



SUMMARY

Caring for a pet is a common responsibility for young people—but not always a simple one. Author Patrick Jennings takes on this topic in his own inimitable and thoughtful way in our original *Storyworks* fiction.

LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

- Understanding theme
- Understanding character
- Making inferences
- Relating literature to personal experience

MAIN TEACHING OBJECTIVES

After reading this story, students should be able to:

- Identify the theme of responsibility in the story
- Describe Zaritza's character
- Explain how Zaritza's role as a big sister causes her to change
- Relate ideas and events in the story to their own experiences

BEFORE READING

Discussing responsibility: Ask students to write a list of the responsibilities they have at home or with their families. Then invite them to share one of their responsibilities with the class. How do they feel about it? Do they enjoy or dread it? Do they think it's fair? Ask for a show of hands of how many other students have the same responsibility.

DURING READING

Predicting: Have students pause frequently as they read to predict what they think will happen next. Start by discussing the title of the story. What do they think it could mean? Then, on a sheet of paper, have them record at least five entries where they tell the page number and what just happened in the story, and then their prediction based on what they read.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ WRITING PROMPTS

- What do you learn about Zaritza from the opening of the story, when she is talking in the mirror? (understanding character) *She is dramatic and known for*

her wild excuses; she dislikes science; she tries to find ways to blame her mistakes on others.

- What lesson does Zaritza's mom want her to learn? (understanding main idea) *She has to take responsibility for her actions and face the consequences.*

- How do you think Zaritza feels about Abalina? What examples show this? (making inferences) *Zaritza feels jealous that her little sister doesn't have responsibilities yet; she blames Abalina for her own errors; she complains to her mom that she'd rather be Abalina's age.*

- What details show that Zaritza needs to become more responsible? (identifying supporting details) *She forgot to lock Bandito's cage; she lost her mom's earrings; she left her parka on the floor; she left a cookie container and her math homework in her pockets.*

- What happens to Zaritza when Abalina looks at her in the mirror and says, "Homework"? (understanding plot) *She realizes she wants to change and be a good role model for her sister.*

- Near the end of the story, Zaritza says to Bandito, "I know you didn't eat my cookies." What does this show about how she has changed? (drawing conclusions) *She isn't blaming someone else for what she did.*

- Chores or responsibilities are often no fun. What is the advantage of having them? (critical thinking) *Answers may include: You earn your parents' respect; it feels good to help out; you might earn privileges or allowance; they help you learn to be independent, etc.*

Exploring theme: Theme can be a difficult idea for youngsters to understand. Explain to students that it is a big idea that readers take away from a work. It is not only what the story is about but also the idea that connects the story to the readers' own lives. A story can have more than one theme. For example, "My Homework Ate My Homework" presents the themes of responsibility and siblings. Ask students what they think the story says about each of these. Then, ask them to choose one of the themes and write an essay explaining, with examples, how the story shows the theme

and, then, how the theme connects to real life.

FOR YOUNGER OR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

If theme is difficult for some students to grasp, help them look through the eyes of Abalina. Ask them what they think it's like (or what they know from their own experience) for a young child like Abalina to look up to an older sibling. What do they think Abalina should learn from Zaritza? What should she not learn? Do they think Zaritza should change the way she acts in order to influence Abalina? Then, invite them to draw a picture of an older and younger sibling doing an activity together, with a caption explaining what is going on.

WRITING PROMPTS

Persuasive: Ask students to write a persuasive essay agreeing or disagreeing with this statement: "Children today should have more family responsibilities." Remind them to explain why they believe their position and to support it with specific examples.

Narrative: Have students write their own stories about an adventure that happens while taking care of the classroom pet.



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Go to www.scholastic.com/storyworks to print out the following activities that can be used with this story:

- Comprehension Quiz
- Critical Thinking Questions
- Vocabulary
- Readers' Response
- Understanding Character