DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR STUART LITTLE

The manual accompanying Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, Second Edition, was used for ideas while developing this discussion guide. Some activities have been duplicated from the manual; specific reference by page number will be found after those activities.

CHAPTER I--"IN THE DRAIN"

1. In this chapter we are introduced to the newborn Stuart, second son to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Little, who "looked very much like a mouse in every way." We soon discover that he even began acting like a mouse. In small groups, ask your students to list all of Stuart's behaviors that they can find in chapter one, categorizing each as either actions considered "people-like" or "mouse-like." Then, as a large group, create class lists from their group work. Discuss the criteria for each category. If he looks like a mouse, is he a mouse? Is there enough evidence in this chapter to determine if Stuart is a mouse?

2. What is a person? Discussion Plan:
   a. Can things like rocks and tables and salt shakers be persons?
   b. Can animals (like goats and hyenas and yaks) be persons?
   c. Are only human beings persons?
   d. Are all human beings persons?
   e. Is it your personality that makes you a person?
   f. Is it your personal, private experiences that make you a person?

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 317)

CHAPTER II--"HOME PROBLEMS"

1. How would you describe George and Stuart's relationship in chapter 2?

2. If you were Stuart's parents, how would you have handled the situation about the use of "mouse" and "mice" in conversation, music, etc.

3. Mr. Little's biggest concern was the mousehole in the pantry. He told his wife, "After all, he does look a good deal like a mouse, and I've never seen a mouse yet that didn't like to go into a hole." If he looks like a mouse, does this make him a mouse? This question offers an opportunity to discuss stereotyping.

   Exercise--There are two types of stereotyping: being a member of a group, such as "You're an American, so you must love baseball!", and being known to have a certain trait, such as "You love baseball, so you must be an American!"

   In the following statements, ask the students to determine whether each is a case of good or faulty reasoning. Give a reason for each answer.
   a. Dora says: "All the parts of this sled are made of wood. This is a piece of wood. It must be a part of this sled."
   b. Mabel says: "Minnesotans live near Canada. Ed doesn't come from Minnesota, so he must not live near Canada."
   c. Sue says: "Jim's strong. Everyone knows that people who play football are strong, so Jim must play football."

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p.36)

CHAPTER III--"WASHING UP"

1. George promised to build things that would make Stuart's efforts in the bathroom easier; however, he never got around to doing it. Discuss whether the students think that it is ever okay to not keep a promise. They should be able to justify their answers. Discuss some of the following possibilities and if it would be okay to not keep the promise made.

   You have promised to:
   a. study your spelling words every night, but you left your spelling book at school
   b. ride your bike to the store with a friend, but you discover that you have a flat tire
   c. help clean the kitchen tonight after dinner, but your parents have forgotten and start to clean it up themselves

2. Discuss the many additions Mr. Little thought of to make Stuart's time in the bathroom easier. (example--the long string attached to the pull-chain of the light) Ask students to work with a partner to think of additions to Stuart's kitchen which would make it easier for him to fix a snack when he was hungry. Partners should then draw the Littles' kitchen as they think it would look, including their ideas to help Stuart.

CHAPTER IV--"EXERCISE"

1. Stuart enjoyed exercising. Referring back to the discussion in chapter 1 "What is a person?", is exercising something that only humans can do?

2. Students will likely recognize that Snowbell did not like Stuart. Had Stuart done anything to Snowbell to make the cat not like him? If it's not something that Stuart had done, what might have caused Snowbell to not like Stuart?

   Discussion Plan:
   a. Is it likely that Snowbell was jealous of Stuart?
   b. Is it likely that Stuart was jealous of Snowbell?
   c. Do you think Snowbell might have resented Stuart?
   d. Do you think that Stuart resented Snowbell?

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 218)

3. At the end of chapter 4, Stuart was stuck inside the rolled up window shade. Do you think it was Snowbell's fault? Do you think it was Stuart's fault? If you don't think it was either of their fault, then why do you think it happened?

4. Mrs. Little told her husband that Stuart was down the mousehole after seeing Stuart's hat and cane by the entrance. A discussion about jumping to conclusions might occur here.

   Activity--Here are some examples of reasoning. Classify each of them as good reasoning, not so good but possibly okay, or poor reasoning.
   a. "Saturday I got sick after I ate a half-gallon of ice cream and had a glass of water. Sunday I got sick after I had a half-gallon of ice cream and a glass of water.
   b. "I once met a fellow from Finland who played the drums real good. I'll bet all those Finns are great drummers!"

c. "We don't check every light bulb as it comes off the assembly line to see if it works, but we spot-check every 5th light bulb, just to get a typical sample.
d. "I've been reading that one child out of every five that's born in the world is Chinese. I have three brothers and so I figure the next baby in our family will probably look pretty Oriental!

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 62)

CHAPTER V--"RESCUED"

1. When they were unable to find Stuart, each of the family members reacted differently. Mr. Little called the Bureau of Missing Persons. George went to the cellar to look for the other entrance to the mousehole. Mrs. Little laid on her bed and cried. Discuss why people might react as they do.

   Discussion Plan--Is Crying Natural?
   Do you ever feel better after you've cried?
   Can you describe a situation in which crying is the appropriate thing to do?
   Can you think of a situation in which it would be inappropriate to cry?

   Exercise--In each of the following cases, state whether you think crying is or is not justified:
   a. Morty got robbed and beat up by two big kids yesterday, so he came home crying.
   b. Morty's little brother Irving burst into tears when he saw Morty get hurt.
   c. When the boys who robbed and clobbered Morty were caught, they began to cry.
   d. When Mac found out he wasn't invited to the party, he started to cry.
   e. Alice laughed so hard that tears ran from her eyes.
   f. Whenever Dorothy wants something, she tries to get it by crying.

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discover, p. 226, 227)

2. How would you describe the relationship between Stuart and Snowbell in chapter 5? Refer back to Chapter 4, question 2. This might provide an opportunity to compare and contrast their responses.

3. At the end of the chapter, why do you think Stuart said, "As for my hat and cane being found at the entrance to the mousehole, you can draw your own conclusions."? Can Stuart prove what happened? If he can, is it ever right to tell on someone?

   Discussion Plan--Is it ever right to tell on someone?
   Do the people in the following incidents have good reasons for doing what they do?
   a. Mindy watched as Doreen set her house on fire. But Mindy didn't turn in a fire alarm because she didn't want to be accused of snitching.
   b. Howard knows that his friend, Arthur, broke a window in the school. When asked by Mindy if he knows anything about the broken window, Howard simply shrugged.
   c. Arthur's other friend, Wilbur, reports to the school principal that Arthur broke the window because, he says, "Truth is more important than friendship."

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 215)

CHAPTER VI--"A FAIR BREEZE"

1. Do you think that Stuart likes being small?

Activity--Ask each member of the class to vote "yes" or "no." Discuss reasons for their vote, using evidence from what they have read so far. After the discussion, ask each student to again decide if he or she believes that Stuart likes being small. Each student should write a persuasive paragraph (or more), again using evidence from the book, explaining why they are voting as they are. Display these so students may read each other's opinions.

CHAPTER VII--"THE SAILBOAT RACE"

1. There's so much activity in this chapter. Ask students to choose their favorite scene and illustrate it. Display their pictures.

2. When stuart arrives back at home, George asked him where he had been all day, Stuart's response was, "Oh, knocking around town." Why do you think Stuart chose to not tell George what he had really been doing that day? Do you think Stuart trusts George?

   Discussion Plan--Trust
   a. What causes you to trust certain people? (what they say, do, their judgment, concern for you, etc.)
   b. How can you tell that someone is trustworthy? (by watching their eyes, face, their clothes, etc.)
   c. Do you trust different people or things according to a need or situation? (best friend, own judgment, parents, history, etc.)

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 269-270)

CHAPTER VIII--"MARGALO"

1. How would you describe the relationship between Stuart and Margalo in this chapter?

   Discussion Plan--Friendship
   a. Can animals be friends with one another?
   b. Can people have friendships with animals?
   c. Can two people like each other very much and still not be friends?
   d. Can two people be friends and still not like each other very much?
   e. Are friends usually very much alike or can they be very different from one another?
   f. Could friends ever hurt one another?

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 354)

CHAPTER IX--"A NARROW ESCAPE"

1. Stuart's family was very thankful to Margalo for saving his life. To show their appreciation, she was presented with a tiny cake which had seeds sprinkled on top. Would you call this a gift?

   Discussion Plan--Gift-giving
   a. What does the word "gift" mean to you?
   b. Why do people give gifts?
   c. Which do you like better--giving gifts or receiving them?
   d. Is gift-giving always good?

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 313, 315)

Activity--Gift-giving
Share with the class The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein. What did the boy want from the tree? What did the tree want from the boy? Would you call those gifts?

CHAPTER X--"SPRINGTIME"

1. Do you think that Snowbell has a duty towards the Little family? (Be sure the students understand that a duty is something you are expected to do.) Do pets have duties towards their masters? Would Snowbell have a duty to Margalo? Does Margalo have a duty to the Little family?
   Encourage the students to define the duty (if any) of each.

   Discussion Plan--On Duty
   a. How do you know when you have a duty towards someone or something?
   b. Do you choose what to have duties towards?
   c. Do all adults have duties? The same duties?
   d. Do children have duties? Do all children have the same duties?

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 283-284)

2. The Angora attempts to reason with Snowbell about the idea that it would be wrong for Snowbell to eat Margalo, but there would be nothing to stop the Angora from eating her. (p. 69) What counts as a good reason for an action?

   Activity--Reasoning
   You and your partner will be given four cards with statements.
   Decide if each statement suggests good reasoning or poor reasoning. Be able to justify your answer. (When groups haves finished, take turns reading their statements and explaining their opinions.)
   a. "All students in Mr. Cheshire's class are taller and heavier this spring than they were last fall. I wonder what he's teaching that makes them grow like that?"
   b. Three is odd and four is even. Since three and four together makes seven, it follows that seven is both even and odd.
   c. Marva said, "The proof that water is more dangerous than food is that more accidents occur while people are bathing than while they're eating."
   d. Mr. Wilson has more money that Mr. Thompson. Therefore, Mr. Wilson must be richer than Mr. Thompson.

   (Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 98)

3. Why do you think Margalo chose to leave and not say good-bye to Stuart?

CHAPTER XI--"THE AUTOMOBILE"

1. Snowbell doesn't understand why everyone questioned him so closely about the bird's disappearance. Do you think he was treated unfairly? Why or why not?

   This situation offers an opportunity to discuss the difference between truth by definition and truth by evidence.
   By definition: examples--All one-cent coins are pennies.
   No squares are circles.
   Some dogs are poodles.
   All governors are the chief executives of their state.
   By evidence: example-- Fires are often destructive.
   Kittens usually like milk.

Winters in Alaska are generally cold.
All dinosaurs are extinct.

Activity--Ask students to classify the following according to -being either true or false, and then to give a reason. (by definition or evidence)

a. Sunny summertime days in Texas are usually hot.
b. All animals need food and water to live.
c. No adults are children.
d. Every tree loses its leaves in winter.
e. Dogs usually bark.

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 18)

2. If you were Stuart, would you have left home without telling anyone as you went looking for Margalo? Why do you think Stuart did this?

3. The doctor had a miniature car that could become invisible. If you had the power to make only one of the things you own to become invisible, what would your choice be? Why? Can you imagine anything good that you would be able to do? Anything bad that might happen?

CHAPTER XII--"THE SCHOOLROOM"

1. When asked by the superintendent if he thought he could maintain discipline as a substitute teacher, Stuart replied, "I'll make the work interesting and the discipline will take care of itself." What is it about a thing that makes it "interesting"?

Discussion Plan--What is interesting?

a. Choose two things that interest you right now. Are they the same things that interested you most a year ago?
b. Do your interests stay the same all through the day, or do they change?
c. Are you more interested in food before dinner of after dinner?
d. Do animals have interests?
e. What is it about some people that makes them interesting?
f. Are some subjects in school more interesting than others?

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 101)

2. What does it mean to be "important"?

Discussion Plan--Ask students to think of the most important thing that has happened to them during the last week. What about during the last month? They should share their responses, briefly explaining why that event was of such special value to them. During the discussion, students will have a chance to see that what is important to one person is not necessarily important to another.

3. Stuart would like to be "Chairman of the World". Do you think that he would make a good "Chairman"? What does he think makes a good "Chairman"? What would you expect him to do?

CHAPTER XIII--"AMES' CROSSING"

1. Imagine that you are one of Harriet's parents and she showed you the letter she received from Stuart. What would be your reaction? Why?

Exercise--Imagining

Have children sit around in a circle. (If you have a large class, you may find it useful to divide up into groups of 8.) One person in the circle will say to the person on his/her left: My name is _____, and I like imagining that _____. They can imagine things that are serious or ridiculous. The next person in the circle must repeat what the first person said, plus add his or her own statement. Each person must repeat what the person before them said. (If you can't repeat it, you're allowed to pass.) When it is the starter's turn again, a new mental activity should be initiated such as thinking, believing, remembering, doubting, hoping, etc.

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 57)

2. Why does Stuart write in his letter that his canoe "is like an old and trusted friend" when he doesn't even own one?

3. When Stuart was buying the canoe, he asked the storekeeper if it leaked. What was his response? Why do you think he responded as he did?

Discussion Plan--Vagueness

There are times when vague words are appropriate and useful, such as describing the day as being hot rather than specifying whether or not it is beyond a specific temperature. The opposite of "vague" is "precise." Sometimes, it is easy to precise; sometimes it is very difficult. There are even times when we may have to use a vague expression because it is the only one appropriate.

Activity--Are the following questions and statements too vague? Are any of them all right? Are any of them too precise?

a. A heap of sand contains a lot of pebbles.
b. Is Mrs. Smith bald?
c. Is it cold today?
d. To find a sum, you add the addends.
e. Do you feel ill?
f. Do you feel well?
g. He is a very special person.
h. One can only go into a forest half way.

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 89)

CHAPTER XIV--"AN EVENING ON THE RIVER"

1. In Stuart's imagination he created the "perfect" evening with Harriet. Do you think that it was possible for Stuart to really experience the same evening that he imagined? Can we ever imagine something and then it happen?

Discussion Plan--Imagination

a. What make-believe worlds can you imagine?
b. Can you imagine a world in which people are weightless? How would it feel?
c. Can you imagine a world where all people have two heads? How do they speak? Eat?

(Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, p. 67)

Exercise--In your imagination, create a perfect day. Where are you? Are you with other people? Are there animals? Are you alone? What kinds of things are you doing? Think of these and other questions to plan the perfect day; then draw or

write about that perfect day. (When their pictures or stories are finished, ask the students if they think that it is possible for them to really experience the day that they imagined.)

CHAPTER XV--"HEADING NORTH"

1. What do you know about the telephone repairman from reading this chapter? How are Stuart and the repairman alike? How are they different?

2. At the end of the chapter, we are told that Stuart "somehow felt that he was headed in the right direction." What do you think Stuart meant by that?

3. Talk about things that might happen during Stuart's future travels. Then ask students to work in groups to write and illustrate a future "chapter" in Stuart's journey.

Linda Huffines