

Colour the Stars

Author: Dawn McMillan

Illustrator: Keinyo White

Synopsis

Isaac and Luke are friends. Luke is blind and believes that he doesn't need colours in his life. Isaac can't imagine a world without colour and decides to teach his friend about them. Because Luke is blind, Isaac must appeal to his other senses. Through his vivid descriptions and by encouraging Luke to smell, touch, taste and hear, Isaac manages to convey a sense of what colours are like. In the process Isaac makes a discovery of his own. By closing his eyes and listening carefully he hears things that he has never noticed before. He begins to develop a better understanding of what it's like to live in Luke's world.

Text Type

Colour the Stars is a beautiful story about two young boys and how they reach a deeper understanding of each other's worlds. Isaac believes that Luke is missing out on something important because he can't see colours. By using nature and encouraging Luke to employ his other senses, he manages to convey the concept of colours and their connotations. By helping his friend, Isaac realises that Luke is not really missing out – his other senses are heightened and his hearing is acute. Luke notices the tiny details that others miss. This means that even though his world is devoid of colour, it is extremely rich in other ways.

Colour the Stars is beautifully illustrated and contains vivid descriptions of colours and the emotions they evoke. Though suitable for younger readers, the story also contains sophisticated ideas that lend themselves well to older students. This story could be used as a lead-in to a unit on tolerance, prejudice or overcoming adversity.

Sharing the Story

The story can be read in one sitting and lends itself to being read aloud. Encourage students to read between the lines and develop their understanding of the main themes and messages.

Introducing the Story

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

- Do you know anyone who is blind? What challenges do they face?
- If you suddenly lost your sight what do you think you would miss the most and why?
- What resources do blind people have available to them to help enrich their lives?



- Try and answer the question posed on the back of the book.
- Choose 5 of your favourite colours. Try and explain what they are like to a partner. Remember that colours are not simple but have many variations. Their names can even imply mood or atmosphere. Colour names come from many sources, such as food, metals, jewels, flowers, nature and animals. Colours may also be shaded, mixed, be added to light, have a consistency, condition or texture or be devoid of colour.

Teacher reads the story aloud to students.

Comprehension and Discussion

- What are the names of the two boys in the story?
- The boys are sitting on a stream bank. What kinds of things do you think they would be able to smell, feel and hear?
- The bush is described as “standing guard” behind them. What effect does this metaphor create?
- How do you know that Luke is blind?
- How does Isaac react when Luke says that he “doesn’t need colours”? Why do you think he reacts this way?
- How does Isaac explain yellow to Luke? What feelings or emotions does the colour yellow evoke for Isaac?
- What does Isaac mean when he says “you have to *smell* green?”
- What sense does Isaac appeal to when he describes brown to Luke? Why does Luke think that brown is “soft”?
- How is red different to yellow? How does Luke know what orange looks like?
- Why doesn’t Isaac have to explain blue to Luke?
- What does Isaac hear when he closes his eyes? Why do you think he hears things that he hasn’t noticed before?
- How does Isaac react when he realises that Luke’s hearing is so highly developed? What insight does he develop into his friend’s world?
- What is the only colour that Luke can truly see?
- How does Isaac explain stars to Luke? How do we know that Luke has a true understanding of what stars look like?
- What do you think Isaac means at the end of the story when he says that he knows that he and Luke see the same stars?

- Read the section at the end of the story about guide dogs. Who breeds guide dogs? How old are puppies when they are placed with families? Why is it important that the family takes the dog everywhere with them? How old does a dog have to be before it is taken to the Guide Dog Training Centre? How long does it take for a puppy to become a RNZFB guide dog? Describe 2 of the things that it has to learn to pass the test.
- The author's dedication at the start of the book says "Let's celebrate the wonder in our world". How do the boys in the story do this?

Activities

Colour Connotations – Choose 5 colours and write a list of adjectives that describe them or the emotion they evoke. Use the following as an example: Black – evil, death, winter, anger, elegance and sophistication.

Writing – Explain how the use of colour and illustrations in the story helps to emphasise the main message.

Research – Use the internet to research a true story about how a guide dog has acted heroically and saved their owner from harm. Present your story to the class as an oral report.

Questions – Write 5 discussion questions for the story.

Static Image – Design a static image that depicts one of the important themes presented in the story. Themes may include celebrating the wonder in the world or reaching an understanding of how others live. You may wish to do a collage, use the computer or design a poster. Use words and images from the story to convey your idea.

Static Image – Design a poster advertising *Colour the Stars* that would be appropriate for displaying in your school library. Remember to use verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Writing – Write a letter to the author explaining why you enjoyed the book.

Writing – Write a paragraph explaining the experience that Isaac and Luke share and the understanding that each reaches about the other's world. Will their friendship be different after this day? Why/ why not?

Figurative Language – The author has used figurative language to create imagery in the story. A metaphor is a direct comparison between 2 things where one thing *becomes* another. Identify 3 metaphors used in the story and explain the effect of them.

Creative Writing – Write a description of your favourite place. Create imagery through your use of figurative language. Build a picture in the reader's by using adjectives and referring to the senses.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd