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***The Cleo Stories: The Necklace and the Present* by Libby Gleeson, illustrated by Freya Blackwood**

The Cleo Stories contains two individual tales about a creative and independent young girl named Cleo. Both these stories are simple, sweet and reflect the thinking and behaviour of an inventive young girl. Much time could be spent examining Freya Blackwood's illustrations as they really bring the story to life. The look on Cleo's face when she has both her hands glued inside the bowl will really make you giggle.

In the first story, *The Necklace*, Cleo attends a friend's 6th birthday party. While there, she is talking to some friends about special gifts they received for Christmas. Three of the girls had been given necklaces and Cleo decides that she must have a necklace too. After her mum and dad suggest the necklace as a gift for her next birthday, Cleo takes matters into her own hands and solves her problem in a very colourful way!

The Present is about the lead-up to Cleo's mother's birthday. Cleo has decided that she would like to get something special that she knows that her mum would love. Despite being told that she herself is the best gift her mother could ask for, Cleo uses her creativity to surprise her mum with a very personal present.

Both these stories are well-suited to reading aloud with young children. As they are about gift giving and receiving, they provide a good opportunity to talk about how and why we give gifts. Coming up to Christmas, it may be nice to look at ways that children can give gifts that are all about the 'thought' and not 'cost'.

In addition to the lovely stories and stunning illustrations, part of the joy of this book is its beautiful presentation. A copy of *The Cleo Stories* would make a beautiful gift... if you could bear to part with it!

Gaby Gutjahr, Teacher Librarian, Thirlmere Public School, Thirlmere NSW 2572

This book is warm and inviting. The illustrations are delightful and capture the mood and emotion of the characters. This assisted the young learners identify with the emotion of the story, particularly visual learners.

As a teacher in the junior school, I found this book to be warmly accepted by my students (and my daughters, aged 6 and 8). In the classroom, we read through the text and this led to a philosophical discussion. We were able to stop during significant parts of the story to reflect and discuss feelings. How did Cleo feel when all the kids at the party were only focused on Isabella's card and not her homemade one? Was hers of less value? Did Cleo feel embarrassed about her Christmas t-shirt (which was of great personal value to her). Why did Cleo feel the need to have her own necklace? What was the relationship between her and Nick? Did he accept her as she was? How do we know?

The issues relating to the text: friendship, peer approval, fitting in/acceptance, celebrating differences, problem solving, honesty as well as what is more important? Monetary value/Possessions of personal value and relationships/needs versus wants.

Activities:

Art based - sketches based on the story/drawing emotion... what do feelings look like?

Expression

Philosophical discussion

English - Writing: write and draw what will happen next? Will the texta wash off in the bath? Will her parents get her a necklace? Will Cleo change her mind about the necklace?

Character profile - list characters... Cleo, Nick, Mum, Dad, Isabella, Sophie, Mia...

The 6-9 age group I believe would be most suitable, as the students can relate to the similar age/stage of Cleo. We look forward to more reading more *Cleo* stories.

Alyssa Chalhoub, North Fitzroy Primary School, North Fitzroy VIC 3068

The book *The Cleo Stories* contains two stories about a little girl called Cleo who has a wonderful imagination and a big heart. In the classroom, *The Cleo Stories* would be perfect to read to any students from Foundation to Grade 4, but could easily be expanded to higher grades. Although the book is about a little girl, I believe that the problems that Cleo encounters are typical of any school aged child, male or female and can create great class discussions.

In the first story *The Necklace*, Cleo really wants a necklace, but doesn't want to wait until her birthday as her parents suggest. With a little bit of imagination, Cleo solves the problem herself. In the classroom, I would use the story to start social activities such as the 'yes/no' game, posing questions such as 'I like', 'I own' or 'I like to'. The activity could be used to initiate discussions about how everyone likes, owns or participates in different things, just like Cleo and her friends at the party, and that this is okay. The story could also create great class discussions on patience. Beyond the social side of the book, the story would be a good part of a persuasive writing unit. Students could write a letter to Cleo's parents, as Cleo, outlining arguments as to why they should buy her a necklace.

The second story *The Present* follows Cleo trying to think of the perfect gift to give to her mother for her birthday. The story could be used as a prediction exercise where students predict what will happen before reading the story, and just before Cleo's mum opens the present. The story also presents the opportunity to talk about adjectives and synonyms using the same format as when Cleo describes her head as being 'as empty as my shoes are when I take my feet out'.

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