

A Curriculum Guide to

The Thing About Luck

By Cynthia Kadohata

This curriculum guide correlates to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-7.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) (W.5-7.7) (SL.5-7.1, 4).

About the Book

Summer and her family have had a really bad year. Just when family matters cannot seem to get any worse, her parents learn they must travel to Japan to care for elderly relatives, leaving Summer and her brother, Jaz, behind to spend the summer with their grandparents, Obaachan (grandmother) and Jiichan (grandfather). Money is tight and the mortgage has to be paid, so Summer and Jaz go on harvest with their grandparents. Summer's grandparents are old-fashioned and demanding, but Summer understands that they are aging and need help meeting their job responsibilities. Summer has a full load assisting her grandmother as a cook and entertaining her brother, who has trouble making friends. Along the way, she meets a boy and faces an ethical dilemma when her dog causes trouble on one of the farms. When rain threatens, she recognizes her grandfather's physical limitations and sets out to save her family's summer job. Summer's experience is a heartwarming story of growth and challenges.

Prereading Activities

1. Describe a time in which a family event upset your regular routine. How did you deal with the situation? Looking back, would you do anything differently today?
2. Describe a time in which you had to own up to something that went wrong for which you were responsible. How did you handle the situation? How might you handle it differently today?
3. Reflect on a time in which you felt used and/or demeaned by a peer. What did you do? If you didn't handle it well, how might you better handle the situation?

Discussion Questions

1. What is *kounn* and why does Summer reference it in the opening of the story?
2. Why is Summer not surprised when she learns that her parents must travel to Japan to care for aging relatives? Why might the author have this family emergency occur?

3. What happens to give Summer a fear of mosquitoes? Is her fear warranted?
4. Why does her brother not have friends? What do her grandparents do in an attempt to help him find a friend?
5. Describe the work Summer's grandparents sign on to do. What is a typical day like for Summer?
6. Are the Parkers good employers? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
7. How does Summer's opinion of Robbie Parker change by the end of the story?
8. Describe in depth Obaachan and Jiichan. How are they alike? Different? Support your explanation using their words, actions, and comments/thoughts about other characters.
9. Summer feels a tremendous amount of responsibility. In what ways does she feel responsible and why?
10. During her weeks off from school, Summer is required to write a book report on *A Separate Peace*. How does her written report reflect her character and her thinking process over time? Why do you think the author chose this classic book?
11. What events illustrate Summer's strength of character?
12. Why does Summer sneak out at night and run the combine? Describe her feelings about this work. What reaction does Mick have and why?
13. Thunder, the family dog, goes along on the harvest. What pivotal role does he play in the story? What conflict would be absent or would have to be presented differently if he were absent from the story?
14. Who is Mr. Laskey? Is he a responsible person? Is he likeable? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
15. How does the author use humor to develop each character's voice? Support your answer with examples from the text.
16. How has Summer grown by the end of the story? How has her relationship and understanding of her grandparents changed? What about their understanding of her? Support your response with evidence from the text.

Further Discussion Questions / Activities

1. Identify at least one theme in the story. Discuss in small groups how the author develops this theme throughout the story. Summarize your discussion to a larger group.
2. Write three discussion questions about the story on index cards that you would like to talk about with your peers. Meet in a small group and discuss your questions. Refer to information in the text to support your conversation. Identify the one question that elicited the most discussion and share it with the larger class.
3. Choose any scene and rewrite it from another character's point of view. For example, rewrite one of the scenes in which the grandfather can no longer drive from his point of view. Share your rewrite with a small group. How does this different point of view impact the story? Use correct grammatical conventions in your narrative. (Instead of rewriting the scene, you may choose to retell the scene in a small group setting).
4. Research crops of the Midwest, harvesting procedures, or the causes of malaria, and present your findings with PowerPoint, another media form, or a written report to a larger group. Support your presentation with visuals.
5. Read another novel, a short story, or a poem with a migrant worker theme that contains a protagonist about the same age as Summer. What commonalities do you see between the two characters? What common struggles do they share?
6. Imagine a scene that would further develop one of the characters. Discuss the scene with a classmate. Why did you choose this scene and this character?

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