Fat Kid Rules the World
by K. L. Going

Troy Billings, seventeen, 296 pounds, friendless and utterly miserable, is about to step off the subway platform in front of an oncoming train when he meets Curt MacCrae, an emaciated, semi-homeless, high school dropout, the stuff punk rock legends are made of. They form a friendship that changes both their lives and the lives of the people around them.

THEMES
problem-solving, friendship, responsibility, courage

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:
facetious, illuminates, plummet, disembodied, infested, paranoid, reeks, oblivious, mortify,grimace, humiliating, obsessively, alienated, animated, culminating, stench, dysfunctional, emphysema, emaciation, concave, thwarted, incessant, surreal, mirage, unabashedly, apparition, ominously, abyss, consequential, nuance, angst, vintage, idyllic, nostalgic, crescendos, conceptualize, adrenaline, nonchalant, silhouette, frail, altruistic, rhetorical, atrophied, frenetic, derision, anorexic, gingerly, stoic, vulnerability

B. Before beginning the story, discuss with the class the following questions:
1. Do you like rock or punk music? What do you like about it? How do your parents feel about this kind of music?
2. Do you know someone who is overweight? How does this person feel about him or herself? How do people at school treat him or her?
3. What would it be like to be homeless? Why are people homeless? Are teens ever homeless? How do they live?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:
1. Begin with Chapters 1-25: What is Troy thinking about as he stands on the subway platform? How does he feel when Curt MacCrae speaks to him? What is Curt's reputation around school? How does Curt answer when Troy asks him where he lives? What does Curt do that cements their friendship? What is the first thing Troy's dad does when he meets Curt? What plans does Curt have for them? Describe Curt's mom's house. What is Curt's opinion of Troy's room? What does Troy find himself doing when Curt doesn't show up at their meeting place? What happens? What is Curt's response when Troy tells him?
2. Advance to Chapters 26-58: Why does Curt take Troy to The Dump? Why can't Troy concentrate on his drum lessons? Why does Troy's dad change his mind about letting Troy go to the concert? What happens to Curt after the concert? What happens to Curt when he gets back? Complete the story with Chapters 59-89: How does Troy feel as they get closer to the gig? What happens? How has Troy become a legend? How does Ollie get him to come back? What happens to Curt? What memories come back as Troy waits in the emergency room? How does what happens to Curt draw Troy and Dayle closer? What gig has Curt planned? What does Troy realize Curt is doing? What decision do he and his dad have to make? How does Curt react when Troy tells him?

B. For Discussion:
1. Why is Troy down on himself? How does he feel about being fat?
2. What does Curt mean when he tells Troy, “You make your own size. You make your walls. It’s not about what’s out there”? How does this help Troy accept himself?
3. How does Curt help Troy and his father draw closer? How does he help Troy grow closer to his brother Dayle?
4. How do you think things will work out with Curt living at Troy’s house? What do you think Curt will be like in five years? What will Troy be like?
5. Discuss the title. In what way might the author have intended sarcasm? How does it come to be true?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give wide leeway in working with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:
1. Have students make up names for punk or rock groups. They might use a thesaurus and select words that might go together. How do actual rock groups come up with their names?
2. Have students listen to the similes Troy uses, such as describing Curt in his father’s clothing as, “an elf transported to the land of giants” or himself as “the
elephant in the room.” How do these comparisons help us see what Troy is seeing?

3. Have students write a play about Curt living with Troy’s family. What quarrels might the four men have?

4. Have students really watch people, such as when they are eating, then write a description of what they see.

B. Art and Music:
1. Have students select background music that might be appropriate to some of the scenes. Certainly punk music would be appropriate, as would songs by the Beatles for when Curt takes Troy to his mother’s apartment.

2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could show the subway and streets of New York, Troy’s apartment and Curt’s mother’s apartment as cutouts, show The Dump, add pictures of guitarists, drummers, and record covers of punk artists. They might create a mural like the one Curt creates on Troy’s bedroom wall.

3. Have students learn about the history of popular music. How did popular music change in the sixties? What influence did the Beatles have on music? Who were some other important artists of the times? How did this music evolve into punk and rap? What do students think will be the next wave of popular music?

4. As he waits for Curt, Troy describes the area of New York he’s in as, “the Norman Rockwell painting of the twenty-first century.” Have students look at Norman Rockwell paintings. What do they generally depict? How would he paint the twenty-first century? Another group might learn about surrealism by such artists as Salvador Dali. Why does Troy so often refer to what’s happening as “surreal”?

C. Social Studies:
1. When the story opens, Troy is about to jump off the subway platform. Have students learn about suicides and attempted suicides among teens. What do statistics tell us about this? Why do teens so often commit suicide? What can be done to prevent suicides among young people?

2. Curt is semi-homeless because his mother doesn’t want him. Have students find out about homelessness among children and teens. Why aren’t they in foster homes? How can we help them?

3. Have students develop a curriculum for teaching someone to play the drums or other musical instrument.

D. Science and Math:
1. Like Troy, many people today suffer from obesity. Have students learn about this. Why has obesity become a major health problem, even among young people? What can we do about it?

2. At the concert, Troy gets high on second-hand “sweet” smoke. Have students find out about marijuana. How does it make someone high? Can someone get high just breathing it? What are the dangers of marijuana?

3. Curt verges on being anorexic. Have students learn more about anorexia. What can happen to someone who gets too thin?

4. Curt is addicted to medicines. Have students learn more about this. How can someone become addicted to over-the-counter or prescription medicines? How do doctors control prescriptions to prevent this?

**USING AUDIOBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM**

When it comes to teaching today's students, sometimes books are just not enough. In an increasingly technological and information-savvy world, the ability to read will be critical to every child's success. The value of audiobooks as a learning tool in the education of children is widely recognized by experts. Audiobooks bring written text to life, adding an interactive quality that can ignite a child's imagination. They encourage reading by broadening vocabularies, stretching attention spans, and fostering critical-thinking skills. Listening to audiobooks in the classroom can effectively enrich the reading experience and aid your students in understanding and appreciating literature, history, theatre arts, and more!

**Theme Related Reading and Listening:**

These and other titles may be ordered from Listening Library. Additional copies of paperback books may be ordered at publisher’s current prices. Call or write to order study guides for over 350 other titles.

- *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick
- *The Graduation of Jake Moon* by Fred Savage
- *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen
- *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

Other titles you may enjoy:

- *The Janitor’s Boy* by Andrew Clements
- *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers
- *Stand Tall* by Joan Bauer
- *What Would Joey Do?* by Jack Gantos

For a FREE school and library catalog of Listening Library's unabridged productions:

- Call TOLL FREE 1-800-733-3000
- FAX us at 1-800-940-7046
- email us at BOTCS@randomhouse.com
- visit our website at www.school.booksontape.com
- or write:
  
  Books on Tape
  1745 Broadway
  New York, NY 10019

© 2007 Listening Library