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Lessons

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The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend

by Dan Santat



Summary: Beekle lives in the land of imaginary friends. But when he's not picked to become an imaginary friend, he embarks on a journey to the real world to find that special friend.

Why We Love It: Dan Santat is an artist and a storyteller of extraordinary caliber, and Beekle's story is a home run because of its imaginative premise; it is a story full of heart coupled with eye-popping illustrations.

Big Ideas: friendship, waiting, imagination, patience, belonging, fitting in, finding your place, longing, loneliness, journey, going after what you want, dreams, courage, long-awaited friendships

1 QUICK WRITE.

- Think of a time you felt really alone and wished for a friend.
Write about this for 3 minutes and then set it aside.

2 READ.

Read the picture book *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* and discuss the story. Discuss parts of the story that stick out to you or that you connect with. What writer's craft moves do you notice the author using? Notice the parts of the story.

3 CRAFT MOVES TO NOTICE.

- An echo ending (“... he did the unimaginable.”)
- A pitchforked description (“The real world was a strange place. **No kids were** eating cake. **No one stopped** to hear the music. And **everyone needed** naptime.”)
- Pitchforks

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4 SHARE THE STRUCTURE.

Show the students the structure found in the picture book. Reread the story, looking for chunks together and watching for how the author moves from one part to the other.

Yearning for a Friend

Why I felt
alone

What I
decided to
do about it

How that
didn't help

How I finally
found a friend

What we did
together

5 INVITATION TO WRITE.

Here are several ways you can get students to write.

- Have students use the text structure to write a kernel essay summary of the story. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- Have the students use the text structure to write their own piece in a kernel essay. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- See what students come up with. (Give them around 10 minutes.) Here are some possibilities:
 - A page of thoughts in their quick write
 - Examples of the author's craft moves
 - A text structure

Whatever they choose to write, let them know that they can change anything they need to and make it their own.

6 SHARE.

Invite students to try their writing on someone else's ears. This is a crucial step! The sharing is just as important as the writing.

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Want to Go Deeper? Try These Options.

OPTION 1: CRAFT CHALLENGE

A Pitchforked Description

In this story, the author uses a pitchforked description to describe the real world:

“The real world was a strange place. No kids were eating cake. No one stopped to hear the music. And everyone needed naptime.”

Look through your piece and see where you can try this pitchforked sentence pattern:

My (noun) was (adjective). No (noun + verb phrase). No one (verb phrase). And everyone (verb phrase).

Try it out on someone’s ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

OPTION 2: ANALYZE

1. Start with a big idea.

- If you want students to find the big ideas themselves, try asking, *What big ideas do you see in this story that tell you what it’s really about?*
- If students need a nudge, try using some of the big ideas from the list in this lesson’s introduction and have students provide evidence from the story to support their answers. **Ask:** *How is this story about (big idea)? How does the author explore the big idea of _____? Where in the story do you see that?*

2. Turn the big idea into a truism (thematic statement).

- Once you have identified the big ideas, use one of them to create truisms for this story. Here are some examples from this story:
 - “Sometimes the best friends lie just beyond our imagination.”
 - A good friend is worth searching for.
 - Sometimes your best friend isn’t who you expected.
 - Sometimes you need to write your own story.
 - Have students write and share their own truisms.

Ask them to prove their truisms by providing evidence from the text. They might imagine a listener saying, “Oh yeah? How do you know? How is that true in the story?”

OPTION 3: READING RESPONSE

Students can compose short or extended responses to demonstrate understanding by answering any of these questions. Look in the appendix to find a list entitled “Basic Reading Response Text Structures” and a list of additional question stems.

Questions for Reading Response

- What is this story really about?
- Why does Beekle decide to leave and start his journey?
- How are Beekle and the girl alike?
- How do Beekle and the girl benefit each other?
- What are the main reasons the author included these sentences? “The real world was a strange place. No kids were eating cake. No one stopped to hear the music. And everyone needed naptime.”

Student Examples

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QUICK WRITES

Anish Muthuraman, sixth grade

When I was moving to my new house, I was lonely. It was summer break, and I had no one to talk to. I wished that I had a friend. Later, my wish did come true. One day I was biking and met a group of boys. I got to know them and made friends with them.

Josiah Obeng-Boampong, eighth grade

One time I felt lonely was when I first moved to a new school. After elementary school, I had to separate with all my friends and start over again, somewhere new. In sixth grade, I began to attend my current school. I didn't know anyone and felt out of my league in middle school. I was fairly smart, always at the top of my class back in elementary school, but school isn't only about academics.

David Donaldson, eighth grade

A time I felt alone was at camp during this past summer. For whatever reason, that time around I was having a harder time clicking with the people there, because usually in the past, the chemistry would show itself within that very first day. However, this time it was day two and I felt as though I had not been making many friends there.

KERNEL ESSAYS

Isaak Houpt, fifth grade

1. I was new to the school.

2. I sat at lunch tables looking for a friend.
3. I just found that everyone had a friend and didn't need more.
4. Someone had a friend, but their friend didn't treat them very well, so I became friends with them.
5. We had playdates, went to the movies, and then someone else joined us, so now we are the perfect trio.

Alex Edwards, fifth grade

Craft Challenge (highlighted)

1. I felt alone because I had no friends. I was alone. No one cared. No one helped.
2. I moped around.
3. That just made me feel worse about myself.
4. I made friends with Donovan and Isaac by sitting at their table and socializing with them.
5. We work together on group projects and play video games together, too.

TRUISM (WITH PROOF)

Cuate Saunders, sixth grade

Feeling lost doesn't always mean you are. In the beginning, Beekle feels lost because all his friends find friends but he doesn't. At the end, he gets his friend.

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Student Examples

Callum Campbell, sixth grade

The blandness of reality is almost always disappointing until love is found. In the story, imagination land is fun while the real world is disappointing. Beekle figures this out when no one loves him, until he finds the girl.

Josiah Obeng-Boampong, eighth grade

Friendship is a powerful force and can be formed anywhere, as long as it's a two-way street. The imaginary friend of the girl doesn't even exist, yet they are able to become friends because the imaginary Beekle persevered to reach his fateful friend.

Finn Thanairongroj, eighth grade

Sometimes all a person needs is another person. All Beekle wanted was a friend, and he was happy and content after he made his friend.

BIG IDEAS (WITH PROOF)

Henry Millican, sixth grade

This story is about loneliness because Beekle had to wait for a best friend, but slowly got more lonely and nearly lost hope. Sometimes after a period of loneliness, long or short, there will be happiness, and you will be whole again. When he finds a friend, he becomes whole.

Josiah Obeng-Boampong, eighth grade

This story is about friendship because two beings, who had never met, were able to become good friends. I know this because in the end, they are having a good time together in the imaginary world.

David Donaldson, eighth grade

I think the big idea of the story was finding your way in a world with so many lonely paths. Beekle was able to make a friend, and friends make life better.

CRAFT CHALLENGE: PITCHFORKED DESCRIPTIONS

Wes Mayo, third grade

My house was confusing. No person could hear the noises. No one saw the problems. And everyone was always tired.

Zinnia Briseño, fourth grade

My life was shattered. No friends on my side. No one liked me. And everyone wanted to exile me! (This last point is a reference to Sophie in *Keeper of the Lost Cities* #3.)

Wyatt Minarcik, fifth grade

My car was too hideous. No kids looked at it. No one wanted to see it. And everyone wanted me to get a new car.