

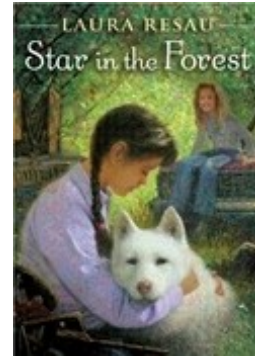


Teaching Resources

Star in the Forest

by Laura Resau

Ideal for Grades 3-6



In this 15-page teachers' guide, you will find:

- Vocabulary
- Preparing to Read
- Comprehension and Reflection Questions (by chapter)
- General Discussion Questions
 - visualizing the setting
 - using inference
 - defining and analyzing characters
 - forming opinions
 - forming connections with your own experience and knowledge
 - identifying elements of fiction
- Activities
 - using a graphic organizer
 - art
 - writing
- Extension/Research (including useful websites and immigration-themed activities)

★ Vocabulary ★

amphibians
Antartica
antibiotic
antiseptic
assassinate
chronic halitosis
coincidence
coyote
cuticle
deported
dictator
drywaller
excommunicated
expedition
flan
fractions
framer
geyser
GPS
hygiene
illegal
immigrant
license
Madagascar
parenthesis
registration
static electricity
trespasser
veterinary clinic

★ Preparing to read ★

Look carefully at the cover of the book and the drawings at the beginning of each chapter. Write two or three sentences predicting the characters and the plot of the book. Write down a question you would like answered as you read the book.

★ Comprehension and Reflection Questions ★

Part I Star

Chapter 1

1. What does Zitlally's name mean? What do you know about her family?
2. Describe where Zitlally lives. Describe her "forest".
3. When she sees her father in jail, Zitlally says, "...my tears stayed hidden under a stone inside a cave inside me." Why do you think she didn't cry when she said goodbye to her father? Have there ever been times when you felt like crying but didn't? Why was that?
4. What changes take place in Zitlally's behavior after her father is deported? Why do you think this is? Have you ever felt so upset that you can't behave the way you usually would?
5. Zitlally tries to fit in with a group of popular girls. Why is this hard for her? Do you understand her wanting to fit in and be the same? Why do you think it was "hard work"?
6. Why do you think someone tied Star up in the forest and then didn't feed him? Who do you think Star belongs to?

Chapter 2

1. What changes take place in Zitlally's home after her father is deported?

2. Why was Zitlally cautious when approaching Star? Would you have behaved the same way if you met a strange dog?
3. Why hadn't Zitlally's birthday cake been eaten? Why do you think Zitlally shares her birthday cake with Star? In this scene, what makes her smile? What does this tell you about her relationship with Star? Predict how Star might become important to Zitlally.

Chapter 3

1. Crystal lives in the trailer next to Zitlally's, but they aren't friends. Why not? When Zitlally is teased in school, what does Crystal do? How does the author let you know that Zitlally may see Crystal in a different way now? Do you think they'll become friends?
2. Why did the police stop Papá? Why is Mamá so angry at him?
3. What is Zitlally's reaction when she's told that her father and mother are going to *El Norte*? What would be your reaction if your parents said they had to leave in order to make enough money to give you a good life?
4. Why doesn't Zitlally tell her friends about her father? What do you think their reaction would be if she did?
5. Zitlally is feeling more trusting of Star in this chapter. Describe how she gets close to Star step by step. What is her reaction when she finally lets Star lick her? When she finally hugs Star? Would you have the same reactions? What does this tell you about what Star means to Zitlally?

Part 2 Crystal

Chapter 4

1. When Crystal follows Zitlally to the forest, how does she react to Star? How would you describe Crystal's personality in this scene?
2. Why does Zitlally say that, compared to Crystal's trailer, Antartica looks pretty peaceful? What do you think life is like in Crystal's home? How do you think she deals with that?

3. Crystal says that she and Zitlally are best friends. Why does she say that? Does Zitlally agree? Predict what relationship Zitlally and Crystal will have.
4. Why does Zitlally insist that Star stay on his chain? How does this reflect her feelings about losing someone?
5. Where do you think Crystal has gone? How does the author let you know that Zitlally misses her?

Chapter 5

1. What is Crystal's explanation for where she has been? Do you think Zitlally believes her?
2. Why did Crystal hide mushrooms for Zitlally? How do you think it makes Zitlally feel?
3. How does Zitlally feel when she discovers the truth about Crystal's father? What does her reaction tell you about Zitlally? How do you think this knowledge will affect her relationship with Crystal?

Chapter 6

1. What does Crystal say when Zitlally tells her about people having "special animals"? What does Zitlally think about this idea?
2. Describe Zitlally's feelings and observations when her mother is stopped by a traffic police officer. Does this scene help you to understand how being an immigrant is often difficult?

Chapter 7

1. Crystal tells one of her whoppers about her father being a sled dog trainer. What do you think actually happened to her dog Poopsie? Why does Zitlally say she decided to let herself believe Crystal's lie?
2. Why are Crystal and Zitlally teaching tricks to Star?

Part 3 Papá

Chapter 8

1. Make a prediction about what you think happened to Star? Do you think the girls will find him? Have you ever lost a pet? How difficult was that?
2. What happened to Papá as he tried to cross the desert? Could this really happen? Why or why not? Why didn't Mamá call the police?
3. Why do you think that Zitlally didn't tell Crystal about her father's kidnapping? Does this fit with Zitlally's personality? How does Crystal show that she's a good friend?

Chapter 9

1. What plan does Crystal have for finding Star? Is this a good plan? What does it tell you about Crystal and the kind of person she is?
2. The girls didn't find any clues about Star until Trailer # 142. How many trailers had they already visited? What words would you use to describe Zitlally and Crystal's behavior?
3. Describe Mr. Ed's house and yard. What kind of person do you think lives there?
4. What did they find in the shed? What was the problem? What do you think will happen next?
5. How did Mamá manage to raise the ransom?

Chapter 10

1. Describe Mr. Ed. What words does the author use to make you "see" Mr. Ed? Would you have been afraid when Mr. Ed opened the door of the shed? How did your opinion about him change during this scene?

2. How does the author describe Jenny? Why does Zitlally say, "Now, she's someone I would NOT want to be best friends with"?

Chapter 11

1. What makes Zitlally overcome her shyness to request help from the vet?
2. Why do you think the people at the vet clinic were so kind?
3. What happened to Papá after the ransom was paid? How does his story fit into Zitlally's belief that Star is his special animal?

Chapter 12

1. Why do Zitlally and Crystal take Star back to the "forest"?
2. What makes Papá laugh? Have you ever seen an animal do something that made you laugh?
3. What special treat is waiting for Zitlally back in her home? Name the reasons this is so special for her.

★ General Discussion questions ★



Visualizing the setting

1. Describe the "forest" in Zitlally's trailer park.
2. Compare Zitlally's home in Mexico to her home in the U.S.



Using inference

1. What does Zitlally's name mean in Nahuatl? Why does she name the dog Star? Find three other examples where the author talks about stars. What does this tell you about Zitlally's connection with nature? Why do you think this is?
2. At the beginning of Chapter 9, Zitlally and Crystal "eat sunshine": What does this tell you about the life that Crystal has had and about how she dealt with the hard parts of her life?
3. Why do you think Crystal chooses to tell Papá the truth about her own father? What do you think of Papá's response? Do you think he's right?



Defining and analyzing characters

1. What are some words that you feel describe Zitlally?
2. Zitlally tells, in a flashback, a story about her father taking her to the outhouse. Why is she afraid? What does this flashback tell about the kind of person her father is and about what he means to Zitlally? Is there anyone in your life that you feel this way about?
3. What are some words that you feel describe Crystal? How do Crystal's classmates describe her? Have you ever met someone like Crystal? Why do you think she lies or makes up fantastic stories?
4. Zitlally didn't want her friends to think that her father was "an illegal criminal speeder construction worker immigrant" because, she says, "that's

not who he is." How would Zitlally describe her father? Think of five words or phrases Zitlally would use to describe her Papá.

5. Compare and contrast Zitlally and Crystal. How is Crystal different from Zitlally? How are they alike?
6. Zitlally's sister, Dalia, is a teenager who is sometimes not very nice, but she shows a different side of herself when Zitlally really needs her. Describe some ways that Dalia is kind to Zitlally. Why do you think she can act in two different ways?
7. Were you surprised at who Mr. Ed was? How would you describe Mr. Ed? How did your opinion of him change?
8. Why does Zitlally offer to give Star to Crystal? What does this tell you about Zitlally? Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?
9. Choose a spirit animal that would fit Crystal or Zitlally. Give your reasons for choosing that animal.



Forming opinions

1. Zitlally thinks it might be nice to join her Papá in Mexico. What does Mamá tell Zitlally about the life she would have if she returned to Mexico? Why do you think Zitlally decides to "do better in school"? Compare Zitlally's life in Colorado with what her life would be in Mexico, in the present and in her future.
2. Zitlally believes that Star is her father's special animal. Why? How does this belief comfort or help her? When does it also make her worry?



Forming connections to your own experience and knowledge

1. Has there ever been a time when you have been separated from your parents? How does that help you to understand Zitlally's feelings?
2. Zitlally wishes for a "magic stick" when she sees her father at the jail. What kind of feelings do you think she had at that moment? What are some "magic sticks" that you may have used to help you when you were afraid or upset?

3. Zitlally describes the last day her family spent in Mexico. How does this story show how Zitlally's view of her father changes when they lived in America? Do you think this is the experience of many children whose parents immigrate to a new country?
4. Do you speak more than one language? Do you know anyone who does? What language do you or your friend prefer to speak and why?



Identifying elements of fiction

1. This story begins in early April and ends in late May. What flowers are growing at different times along the path to the car-part forest? What is the significance of each flower?
2. Zitlally's birthday cake is a motif in this story. Describe the cake. Why was this cake important to her?
3. Zitlally is studying fractions in school and she refers to fractions often as she tells her story. Look up the word "fracture". How does this word describe Zitlally's family, Crystal's family? Tell about one scene in which Zitlally thinks about a problem in terms of fractions.
4. This book is written in "first person", from Zitlally's point of view and with her voice. Find some examples where the author uses words or sentences that help you to hear the voice of a fifth grader rather than the adult voice of the author. Do you think the author's choice of using "first person" added to your enjoyment of the story? Why or why not? Do you think this story could have been told from Crystal's point of view, with Crystal's voice? How would it have been a different story?

★ Activities ★

Use a *graphic organizer* to:

1. Compare and contrast two characters.
2. Choose a character, then use a Venn diagram to show the ways you are like and unlike that character.
3. Zitlally talks several times about events in the past. These are called "flashbacks". Make a time line of the events in the book. Remember that "flashbacks" occur at an earlier time than the current events.

Art

1. Construct a diorama of one of the main events. Write two or three sentences describing the characters, setting and action in the scene.
2. Make a bookmark for the book. On the front draw put the title, author, and a drawing that illustrates something from the book. On the back, write three sentences that would make another student want to read the book.
3. Draw a comic strip of your favorite scene.
4. Make a sketch of a scene. Write two or three sentences describing the setting, characters and action of the scene.

Writing

1. Write a paragraph that describes the celebration at the end of the book. Choose a birthday gift for Zitlally. Tell why she would like the gift.
2. Write a letter from either Zitlally or Crystal to her father.
3. Choose a scene that made you feel some strong emotion (fear, sadness, happiness, etc.). Write about the emotions you had when you read that particular scene and why.

4. Choose a character then write three entries in that character's diary. You may choose dates that would be before, during, or after the book's events.
5. Write a "friendly letter" to a favorite character.
6. Pretend that you can spend a day with one of the characters. What would you do together? Why?
7. Write a letter to the author of the book, telling her what parts you did or did not like. Should the author write another book with these characters?
8. Write your idea for a sequel to this book.



Extension/Research

1. Zitlally's father speaks Nahuatl, the same language that the Aztecs spoke hundreds of years ago. Find out more about ancient Aztec civilization and share your research with your classmates.

Useful Websites on Nahuatl Culture and Language:



Nahuatl alphabet and pronunciation guide
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/nahuatl.htm>



Photos of vocabulary words: animals, body parts, colors; with pronunciation guide
http://www.native-languages.org/nahuatl_words.htm



List of Nahuatl words with English and Spanish translation
<http://www.mexica.net/nahuatl/nahuawds.html>



United Kingdom site about Aztecs. Has student appropriate material, including sounds of Aztec (nahuatl)_ instruments
<http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/index.php?one=azt&two=tec>

2. There are many indigenous cultures in Latin America that have roots in ancient civilizations. Divide the class into small groups. Each group researches one of these groups, and talks about their culture, past and present. Here are some suggestions:

- Modern Quichua/Quechua and ancient Incans in South America.
 - Modern Mayans and ancient Mayans in Central America (Belize, southern Mexico, Guatemala).
 - Modern Nahuatl and ancient Aztec.
 - Modern Mixtec and ancient Mixtec or Olmec (Mexico)
 - Modern Zapotec and ancient Zapotec (Mexico)
3. Zitlally's father passes on their cultural heritage through stories and his native languages. Research your cultural heritage. Where did your ancestors come from? Interview your parents or grandparents about their cultural traditions. You can also use books or the Internet to learn more about the foods, holidays, and other cultural traditions of your family and ancestors.
 4. Many cultures have folktales about shapeshifters or spirit animals. Find one of these folktales and share it with the class through writing a play and acting it out or making your own picture book of the folktale. Then, invent your own story about spirit animals.
 5. In your community: Take a tour of your local animal shelter. Try to find out reasons why the animals were brought here. Did you feel a connection to any one animal? Write a story about him or her.

Immigration-themed Activities:

6. Research the history of Mexican immigration to the U.S.A. and make a timeline showing important events.
7. Investigate the issue of undocumented immigration.

Teachers' Note: U.S. immigration policy is a complex subject, historically and currently. That complexity makes it difficult to present to elementary students for analysis and discussion. Finding balanced information online about the current immigration debate can also be difficult. Students who do pursue online research should be warned that many "facts" are opinions or may be biased in their presentation. There are also many unpleasant public comments online that might offend or upset some students.

Useful Websites for Teaching Immigration Issues

★ Creative immigration-themed activities from "PBS Teachers", including historical timeline of Mexican immigration:

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/immigration/index1.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/index.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/interactive-timeline.html>

★ Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.: statistics, charts, and graphs. Also links to other Pew Hispanic reports that may be of interest:

<http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/47.pdf>

★ An unbiased overview of the illegal immigration debate, which looks at pros and cons for possible solutions. Geared toward educators:

<http://immigration.procon.org/viewtopic.asp>

★ Teachers' resources on immigration, from the Library of Congress:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/immigration/>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/mexican2.html>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/alt/introduction.html>

★ Information about The Dream Act— proposed legislation to provide undocumented youth with a path to legalization:

<http://dreamact.info/>

★ Interesting and touching first-hand stories from undocumented youth about their experiences. Students are welcome to post their own personal experiences anonymously on this forum as well:

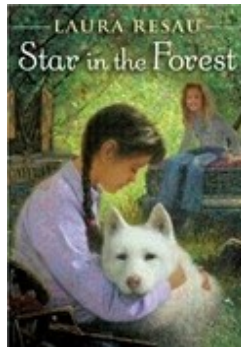
<http://dreamact.info/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=25>

★ A chat forum in which teachers share ideas for immigration-themed activities:

http://www.proteacher.org/c/275_Immigration_Unit_Activities.html

★ The final article in a 2009 New York Times series on immigration, which deals with the problem of children of undocumented aliens. The "Room for Debate" includes writers who present pros and cons about a proposed law regarding these children. There is also a link to a short video about a young person who illegally immigrated as a child and the problems that have resulted:

<http://projects.nytimes.com/immigration/>



This teachers' guide was prepared by Christine Resau, a speech and language pathologist specializing in language-based reading problems. She worked for over thirty years in pre-K through young adult education, and spent several years providing workshops and consultations as the Title I and III supervisor at her school. (And for over thirty years, she's been Laura's mom!)

For information about Laura and her inspiration for *Star in the Forest*, please visit her at <http://www.LauraResau.com> . Happy reading!

