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IMMORTAL MAX

by Lutricia Clifton

GRADES
3-7

Common
Core State
Standards

About the Book

Twelve-year-old Sam Smith dreams of owning a purebred puppy, convinced it would be superior to smelly and disheveled Max, the family's ancient pet. Near death's door when Sammy's sister rescued him, Max survived and seems immortal. That's too bad, for Sammy's mother says no new dog if it's going to bother Max. Undaunted, Sammy decides to save enough money to buy a puppy anyway and takes a job walking dogs in Country Wood, where he clashes with Justin, a rich, pampered "burbie" who owns just the kind of dog Sammy wants: a sable German shepherd. Justin is determined to get Sammy fired and destroy his dream. Their feud, echoing the conflict between rich city transplants and the townies, escalates into violence.

This heartwarming story of a boy and his dogs is filled with memorable characters—both human and canine.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature/Language Arts

This story about Sammy, who wants a special dog even though he already has one who's more special than he realizes, describes many situations with which students may be familiar. Ask students to choose one or more of the following to discuss with partners or in small groups, or to use as writing prompts: [CCSS 5.RL.2](#); [5.RI.3](#); [5.W.1, 3, 4](#); [5.SL.1, 4](#)

Bullying—Throughout the course of the story, Sammy has conflicts with his classmate Justin, who is a bully. What experiences have you had with bullies? How have you handled them? What do you feel is the best way to deal with bullies?

Insiders vs. Outsiders—At some schools, some students are perceived as being superior (richer/smarter/cuter, etc.) to others. This can create a Burbies/Townies, Insider/Outsider, Winner/Loser, Rich/Poor dynamic. Have you ever experienced these types of attitudes in the schools you have attended? Do you think they're justified? Why or why not? Do you agree with what Sammy did to alleviate some of these attitudes among the kids he knew? Why or why not? What kinds of things could you do to make kids in your world get along better regardless of their differences?

"Dreambook"—Sammy creates a dog "Dreambook" that contains information on many different breeds of dogs, including the one he wants most: a sable German shepherd puppy. If you were to create your own "Dreambook," what would you include in it? [CCSS 5.SL.2](#)

Descriptions—The author presents very detailed descriptions of each character: their appearance, their personalities, even the specific clothes they are wearing at different times. Work with a partner, and write a similar description of him/her. Be as specific as you can and include as many details as possible. Or write a detailed description of a friend, a parent, a sibling or a teacher.

Caring for Pets—Sammy has various jobs to do related to taking care of Max, and more duties when he takes on the job as a dog-walker. What things have you had to do to take care of your own pets? If you've never had a pet, what have you observed about others'?

Earning Money—Sammy creates a job for himself as a dog-walker so that he can earn money to purchase his dream puppy. If you had to earn money for a specific purpose, what kinds of jobs could you do? How would you go about convincing people to hire you?

Compare and Contrast—Sammy’s life on the farm is very different from that of the kids who live in the gated community of Country Wood Estates. Compare the life where you live with both of these. Which would/do you prefer? Why? Describe what you feel would be the ideal place for you to live if it were possible.

Friendship—Sammy is very caring and concerned for his various friends: Sid, Bailey, and Anise and Yee. What do you think is necessary for a good friendship? How do you choose your friends? What do you do to be a good friend and show people you care about them?

A Quote—Near the end of the story, Sammy thinks, “The thing about clocks is one tick follows another. New ones replace those that die away.” He is thinking of the things he has lost as well as what lies ahead. What does this quote mean to you? How can you relate it to your own life?

Obesity—This issue comes up early in the story when the character of Bailey is introduced. At first, the other girls shun her because of her obesity and her “always smiling” attitude. But after she explains herself to them, they all eventually become pals. What experiences have you had with this issue? Have you known people with a weight problem? How have you treated them?

Research / Electronic Resources

Students can do additional research using print and electronic sources on any of the following topics related to the story, and they can present their findings to the class in an oral or written report. **CCSS 5.RI.7; 5.W.1, 2, 7, 8; 5.SL.2**

Puppy Mills—Sammy’s sister, Beth, and the woman at Kendall’s Kennels both talk about puppy mills in the story. Students may be interested in finding more information on this. A great deal of information is presented here: <http://www.asPCA.org/fight-cruelty/puppy-mills>, along with suggestions for those who wish to become more involved in ending this inhumane practice.

Bullying—<http://www.stopbullying.gov/> presents a wealth of information regarding bullying: What it is, who’s at risk, how to respond to it, things kids can do to prevent it, and where to go for help. This is an excellent site that should be bookmarked in every school.

Chinese Zodiac—Students may not be familiar with this Asian astrological system, mentioned by Yee. They can see the various animals and what they represent, and they can figure out where they fit in the Chinese Zodiac here: <http://www.hutong-school.com/sites/default/files/chinese-zodiac-years2.jpg>

Dog Breeds—Several specific breeds are mentioned in the story: sable German shepherd, Yorkshire terrier, Pekingese, peekapoo, miniature pinscher, Schapendoes, Bouvier des Flandres, and Pyrenean sheepdog. Each of these can be searched on Google.com, and after entering the name of the breed, students can see in the right-hand column a photo of the dog as well as some pertinent information. They can consult other links to find further information regarding the particular breed.

Obesity—<http://kidshealth.org/Search/01.jsp> presents a great deal of information written specifically for kids related to obesity, good diet, and good health.

Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

About the Author

Lutricia Clifton’s debut novel, *Freaky Fast Frankie Joe*, was named a Bank Street Best Children’s Book of the Year, an IRA-CBC Children’s Choice and a Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List title. It was also nominated for the Nebraska Golden Sower Intermediate Award, the Kansas William Allen White Award, the Missouri Mark Twain Readers Award and the South Carolina Children’s Book Award. Lutricia lives in Illinois. Visit her online at <http://www.lutricia-lois-clifton.com/>.