

A Crack in the Sky

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Synopsis

Conor has a great life with his mother - even if she can't afford to buy him all the things that his friends have. He knows that she loves him and tries her best to provide for him. When a spring pops through the couch, Conor's mum knows that it is time to buy a new one. But a trip to the shop proves futile; she can't afford a new couch and becomes despondent. Then something unexpected happens. Conor finds a couch floating in the water down at the estuary. Surprisingly, when the couch comes ashore it is not wet at all and seems in perfect condition. Conor convinces his mother that the couch would be perfect for them and with help from some neighbours they drag the couch home.

At first everything seems fine but then Conor gets sick and his mother is forced to take time off work, something that she can ill afford to do. When she comes home from the public phone and finds Conor jumping up and down on the couch she explodes. Has she lost her job for nothing? Conor feels terrible and falls asleep on the couch. When he wakes up he discovers something incredible - he is no longer at home. In fact, he has no idea where he is.

Conor's whole life is turned upside down but at least he isn't alone. There are others living in the strange place: a guy named Burler, a couple called Mr and Mrs Duncan and a sick young girl named Willow. Conor even finds his estranged father who has been missing for years. Eventually, Conor makes a startling realisation. He has been shrunk and sucked inside the red couch. Is it possible that his father didn't actually walk out on his mother, but rather got sucked into the couch too? It seems that the couch senses sadness and snatches those who feel it, away from their sad lives.

Life is different in the strange land. Instead of eating normal food the group eat crystals. But most disturbing of all is the fact that Conor has trouble remembering his old life, and so do the others. He must get home before he forgets his mother and his old friends. But how can he do this? And can he escape before the violent winds spell the end of him?

Text Type

A crack in the sky is a delightful fantasy adventure about a young boy named Conor who is sucked into a bizarre world inside his strange red couch. Faced with

the possibility of being stuck in the couch for years and never seeing his mother again, Conor must use all of his skills and abilities to figure out a way to escape. In the process, Conor also manages to rescue the others who have been stuck in the couch for much longer than he has. By escaping the couch he is able to free his father who has been missing for years and orchestrate a reunion between his mother and father.

Fast-paced and with broad appeal, this story is original and funny and will keep even the most reluctant readers engaged. Wonderful sketches help to bring the story to life.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5- 16), Chapters 2- 9 (pp. 17- 94) and Chapters 10- 14 (pp. 95- 166).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them make the leap of imagination necessary to really envisage what it would be like waking up in a strange world and then discovering that you are actually in a couch! Encourage students to discuss the character of Conor and look at his actions and motivations. Wherever possible have students relate Conor's life to their own experiences and broader understanding.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who is the main character in the story? Why is he having a bad day?
- What does he discover floating in the tide?
- What do you think is strange about the red sofa?
- Why do you think the story is called A crack in the sky?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 5- 16) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5- 16)

- Why does Conor have a bad morning?
- What does Conor's mum do for a job?

- Why is the sofa in the kitchen? What happens when Conor's mum drags herself off the sofa? How does Conor's mum react? Why do you think she reacts like this?
- Why do some of the kids at Conor's school tease him about how his mother dresses?
- What does Conor consider the best part about going to school? Why do the other kids call him Magpie?
- What does Conor want desperately? Why doesn't he ask his mother for it?
- What does Conor see when he looks out at the estuary? What strikes him as strange?

Discussion

- What do we learn about Conor and his mother in this chapter? How does Conor's mum feel about not being able to buy Conor new things?
- We know that what Conor sees in the water is a red couch. What do you think it is doing there? How can it be coming into shore when the tide is coming out?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2- 9 (pp. 17- 94) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2- 9 (pp. 17- 94)

- Who bullies Conor when he arrives at school?
- What happened to Conor's dad?
- Who is Conor's best friend?
- Why is Conor so excited when he learns that Kaz's dad is clearing out his shed?
- Why do Conor and Kaz arrange to meet after school?
- Why is Conor relieved when the bell finally rings?
- How does Conor know that something is wrong as soon as he gets home? Why is his mother so upset? Who is Mr Mullins?
- Why isn't Conor happy that Kaz has a new skateboard? Why does Conor want to fight his friend?
- How do we know that this is no ordinary sofa?
- How do Conor and his mother get the sofa home? What is unusual about this process?
- What does Conor have a nightmare about? What wakes him up?

- Why is Conor's mum worried when Conor wakes up looking sick in the morning? Why does she have to leave him alone for a minute? Why does Conor decide to jump on the sofa? How does his mum react when she comes home and sees him? Why does she react this way?
- What does Conor wish for before he falls asleep?
- Why is Conor so confused when he wakes up? What do you think is wrong with Conor's memory? What happens to him when he tries hard to remember things?
- Describe the place that Conor finds himself in. Why do you think that he believes that this has always been his home?
- What is the man's name? How do you think Conor knows this without being told?
- How does Conor feel when he comes to the conclusion that his memories are really only dreams?
- How does Conor feel in this strange place?
- What does Burler pick up off the ground on the way home? What does he do with them?
- Describe "home". How does Conor know that he belongs there? Who is there to greet him?
- What does Conor have for dinner? What happens when he bites into it?
- What trick does Burler play on Conor?
- What does Conor find when he runs off into the valley?
- How does Conor know that he is being watched?
- What strange feeling does Conor have deep inside?
- Why do you think everyone wakes up sneezing? What is strange about the morning?
- What does Conor invite Willow to do with him? Why doesn't Willow go?
- What does Conor find while he is exploring the valley? How does Willow react when she sees what Conor has found?
- Describe the wind that rips through the camp. What does Conor see when the sky pops open? How does he rescue Willow? Why do you think no one mentions the wind after it happens?
- What does Conor hear that compels him to try and climb up to the sky?
- What does Conor find in the valley after the wind? What does he decide to build with them? Why doesn't Conor tell the others about his plan?
- What realisation does Conor come to about the others at camp?
- Describe the creature that Conor sees in the valley. Who rescues him from it?
- What does Burler say that the "dragon" really is?
- What is Willow's theory about the man who is following Conor?

- What does Willow remember about her old life? What happened to her parents?

Discussion

- Have you ever been the victim of a bully? What do you think the best way to deal with a bully is?
- How would you feel if you woke up in a completely strange place and you had no idea how you got there? What is your theory about what is happening to Conor?
- How do you think Conor's mum feels when she discovers that her son is missing?
- Who is the strange man following Conor, do you think?
- Do you agree with Conor that it is important to experience good and bad things? Why/why not?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 10- 16 (pp. 95- 166) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 10- 16 (pp. 95- 166)

- What does Conor find hanging out of the sky? Why does he think that the valley might keep changing size?
- What does Conor find that would make a perfect sail?
- What does Burler begin to remember about his old life? What do we learn about the Duncans from their memories?
- Why is Conor surprised when Willow asks if she can go exploring with him? Why isn't Willow angry with him any more?
- What strange event occurs when Willow and Conor are in the valley? Why can't they escape through the crack in the sky?
- Why does Conor follow the unusual creature? Why does he jump on its back? How does he know how to ride it?
- What does Conor begin to use the creatures for?
- Why is Conor so worried when he realises that Willow has gone off by herself? Where does he find her? What has she found?
- What is written on the tag?
- How do the others react when Willow and Conor show them what they have found? Why do you think they react like this?
- What is the last thing that Willow and Conor remember about their old lives? What do the others remember about a big red sofa?

- Why do you think everyone gets tired and goes to bed after the sofa discussion? How does this make Conor feel?
- What does Conor discover inside the cave? Why is he so angry with the "giant"? Who does the man turn out to be?
- What does Conor learn about the sofa from his father?
- Why doesn't Conor's father want to get out of the couch? Why doesn't he blame Conor's mother for kicking him out? How does he react when Conor tells him that his mother still has a picture of him by her bed?
- How do the others react when they realise that they are all trapped in the sofa?
- Why is Conor convinced that the only way out of the sofa is through the crack in the sky?
- What does Conor do when the winds come again? Why aren't they able to escape? Why is everyone surprised when the wind starts up again? Why does Conor decide that they have to tie themselves together? What does Conor grab hold of that helps them? How does Conor feel when he looks down and sees his father below?
- Where is the wind coming from?
- What happens when Conor's mother switches off the vacuum cleaner? What convinces her to turn it back on? Describe what happens when Conor gets pulled out of the couch.
- What surprise does Burler have for Conor?
- How long has Conner's dad been gone? Why isn't Conor's mum mad at him?
- Why is Conor a bit disappointed when he gets back home? How long was he gone? Why is Conor so surprised by this? How long have the others been gone?
- What realisation does Burler come to about the crystals that they have been eating?
- How does Conor's mum help his friends get ready for their new lives?
- Why is Conor so determined to check the vacuum cleaner bag? Why is he disappointed by what he finds in there?
- Why are Conor's parents so happy?
- Why is Eddie a bit suspicious about Conor's visitors? What news does Eddie give Conor about his dad and Burler?
- Why do you think that Kaz isn't angry with Conor? Who does Willow introduce herself as?
- Why is everyone so amazed when they see Conor on the skateboard? Why do you think he now has the confidence to do this?

Discussion

- Identify the climax of the story and explain why this event is important.
- What do you think Conor has learnt from his unusual experience?
- What do you think Willow, Burler and the Duncans will find the most difficult about adjusting to their new lives?
- How do you think Conor's life will be different from now on?
- What is an important theme developed in this story?

Activities

Static Image - Design a web page to advertise the novel. Remember you are trying to encourage people to read the book so your web page needs to make the book seem appealing. You might want to include a brief plot summary, information about the characters and themes and links to other sites. Try and combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Character - Write several paragraphs explaining what Conor is like as a character and how his character is developed throughout the story.

Important items - Imagine that you are Conor and have time to grab 10 items before you disappear into the sofa. What would you grab, and why?

Board game - Design a board game based on the story. For every positive event that occurs reward the player, for every negative event, penalise them. Illustrate your board game with scenes or important settings from the story.

Script - Choose an important event from the story and write a script for it. Remember to include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Writing - Write an epilogue for the story that explains what everyone is doing one year later.

Review - Write a book review for *A crack in the sky*. Include information about the plot (but don't give too much away!). Discuss the characters, setting and themes. Remember to include your personal opinion about the book and why you would recommend it to others.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd