



Book group activity for primary students

The Mozart Question by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Michael Foreman

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The Story

In this book the illustrations and the words are equally important. The author and illustrator worked together after hearing that in many of the death camps the Nazis selected Jewish prisoners and forced them to play in orchestras. Modern day junior reporter Lesley travels to Venice to interview a famous violinist. She is instructed to find out all she can about the musician's career but she also discovers that the interview will be terminated if she asks a particular question... "the Mozart question."

The book is challenging for younger readers both in content and language but with guidance from their teacher ten and eleven year olds should gain much from discussing both story and artwork.

Questions For Discussion in class or student reading groups

1. What does Lesley know about Paulo before she meets him in Venice? What questions would you advise Lesley to ask him?
2. What instructions must Lesley follow in the interview? In what ways do these instructions tell us something about Paulo and what he believes about music?
3. How does Lesley feel when she first meets Paulo?
4. Do you think the interview begins well? Does Lesley think it begins well?
5. Why does Paulo tell Lesley a story?
6. What does Paulo remember best about his Dad?

7. Why does Paulo's mum say he should not tell his Dad he has seen and held the violin?
8. How do we know that Paulo and his Mum like music?
9. When and how does Paulo learn to play the violin?
10. Why does Benjamin say that Paulo must tell his parents about his violin lessons?
11. Why did Paulo's Mum and Dad stop playing their musical instruments? Do you think either of them missed their music?
12. What promise does Paulo make to his Dad and why is he asked to make it?
13. How does Paulo keep his promise?
14. Why will the 50th birthday concert be special? Do you think Paulo will be happy or sad when he plays in this concert? Try to think of reasons for your answer.
15. Why did Paulo say he was glad to have told his story to Lesley?
16. What do you think Paulo meant when he said that secrets were lies?
17. The pictures are an important part of this book. The artist said that he found some of them difficult to paint. Look at the pictures on page 59, 62 and 68. Which of these do you think is telling the most important part of this story?