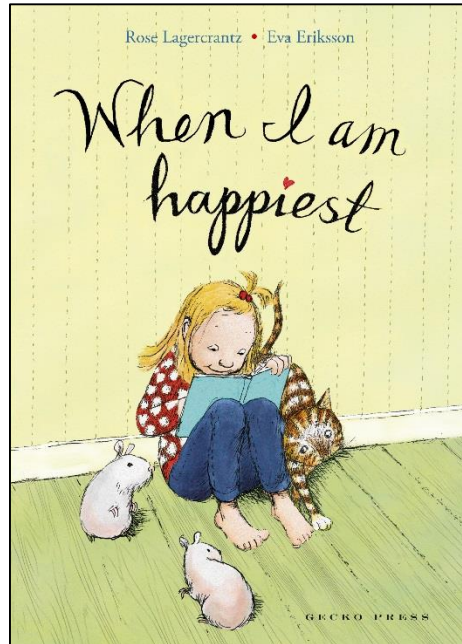


Teaching Notes

When I am Happiest

by Rose Lagercrantz and Eva Eriksson



Synopsis: It's the second-to-last day of school and Dani's so happy she could write a book about it! In fact, that's exactly what she's done, although it's not quite finished yet. Now the book is in her backpack with all the other things she has to take home before the summer break.

But then Dani gets some bad news. Something serious has happened. How will she ever be happy again? How will she ever be able to finish writing her book? Sometimes a good friend is all you need to make your heart start laughing again.

The Author

Rose Lagercrantz is a popular Swedish author of books for children as well as for adults. Her first book was published in 1973. She has received many of the top Swedish literary awards, including the August Prize and the Astrid Lindgren Prize.

The Illustrator

Eva Eriksson, from Sweden, is one of the world's greatest illustrators. She is consistently nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Prize and other international awards.



Themes

This warm and heartfelt illustrated chapter book explores several themes. These include school life, friendships, family life, misfortune, optimism and humour.

The theme of school life is explored as we see Dani attending the penultimate day of her school, the activities she partakes in and the relationships she has there, both with her friends and the school staff.

Another theme found throughout the book is that of friendship. Dani has made friends at school, even if she is still bemused by the bullying way school friends sometimes treat her. She has also come to terms with having her best friend living thousands of miles away and makes the most of a long distance friendship. It is this friend who helps her feel the happiest again after misfortune befalls her once more.

The theme of misfortune is clearly evident, as not only has Dani lost her mother at a young age and her best friend now lives thousands of miles away, but also Dani yet again confronts misfortune when an accident leaves her Dad lying in a coma.

A further theme portrayed in the book is the importance of family. When her father has his accident, Dani's grandparents and cousin step in to help and support her. They demonstrate how the love of family can help overcome worry and sadness.

A final theme which is demonstrated throughout the book is the ability to live life with humour and optimism. Dani is a self-professed happy person who tries not to think about unhappy times. Her optimistic personality, positive view of the world, and humour help her to overcome the misfortunes she encounters, with courage, hope and joy.

Activities

1. Before reading, think and talk about one of the times when you have been the happiest. What was the reason?
2. Look at the cover image and title. What do you think this story might be about?
3. There are many language features in the book, for example:
 - similes: 'It'll be like pure medicine' (p. 110)
 - onomatopoeia: 'beep' (p. 84)
 - rhymes: 'Eeny, meeny, miny, moe...' (p. 12)
 - alliteration: 'Spit spot spun' (p. 115)
 - riddles: 'How many eyes does a herring have?' (p. 92).

Find the definition of each language feature. Then find other examples from the book or make up your own for each.

4. Dani has a photo of her best friend, Ella, on her desk at school which makes her smile (p. 8). Draw a picture of your best friend or another person who makes you smile. Then write a short explanation as to why they make you smile.
5. Dani's class at school draws pictures of flowers (p.15) and of their mothers (p. 30). Create your own artistic drawing of either of these subjects.
6. Dani's class talks about the Ten Commandments and then Dani and Ella create their own illustrated commandments (pp. 25-29). Research the story of the Ten Commandments and look at Dani and Ella's definition and examples of the commandments. In pairs, think of five commandments for your class to follow. Compare and contrast your commandments with your classmates before deciding, as a whole class, which five commandments your class should abide by. Finally, in groups, choose one of the chosen commandments to create an illustrated poster of for your classroom.
7. Throughout the book Dani writes stories and books, such as 'The Terrible Island' (p. 36) and 'The Last Time I was Happiest' (p. 41). Choose one of the titles above to use as inspiration and/or a title of your own story. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your story as a children's picture book for younger children.
8. The author has used different font sizes and font types in various chapters of the book. Why has she done this? What do they help tell the reader about the speech,



action or emotion found in the book? Have they been used effectively? Find some examples from the book, for example, when Dani shouts at her Dad as he lies in the hospital in a coma (p. 85).

9. Examine the illustrations in the book. What attracts your attention to a particular picture? What kind of lines and textures are used? Do the pictures mirror the text or go beyond what the story tells you? Do you like the style? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Find another book illustrated by Eva Eriksson, such as *My Happy Life* (Gecko Press, 2012), *My Heart is Laughing* (Gecko Press, 2014) or *Watch Out for the Crocodile* (Gecko Press, 2014). Compare and contrast the illustrations. Are there many similarities or differences?
10. Choose your favourite illustration from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it, for example, a painting, drawing, photograph, model, poem, etc. Or, design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
11. Alongside happiness, which other emotions can you find in the book, for example, being scared, brave or sad? When you find an emotion in the book examine the illustrations that accompany it. How has Eriksson interpreted the feeling in the illustration? (Think about size, composition, etc). Draw your own picture that expresses another emotion, such as, anger, joy or love.
12. Who is your favourite character in the book? Why? Write a character study of your choice.
13. In pairs, take turns to read your favourite chapter aloud to one another. Discuss which is your favourite chapter and why? Do you agree with your partner's choice? Why/why not?
14. In groups, adapt an episode or chapter from the book for a performance in your classroom. Devise a script, create scenery, choose music and make costumes or puppets to represent each character. Act your adaptation out for your class. If you have access to a video camera, tape it.
15. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What do you like about it? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten.
16. This standalone book is also the third in the trilogy of books which include, *My Happy Life* (Gecko Press, 2012) and *My Heart is Laughing* (Gecko Press, 2014). If you have not done so already, find and read these books.