

III. AFTER READING

EXTENDING THE STORY

Literature (LA.E.1.2.2, LA.E.1.2.3, LA.E.2.2.1, LA.E.2.2.3, LA.E.1.3.2, LA.E.2.3.1)

1. Questions to help us think about the style used by the author and the illustrator:

How did the author create suspense?

How did the author tell three stories at one time?

How did this story compare to another you may have read by Avi?

How did the illustrations contribute to your understanding of the story?

2, Questions to understand the characters and setting:

Are the characters real? What does the author do to accomplish this?

How do the characters change in this story? What are his strengths and weaknesses?

What do the characters learn in this story?

In what ways is the setting important to the action of the story?

How would the story be different if it were in a different setting?

3. Questions to analyze the plot:

Is the plot believable?

How many conflicts are there in the story?

What is the climax of the story?

Is the ending satisfying? Have the problems/conflicts been solved?

If a problem is left unsolved, what are your ideas for a resolution?

Poetry/Writing (LA.B.2.2.3, LA.E.1.2.1, LA.B.2.3.3, LA.E.1.3.4)

1. Find poems about clouds. What words does the poet use that are particularly descriptive?
2. Write your own poems after a notable day of cloud watching. What do today's clouds look like? What do they inspire in you?
3. Create a pattern poem for clouds.
Line 1 Type of cloud
Line 2 2 adjectives that describe the cloud
Line 3 3 verbs related to that cloud
Line 4 a phrase that tells something about the cloud
Line 5 A synonym for the cloud
4. Try your hand at other weather poems about rain, wind, thunder, lightening, etc. Use strong verbs, and good images. Can you arrange your words on the page to look like the subject itself?

History (LA.2.2.1, LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.3.2, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.B.2.3.1)

1. Make a timeline of 1972 and include the most important news of the year or do a double timeline that also includes 2004 or the present year. Compare and contrast the years on the basis of population, U.S. and world events, sports, entertainment, science and such vital statistics as median income, life expectancy, unemployment, etc.

Science (LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.A.2.3.8, LA.B.2.3.1)

1. Research the lives of Luke Howard and Wilson A. Bentley. What did they accomplish? What methods did they use to achieve their breakthroughs? What lasting scientific values do their discoveries have?
2. Find out: Why are skies blue? Why are clouds white? Why are sunsets red?
3. You can predict approaching weather by watching cloud patterns. Observe cloud patterns and predict the weather for a week. Make careful notes about your predictions and chart your predictions and actual weather. How accurate are you as a weatherperson?
4. What other patterns are visible in nature? How do they help us predict changes or problems?

5. Choose 5 different areas of the country to study and make 5 student groups for each. Watch the weather for each area and chart your observations over a period of time. Compare and contrast.

Art (LA.C.2.2.1, LA.C.2.2.3, LA.C.2.3.1)

1. Study famous paintings of cloud structures. How does the artist work with clouds? Georgia O'Keefe created *Sky Above Clouds* 1963. How does she picture the sky? Compare and contrast her work to others.
2. Create your own artwork as you see clouds. What different mediums can you use to capture what you see in the sky?

ANALYZE THE HEADLINES (LA.A.2.2.1, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.A.2.3.5, LA.B.2.3.1)

- Put the following headlines in chronological order. **ANSWERS: 9, 2, 1, 8, 6, 3, 5, 4, 7**
- Choose a headline and write the accompanying article that outlines who, what, where, when, why, and how or,
- Discuss what was happening in the story at the time of each headline.

1. **GIRL SPIES ON SKY WATCHER**
2. **BOY'S CLOUD WATCHING BECOMES JOKE TO PENNSYLVANIA NEIGHBOR**
3. **PARENTS FEAR FOR THE SAFETY OF THEIR DAUGHTER**
4. **BOY'S KEEN EYE LEADS TROOPER TO KIDNAPPER**
5. **POLICE BELIEVE KIDNAPPER MAY HAVE GUN**
6. **SHOCKED GRANDMOTHER REFUSES TO BELIEVE BOY'S STORY**
7. **POLICE NAB FORMER ARMY PARACHUTER IN HEIST**
8. **MID-AIR HEIST LEAVES ELMIRA BOX CO. \$1 MILLION POORER**
9. **FORMER ARMY PARACHUTER PLOTS DARING PLANE HEIST**

INTERVIEW WITH AVI

You've written four serial novels for Breakfast Serials. Have you approached them differently?

Who was it that said, "I'm sorry to have written at such length, but I haven't the time to be brief." Well, welcome to the world of the serialized novel! The more I write them the more I've come to realize that the serialized novel is a distinct form of the novel. It's not a book chopped into pieces. It is not a series of incidents strung together. It's not even just chapters! No, given the format, it's as hard as writing gets. You have to engage readers with real characters caught up in real experience, and you must offer those characters and story with elegant, revealing and compelling immediacy. If that isn't a challenge, I don't know what is. I'm tempted to add that phrase you see on TV commercials, "Don't try this at home!"

What makes a serial story different from one that isn't written for serial reading?

The essential difference is the story must have a driving energy that is sustained throughout. You must capture your reader again and again. You must tell your story in such a compelling way that the reader not only wants to come back, but remembers enough to keep going week after week.

It's said you began Breakfast Serials with the idea of just publishing one story in one newspaper. Is that true? Now that these stories reach across the nation, what are your thoughts?

Yes, it all began with one story, though it spread with amazing rapidity throughout the country. What are my thoughts? I love it. It's rare one can have an idea and see it so quickly evolve and become big. Mind, when it all began I was only interested in seeing something done in an old-fashioned way. Now

Breakfast Serials has evolved into something very modern and vital. The stories are better. Readers more demanding. Most important was the discovery that these stories mean as much to adults as to kids.

The character Jamie in *Reading the Sky* is dyslexic. Has that anything to do with your life?

Some years ago I was diagnosed with what is called “symptoms of dyslexia,” which means my writing is full of letter reversals, word omissions, confusion of words and the like. My manuscripts look like I am the laziest and sloppiest of writers. And my spelling! Ugh! And, while compared to those who truly have dyslexia, the kind of frustrations I had (and still have) helped me build Jamie’s character. What ever the problem one has with this, chief is the difficulty others have in recognizing that this is part of the person. Depending on its degree it may or may not be worked with. It took me years to learn to live with it. But here I am, a writer. The computer has made a huge difference. And you’ll note in the story that, given its time, the seventies, the computer was not ubiquitous.

What impact has the Newbery award had on you?

It gave, and continues to give lots of pleasure. But for me, in any case, it added pressure. I felt, now I really have to write well! But the truth is, it hasn’t changed things very much. Every book is a unique creation with its own challenge and problems. I still have to write well. That’s always hard.

If you could suggest one thing for parents to promote reading at home, what would it be?

The most powerful tool is for a parent to read to and along with their child. Take, for instance, a Breakfast Serial story. Read it on your own, read it with you child. Talk about it with your child. Don’t focus on the lessons you might find in the story—a story is not a test! Not a quiz. No, focus on the experiences to be found in the story. That is, what seems real about the story in terms of your life, your child’s life? Help your child make connections from their lives to the story. Do that and reading become an extension of your child’s life. If you teach a child to make those personal connections, I promise, you will have a reader.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Avi has published over 55 books. Among the best known are:

Poppy

True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

Crispin: The Cross of Lead

Nothing But the Truth

The Fighting Ground

Things That Sometimes Happen

Beyond the Western Sea

Wolf Rider

The Man Who Was Poe

Something Upstairs

Midnight Magic

Don't You Know There's A War On

The Secret School

INTERVIEW WITH JOAN SANDIN

What do you try to achieve with your illustrations? I try to define the characters, setting, period and over-all feeling of the story, adding details that give depth, humor or information. And I try to make the illustrations as artistic and visually interesting as possible.

Each story you do obviously brings different illustrations. Does the *style* of the writer have an impact on your art? Yes, definitely. The author sets the tone of the story and that influences my style.

Since you sometimes write and illustrate your own books, how does one aspect affect the other? When I write my own books, I'm thinking illustrations right from the first. The original idea suggests illustrations. Words and pictures feed into one another. Sometimes the pictures take over the story telling; sometimes they slide into the background.

Since your *Breakfast Serials* illustrations appear in newspapers, do you approach this kind of art differently from your book format art? With *Breakfast Serials* illustrations I have more formatting freedom. On the other hand, the newspapers also have a lot of freedom, so I never know where or in what size the illustrations will be run, or if they will be in full color or grey scale, so I have to keep that in mind while planning the pictures.

Your books are published in the USA and in Sweden. Is the world of children's books different there? Well first of all, Sweden is a small country (about the size of California) with a language not spoken to any great extent outside its borders, so of course the world of children's books is much, much smaller. (That makes it all the more remarkable that Sweden has produced so many terrific children's books!) Sales of Swedish-language books are limited; books have to be translated to be known outside the country. To help support authors and illustrators, the Swedish government pays them a kind of user fee when their books are borrowed from the public library system!

I have the impression that, in spite of some mergers, there's still a lot less downsizing and people-churning in Swedish children's book publishing than in the U.S. I still work with most of the Swedish editors I started out with 30 years ago (and most of those editors are still at the same publishing houses!)

What satisfies you the most about an illustration you've done? What a wonderful question! I think it's probably the combination of getting it right—the characters, setting and feeling—and finding it visually satisfying as a picture in its own right. When that happens it's a very good feeling.

What particular challenges did *Reading the Sky* present for you? The overall challenge was that the story switched back and forth from Jamie and Gillian to Goddard, and I had to figure out how to parallel that with the pictures.

Then Goddard had to change from an ordinary looking guy, to an airline passenger in suit and tie, to a disheveled madman, and still be recognizable.

And then there was the importance of keeping the story rooted in 1972—clothes, hair styles, cars, planes, the telephone.

Lastly, clouds: clouds are wonderful, magical, mysterious, and hard to paint!

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Joan has written and/or illustrated 79 children's books in the US and Sweden, and translated 20 some titles for R&S Books, including Christina Björk's popular *Linnea in Monet's Garden*.

Books she has written and illustrated are:

Coyote School News
The Long Way to a New Land
The Long Way Westward
At Home in the New Land (coming in 2006)
Pioneer Bear

Some of the books she has illustrated are:

A Bear for Miguel (Elaine Marie Alphin)
As the Crow Flies (Elizabeth Winthrop)
Small Wolf (Nathaniel Benchley)
Snowshoe Thompson (Nancy Smiler Levinson)
Daniel's Duck (Clyde Robert Bulla)
Hill of Fire (Thomas Lewis)
The Lemming Condition (Alan Arkin)

ANSWERS TO QUESTION/PREDICT/EVALUATE

Chapter 1

1. Jamie spend a month every summer in Pennsylvania with his grandparents.
Words/phrases to describe the setting: hottest summer in years, 10 miles south of NY border, land rolled like ocean waves, endless valleys and hills, rock walls, rock patches, boulder garden.
2. Jamie thinks watching the sky is better than books.
3. Dyslexia is a learning disability that interferes with a person's reading and math abilities. Jamie hated talking about it and would change the subject.
4. 5. Answers will vary.
6. Ed Goddard says nobody watches the sky...but we know that Jamie does. Perhaps their geographical paths may cross with Goddard's plan to rob a plane and then parachute out.

Chapter 2

1. Goddard watches the plane he hopes to rob. He plans to steal the payroll carried on the plane and parachute out of the plane with the money.
2. AWV. The heavy green truck is an armored vehicle and carries men who are armed with weapons.
3. Goddard is a former Army parachutist and former security officer for the Jewel Box Co. of Elmira, NY. So he knows how to jump out of planes and he knows how the security works at the plant he hopes to rob from.
4. He uses a money order to remain anonymous. No names are printed on money orders like you would find on checks.
5. If he reserves all the seats on the plane, no one will be on the plane except him.
6. It shows that Jamie knows a lot and has a wide variety of interests and he can learn in ways other than through reading. He is a pretty intelligent kid. 7. & 8. AWV.

Chapter 3

1. Jamie is at the Lurie's to deliver a tool his grandfather needs to help Mr. Lurie. Mr. and Mrs. Lurie treat him kindly. Todd Lurie makes fun of his sky watching. Gillian Lurie tries to make up for Todd's behavior.
2. Jamie leaves quickly because he tries to keep away from people who bother him, namely Todd Lurie. He is very sensitive about his learning disability and his sky watching.
3. AWV.
4. AWV. Goddard dyes his hair, refolds his parachute and packs it, pays his rent in cash to the superintendent of his building, and checks the weather forecast.
5. AWV. Goddard is very observant to watch the plane for many days; he is organized and his plan is well rehearsed because he practices his map skills, he is devious planning all the ways to not leave any clues like paying for his apartment in cash, using many names, dyeing his hair and emptying his apartment; he has a good memory as he tests his own map skills; he is a perfectionist because he packs and repacks his parachute until he is satisfied.
6. The National Weather Service says the weather will be hot and fair with only a chance of storms. Bad weather could ground the plane or force it to change course.

Chapter 4

1. Jamie lifts his arms and tilts his head back looking as if he were pretending to fly.

- Todd called Jamie is weird and looks like a freak. Grandma says he is very smart. Gillian doesn't know what to make of him. She is curious about him so she follows him.
- Gillian and Jamie meet on the hill when Gillian follows him and spies on him. She surprises Jamie and that puts him on his guard. She questions him and wants to learn what he is doing, but Jamie wants nothing to do with her.
- The parachute is in Goddard's suitcase. 5. & 6. AWV

Chapter 5

- AWV. The slash mark in the title refers to the two stories in one going on: Goddard jumping into the sky and Jamie watching the sky and now the two stories will come together.
- Jamie thinks about her but her spying makes him feel bad...like he is an object, a weird thing to watch.
- Jamie's hill is a place for him to get away and do what he likes best – watch the sky.
- AWV. The teacher may have been teasing or referring to the old idea that people who watch the sky are crazy day dreamers.
- Jamie liked storms because they had the most exciting clouds to watch; the contrast of light and dark illuminates everything in the sky.
- While Jamie is sky watching, Goddard is putting his plan into action. He is on the plane, removes the parachute from his suitcase and puts it on. He breaks into the money compartment and pulls out the moneybag,
- To get out of the plane, Goddard must open the exit door with red lettering: DO NOT TOUCH HANDLE WHILE IN FLIGHT. The door resists his pressure so he kicks it out and it drops away from the plane. 8. AWV.

Chapter 6

- Goddard is parachuting in the sky, Jamie is watching the sky and sees Goddard falling, and Gillian is secretly watching Jamie.
- Throughout the jump, Goddard is calm, knows what to expect, and believes that everything is happening according to plan and going perfectly.
- Jamie sees skyscrapers, castles, magic mountains, white aliens from Mercury, dark beasts of Jupiter, the fire snakes of Mars, and an airplane – a silver spear from Mercury.
- Gillian notices Jamie is running but doesn't know that he has seen a man in the sky.
- No, the storm doesn't worry Goddard; it could alter the course of his fall, but it could also make it unlikely anyone would see him.
- Goddard had moved the money bag to his weaker hand because the other was growing numb. He was just letting the bag swing loosely in his hands. Then when Jamie sees Goddard and yells "Hey" Goddard is shocked, jerks his head about and by doing so the bag slips from his fingers.
- AWV. His statement may mean he is more worried about someone seeing him than the money dropping from his hands.

Chapter 7

- Gillian is trying to find Jamie.
Goddard is on the ground searching for his money and the kid who saw him.
Jamie thinks the parachutist may be hurt and need help.
- Goddard grabs a stick to use as a club
- AWV. Gillian thinks Jamie is being "yicky" and inventing things.
- Goddard buried the parachute. 5. & 6. AWV

Chapter 8

- Goddard is incensed because his leg is hurt, his money is lost, he can't find the kid who saw him, his clothes are a mess, he is covered in mud and he is frustrated and mad at his perfect plan falling apart.
- Goddard doesn't grab Jamie because he isn't sure Jamie is the kid who saw him.
- Gillian finds a satchel.
- The satchel was wedged between rocks and the lock was broken when Gillian found it so it was probably broken in the fall.
- \$1,000,000.00
- AWV. Gillian has put herself in a lot of danger. Goddard could think she saw him parachute down.

Chapter 9

- AWV. Goddard surprises Gillian by his yell and certainly scares her by the way he looks. He also was quicker than she was and he grabbed her before she could get away.
- AWV.
- Goddard wants her to take him to the nearest town – Mansfield. AWV. 4. & 5. & 6. AWV

Chapter 10

- Jamie is confused about what he saw and he doesn't think anyone will believe him.

2. The man with the stick reminded him of the TV images of the Vietnam War and it makes him think the man may have had a gun.
3. AWV.
4. Jamie stops to tie his shoelace and sees Gillian's marks on the ground.
5. Jamie's head pounds and the letters moves like twisting snakes.
6. James traces the letter shapes in the air, retraces them on the ground, rewrites them on the ground, tries to see the shapes in his mind, tries to relax, makes the letter sounds, tries to put them together, then repeats them over and over and finally uses the arrow as a clue to the meaning.
7. AWV.

Chapter 11

1. Grandma doesn't take him seriously. She thinks this is more of what he sees in the clouds. Then she gets angry when Jamie is insistent about what he saw and raises his voice.
2. Grandpa gets the two of them to settle down, listens to Jamie's story and then connects it to what he heard on the radio about a thief parachuting out of a plane with a bag of money.
3. AWV.
4. AWV. Sky watching makes Jamie very observant so he may be able to use these skills in helping the police.
5. Mrs. Lurie is upset, worried that the man may have a rifle, tearful, and too nervous to remember what Gillian was wearing.
6. AWV.

Chapter 12

1. Goddard keeps one hand tightly on Gillian's shoulder. When she tried to get away, he grabbed her and threatened her with the stick. He is hurt and exhausted, incensed and frustrated. He could do anything in desperation.
2. AWV. The heist he planned took a lot of work, planning and preparation.
3. Gillian tells him Springfield is a lot further and rocky...too hard on his leg. She does this so that her message to Jamie about Mansfield has some chance of being found and read.
4. The trooper believes Jamie and praises him for going for help, figuring out the message, and his ability to describe things. The trooper thinks Jamie would make a good detective.
5. Gillian and Goddard are walking to Mansfield.
6. & 7. AWV

Chapter 13

1. The trooper and Jamie are searching in the police cruiser. Jamie is tired so the trooper turns on the car blower and it revives Jamie. Suddenly he sees the two of them on the side of the road. The trooper slammed on the brakes right in front of Gillian and Goddard and shouts for Goddard's arrest. The trooper springs out of the car with his pistol drawn and arrests him. Though Goddard tries to grab Gillian she springs away and runs toward the cruiser.
2. Goddard does not resist arrest. He is motionless with the moneybag clutched to his chest. He pulls open the satchel and turns it over letting the money pour out onto the ground.
3. AWV.
4. Gillian thanks Jamie for being such a good reader...praise he never thought he would hear with his reading problems.
5. AWV.
6. They seem to have become friends with Jamie sharing his sky watching with her.

Reading the Sky is syndicated by Breakfast Serials. Founded by Avi, this organization promotes literacy by providing quality literature to our nation's newspapers. You may contact Breakfast Serials at:

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