

The Magic of Norumbega

Teacher Guide

Classroom or Book Club Discussion Questions:

At the beginning of the book, no one believes that Geti can hear music, not even her best friend. How did Geti react to their disbelief? How do you think you would react if you were certain about something but others doubted you?

Why do you suppose that Geti was the only dog in the park that could hear the music?

The frog does not seem very friendly to the dogs. The author calls him “ornery.” Did the frog’s behavior match his ornery attitude? In what ways was he mean to the dogs, and in what ways was he helpful? Describe someone you know who gives an impression that is different from his/her actual behavior.

When Geti tried to convince the frog to reveal the secrets of Norumbega Park, she told him, “I just need to know.” Why did she use the word ‘need’ instead of ‘want’? Have you ever wanted something so badly that it felt more like a need than a desire? How did that affect you?

Geti is horrified at the thought of living in a zoo, but Dune seems to like his home. Can you think of any reasons their attitudes about a zoo might be very different? Can you describe anyone who lives in a different type of household or culture than yours, and might have a different perspective on what they need to be happy?

Dune thinks he can open any lock in the world, but Cushman probably could have put a better lock on Dune’s cage to prevent him from escaping. Why do you think Cushman kept a flimsy lock on Dune’s cage? In what ways did Cushman treat Dune differently than some of the other animals in his care, and why? Do people in authority (parents, teachers, police officers, etc.) have different rules and standards for different people? Are there times when that can be helpful, or hurtful? Provide some examples.

When Geti was caged and realized the magic words could not set her free, why did she feel even worse when Cushman changed her name to Arabella? How do you think you would react if you were suddenly informed that your name had been changed? How does your name impact how you feel about yourself?

Geti desperately needed a friend, but the white horses refused to befriend her. What could have caused them to act with hostility toward Geti? Discuss a time when you tried to join a group that didn’t want you; or a time when you’ve belonged to a group who wouldn’t let someone new join.

Why did Mazie tell Cushman that “Trixie” belonged to her? What was she risking by telling a lie? Is there ever a situation where telling a lie might be justified? If yes, provide some examples.

If Dune had refused to help Geti escape from her cage, Murphy would have had a dilemma about what to do next. What would her options have been? Brainstorm some things that Murphy could have done if Dune had been unwilling to help Geti.

Compare the friendship between the two dogs at the beginning of the book to their friendship at the end. In what ways did it change? Which events shaped their relationship? What did they learn about each other, and about themselves? Describe a friendship or relationship you have had that changed over time.

Do you believe that the music in the ballroom truly had magical powers? Why or why not? What other explanation might there be for the way Geti was able to dance to save Murphy? Have you ever been able to accomplish something that you expected to be impossible? How did you do it?

At the end of the book, after Geti returned to Dog Park, how had her life changed? Was her life better or worse than it had been before her visit to Norumbega?

The author didn't describe anything about Geti's family or her life outside of Dog Park. What are some reasons she might have chosen to omit that information?

Suggestions for Extended Activities:

Have the students research trolley parks - find out why were they built, why they eventually became obsolete. What other things did people do for entertainment in earlier times that are no longer available or considered interesting?

Have the class research a historic place in their town. Take a field trip there if possible.

Take a field trip to a local amusement park or zoo.

Have the students interview someone who was alive around the year 1940 and find out what they did for amusement.

Have the class plan its own amusement park. What attractions, rides, and other features would they want in their park?

Have the students draw a map of how they imagine Norumbega was laid out. Include as many of the park's features that were mentioned in the book as possible.

Have the students create a poster advertising Norumbega Park. What would they choose to include?

When Norumbega Park opened in 1897, an admission ticket cost 10¢. Have the students do some research to find out how that compares to the cost for admission to an amusement park today. Introduce the concept of inflation and compare today's prices of various items to what they cost 100 years ago.

Research the music of the big band era. Who were the popular bands in the late 1930s and early 1940s? Watch them and listen to their music on YouTube. How do they differ from bands that came along around the time that Norumbega closed (1963) and from the bands that are popular today?

Have the class research the popular dances of the big band era. Watch YouTube videos of the different dances that are mentioned in chapter 14 of "The Magic of Norumbega." Find a volunteer or grandparent who can come to class and teach some dance steps to the students.