

TEACHING GUIDE FOR

WHAT COULD BE BETTER THAN THIS?

1. Story Discussion

What was life like for the king and queen before their baby was born? Describe how they lived, and some of their adventures. How do their lives change after the baby arrives? What sorts of adventures do they have now?

Who is the narrator—the person telling the story? Why does it seem like the narrator is talking directly to you? Why do you suppose the author uses fantasy to describe your parents' lives before you were born? Does she really believe your father was a king and your mother chased after pirates? What is the message she's trying to convey?

2. Writing from personal experience

This book is about a “transformative event” that changes someone’s life or the way a person looks at the world. In this case, the event is having a baby, but there are many kinds of transformative events—taking a trip, finding a friend, the arrival of a new sibling, a new pet, making a discovery, even reading a book!

As a class, discuss some of the transformative events in your life. What happened? How did you feel? How did this experience change you? Write a story or a poem (it doesn't have to rhyme) about this event.

3. Studying the Art

Compare the paintings in the beginning of the book to those after the baby arrives. How do they change? For example, look at the artist's palette (the range of colors she uses), and the gold trim around the borders. How does their home change? Their clothing? Which setting feels warmer and happier to you? Which feels fancier? Which do you like better?

What fantasy creatures are mentioned in the book? How are the creatures represented before and after the birth?

Think about the transformative event you wrote about in #2. Draw a picture that shows how your life changed before and after this event.

4. Using your imagination

Imagine that you are a king or queen, or an adventurer on the high seas. Describe the setting (your castle, or ship, or the ocean); give lots of details! How do you spend your days? What sorts of people and animals (real or imaginary) do you meet? Write a short story about your adventures.

5. Poetry

This story is a poem written in verse. Which words rhyme? What happens if you change one of the rhyming words—if, for example, on the first page you change “on his own” to “by himself.” How does it sound now?

Sometimes, at the end of a stanza, there is an extra line in which the rhyming word is repeated. For example, the beginning stanzas about the king end like this:

*And, yet, despite all the fine things that he had,
He sometimes felt lonely and **sad**.
Even a king can feel **sad**.*

Where else in the book do you see this kind of pattern?

In addition to rhyming words, the story has a particular rhythm. Read a few pages of the book aloud. Do you hear the beat?

***Back** in the **days** when your **mama** sailed **ships**,
Gliding through **rough-rolling waves**,
She **raced** after **pirates**, **scared** away **sharks**,
And **found** buried **treasure** in **caves**.*

What happens to the rhythm when you change some words? Try changing “back in the days” to “Last year” and “rough-rolling” to “gigantic.” How does it sound now?

6. Group Poem

Choose something mentioned in the book—for example, a castle, dragons, a new baby. As a class, write down any and all words you associate with that topic—activities, descriptions, anything that comes to mind. Look at your list, and come up with a title (for example, “My Pet Dragon” or “When I was Queen”). As a class or individually, use the words to write a poem (it doesn’t need to rhyme) about the topic.

WORD SEARCH/VOCABULARY BUILDER
Circle the words listed below
(words can go up, down, across, backward or diagonal)

T G N O M E N P S D
T R K T L O E D P I
L M E T U L D R L A
A A S A I L R A E M
T A G C S Z A G N R
C A A O C U G O D E
J N M D O E R N I M
N R O C I N U E D D
P I R A T E L Q U F
T S E R O F U G A J

CASTLE

DRAGON

FOREST

GARDEN

GNOME

LAGOON

MERMAID

PELICAN

PIRATE

SPLENDID

TREASURE

UNICORN