

I. BEFORE READING

DESCRIPTION OF THE STORY

Jamie, being dyslexic, may not be able to read words on a page, but he can read clouds and what he sees is as wondrous as it is unbelievable—to others. One summer day he sees a man in a business suit parachute from an airplane. When he tells his family and friend Gillian, no one believes him. But, not only are Jamie's perceptions accurate, the man is a thief who has stolen a million dollars and kidnaps Gillian. When she leaves a *written* note as to where she's being taken, Jamie is in a double bind: no one thinks he's seen anything real and he can't read the message. *Reading the Sky* brings high adventure from the sky and on and off the page.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Avi

Avi—a name given to him by his twin sister—was born in New York City in 1937. Raised in a home with a family history of authorship and books, newspapers were a major part of his early life, just as they are today. It was his childhood reading of serialized stories in New York newspapers that gave him the desire to revitalize the tradition. Though he struggled with writing in school, by the time he left high school, Avi had decided to become a writer. In 1970, his first book was published and since then he has published—in the United States and around the world—more than fifty-five books for young people. The recipient of many writing honors, which include *the 2003 Newbery Medal*, two *Newbery Honors*, the *Horn Book Award*, the *Scott O'Dell Award*, the *Christopher Award*, plus many state awards, Avi is known for his wide stylistic range and prolific literary skills. Out this fall is his newest book, *The End of The Beginning*. Avi's website is found at: <http://avi-writer.com>

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR: Joan Sandin

Joan Sandin's first book was one she illustrated for a story that her brother had written. He was eight years old and she was five. "It was set in a cave, and all the pictures took place in the dark. Only one person bought that book—our mother. It could only go uphill from there," Joan admits.

Joan has been illustrating her own and others' published stories for some 35 years. She is also the author/illustrator of a number of children's books published in the US and in Sweden, and is the translator of some 20 Swedish children's books.

Coyote School News, Joan's newest book, is set in a one-room school in Southern Arizona ranch country in 1938. She is delighted that this book, which she both wrote and illustrated, is a finalist for the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, and has been chosen by Arizona's Governor Janet Napolitano as the book she will present in February 2005 to all Arizona fourth graders. (See the **BREAKING NEWS** link on Joan's website)

Joan also travels around the state (sponsored by the Arizona Humanities Council) doing a Chautauqua presentation of Eulalia "Sister" Bourne, legendary Arizona teacher, rancher and author.

Joan grew up in Tucson, and graduated from the University of Arizona. After living most of her adult life in New York City and Stockholm, Sweden, she is back in Tucson, enjoying the sunshine, mountains, and western skies with her husband Brian, visiting children and grandchildren, and a gang of giant goldfish.

You can find out more about Joan and her books by visiting her website at: <http://members.authorsguild.net/joansandin>

DYSLEXIA (LA.A.1.2.2, LA.A.2.2.1, LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.2.2.5, LA.A.2.3.5, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.2.3.8)

Dyslexia is a learning disability that may affect one's ability to read, write, and do math. It occurs in about 15 percent of the population, can be inherited, and is characterized by difficulty in using letters and numbers in sequence. School can be very difficult for students with this disability. These problems do not affect a person's intelligence; rather people with dyslexia may have many gifts. These abilities include more curiosity than average, thinking in pictures rather than words, vivid imaginations, an

awareness of the environment, thinking and perceiving using all the senses. They may also be highly intuitive and insightful. This description fits Jamie, our protagonist, perfectly.

- <http://www.dyslexiacenter.org> The long list of famous dyslexics includes Tom Cruise, Whoopi Goldberg, Robin Williams, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Harrison Ford, Cher, Jay Leno, Agatha Christie, and Charles Schwab. Find a list of quotes from famous dyslexics and other fascinating articles for teachers and students.
- <http://kidshealth.org> This site explains what having dyslexia is like and how kids with dyslexia read and feel. Articles are marked with a P for parents, a K for kids, and a T for teens. Type “dyslexia” in search box.

Charles Schwab is a billionaire owner of a discount stock brokerage firm and dyslexic. He has created two sites to help kids and parents:

- www.sparktop.org an entertaining site for children 8-12 with ideas and encouragement.
- www.schwablearning.org resources for parents of kids with disabilities.

ED GODDARD aka D.B. COOPER

(LA.A.1.2.4, LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.2.2.5, LA.A.1.3.1, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.2.3.8)

As Jamie’s story is told, another story unfolds and the two will soon intersect. Ed Goddard is planning the daring robbery of a plane carrying a company payroll of \$1,000,000. The character of Ed Goddard is loosely based on the story of D.B. Cooper, a real life skyjacker who parachuted out of a Boeing 727 during a Thanksgiving eve storm in 1971 with a bag of \$20 bills.

Cooper’s story started after he boarded a Northwest Orient flight to Portland, Oregon. While in the air, Cooper threatened to blow up the plane if he was not given \$200,000 and four parachutes. The plane landed at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport and the money and parachutes were provided. Cooper demanded that the plane take off and head for Mexico. However, after takeoff, Cooper jumped from the plane somewhere over the state of Washington with the cash.

This case remains as the only unsolved skyjacking within the United States. Cooper was never found though in 1980 a child digging along the Columbia River in Vancouver discovered \$5800 of the original money. (The serial numbers on the money had been recorded by the FBI.) Some argue he never survived the jump; others are sure he is living in luxury somewhere.

One year later screening devices became mandatory in airports. Planes, like the one that Cooper jumped from, were equipped with a device that made it impossible to lower the rear stairs during flight. This device came to be known as a “Cooper vane”.

- <http://home.earthlink.net/~quade/dbcooper.html> A full story from The Seattle Times 25 years later. Kids will be fascinated by the details.

SKY AWARENESS LA.A.1.2.2, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.2.2.5, LA.A.1.3.2, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.2.3.4, LA.E.2.3.8)

For Spacious Skies is a program started in 1980 by Jack Borden to educate children to look up and become aware of the sky

- <http://forspaciouskies.com/> Excellent articles and ideas. Check the Skywatcher’s Cloud Chart and Skyworks cd-rom in the links. This is a springboard for countless teaching ideas.

CLOUD WATCHING (LA.C.2.2.3, LA.C.2.3.1)

There are many good web sites that illustrate sky pictures:

- <http://pals.agron.iastate.edu/carlson> Cool clouds for kids of all ages from Iowa State.
- <http://www.cloudgazing.com> Cloud Gazing or Art in the Sky... many pictures and links.
- http://www.weatherworks.com/monthly/activities/sky_window.html Make a sky watcher window.
- http://www.cloudman.com/look/look_up.htm 10 reasons to look up and imagine.

CLOUDCUCKOOLAND (Chapter 5)

(LA.A.1.2.2, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.2.2.3, LA.A.1.3.2, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.1.3.3, LA.E.1.3.5, LA.E.2.3.2, LA.E.2.3.4)

Have you ever looked up and imagined that you saw shapes in the cloud formations overhead perhaps an animal, a bird, a dragon, or another familiar shape? In *Reading the Sky* Jamie sees “castles, dragons, knights, charging horses” and more. If like Jamie you have, then you were enjoying the activity of **nephelococcygia**, or finding imaginary shapes within clouds. The beginnings of this word go back to a play called *The Birds* written by Aristophanes in 414 B.C. In this play birds see things in the clouds. Another character in the play says that they are crazy and from this came the word nephelococcygia which means “cloud cuckoo land”. This is certainly a stigma that Jamie can relate to in this story. In fact Gillian recalls in **Chapter 5** that “she remembered a teacher talking about daydreaming kids being in Cloudcuckooland.”

- <http://www.weatherworks.com/monthly/activities/nephelococcygia.html>

THE SCIENCE OF CLOUDS

(LA.A.1.2.2, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.2.2.5, LA.A.1.3.2, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.2.3.2, LA.E.2.3.8)

- <http://www.wildwildweather.com> A site put together by a meteorologist for kids 6- 16, their parents and teachers. Click “clouds” and find many learning activities.
Note: The **Cloud Key** (scroll to the bottom) is a great reproducible activity for identifying clouds and predicting weather. It will encourage your students’ powers of observation.
- <http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/weather1.htm> Weather 101 The science of cloud formations.
- <http://www.weatherclassroom.com> Weather content for educators, students and parents.

CREATING A SKY JOURNAL

(LA.B.1.2.1, LA.B.2.2.1, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.2.6, LA.D.2.2.1, LA.B.1.3.2, LA.B.2.3.3, LA.D.2.3.1)

Keeping track of daily views of the sky is an excellent way to sharpen observation skills and writing skills. Have students create their own sky journal and allow time in the day for students to sit and observe the sky. Encourage students to share their entries and the words they use to describe what they are seeing. Collect blue paint chips from a paint store so that kids have a way to describe the many shades and tones of blue that the sky takes on. Word choice can be critical in finding just the right word for describing today’s weather conditions.

CLOUD HISTORY: Luke Howard 1772-1864 and Wilson A. Bentley 1865-1931

(LA.A.2.2.1, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.A.LA.A.2.3.1, LA.A.2.3.6)

These two men are interesting research subjects. **Luke Howard** is considered the father of meteorology because in the early 1800’s he first classified cloud formations using the words cumulus (Latin for heap), stratus (Latin for layer), cirrus (Latin for wispy, curly hair) and nimbus (Latin for rain). **Wilson A. Bentley**, also known as Snowflake Bentley, was the first to photograph a snowflake...eventually over 5000 snowflakes...using photo equipment of the day to establish that no two snowflakes are alike.

TIME AND PLACE : The Pennsylvania/New York border area

(LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.1.2.3, LA.A.2.3.5, LA.A.2.3.6)

The setting of this story is the Pennsylvania-New York border area. The following are mentioned in the story: **Chapter 1** Jamie came from Rochester, New York and his grandparents lived in Pennsylvania, ten miles south of the New York border. The closest big town was Elmira, twenty-five miles to the northeast, **Chapter 2** Ed Goddard was plotting the towns along the route Keystone Airlines would take between Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Elmira, New York including Corning, Williamsport, Binghamton, Elmira, Philadelphia, and Rochester, New York. Also in **Chapter 2** Goddard hoped to land near Canoe Landing, Painted Post, Horse Heads, Jersey Shore, Stoneville, or Chumung.

Practice map reading skills with students. Create math problems measuring distances between these towns, between their own city and these towns, etc.

TIME AND PLACE: 1972

(LA.A.2.2.5, LA.A.2.2.8, LA.E.1.2.3, LA.E.2.2.3, LA.A.1.3.4, LA.A.2.3.6, LA.E.1.3.1, LA.E.2.3.5)

The time of the story is 1972. Avi mentions the headline stories of the day and what the adults were talking about in **Chapter 3** - President Nixon, Vietnam and **Chapter 5** - the Olympics in Germany, the Apollo astronauts landing on the moon, the Vietnamese War and the Viet Cong.

An interesting tie in would be to research the year 1972 and compare/contrast that year with present times. Considering both 1972 and 2004 have elections, a war in a foreign country, and an Olympics, many comparisons can be made. A site which offers information categorized by year is found at <http://www.infoplease.com/year/1972.html>. Also at this site is a link to Fact Monster with kid's reference questions, games, and quizzes.

WORD SPLASH (LA.A.1.2.2, LA.A.1.2.3, LA.A.1.3.1, LA. A.1.3.2, LA.E.1.3.3, LA.E.1.3.4)

Objectives: Assess prior knowledge, provide motivation for reading, set a clear purpose for reading, decipher vocabulary, and allow for a variety of modes of learning

Steps:

1. Select 7-10 meaningful words or phrases from the reading selection. Include not only similar words that will indicate the subject of the selection but also some of the words and phrases that seem contradictory to the others.
2. Give each student a sheet and ask him/her to spend a little time thinking about what kind of story or article could include all of these words or phrases.
3. Ask students to form small groups of 3-5 (or you can assign them to groups). In their groups, they should decide what the story will be about. They should also create a narrative or an explanation that will include all the words or phrases.
4. Ask each group to share their narrative or explanation. As they listen, students should look for common elements.
5. Ask students to list the common elements they heard on the board (or you could list them if students have trouble doing this.)
6. Individually, students now read the selection.
7. In small groups or as a whole class, discuss the similarities and differences between the narratives they constructed prior to reading the story and the actual story. It is very important to discuss the reasons for the differences. This discussion can highlight the number of possible approaches authors have available to them when deciding to write about a particular subject. Students' constructions may be perfectly logical without being exactly the same as the story or explanation the author constructed.

Remember this activity is not about whether their predictions were "right" or "wrong" but about whether their predictions were confirmed. Students may find satisfaction in both the similarities and differences.

An advanced step: Once students have done a few of these word splashes, they could independently prepare them for themselves or each other. They should skim an article or story, selecting seven to ten words and phrases. If working independently, they could write those down in a log and then construct a story using them. If working in groups, they could prepare a word splash sheet for someone else to use before reading a selection.

Word Splash for Chapter 1 of Reading the Sky

JAMIE PETERS, AGE TWELVE

Summer of 1972

ashamed

with his grandparents

castles, dragons, knights

best imagination in the world

dyslexia

sky watching

rocks were everywhere

your way of reading