

The First Part Last

Angela Johnson

Teaching Ideas
NP, draft, 6/14/05

Summary: [revised from dust jacket] Bobby is a classic urban teenaged boy— impulsive, eager, restless. On his 16th birthday, he learns that his girlfriend Nia is pregnant. Their lives change dramatically, both during the pregnancy and after baby Feather is born. This touching, engaging, and award-winning book explores the male side of teenaged pregnancy.

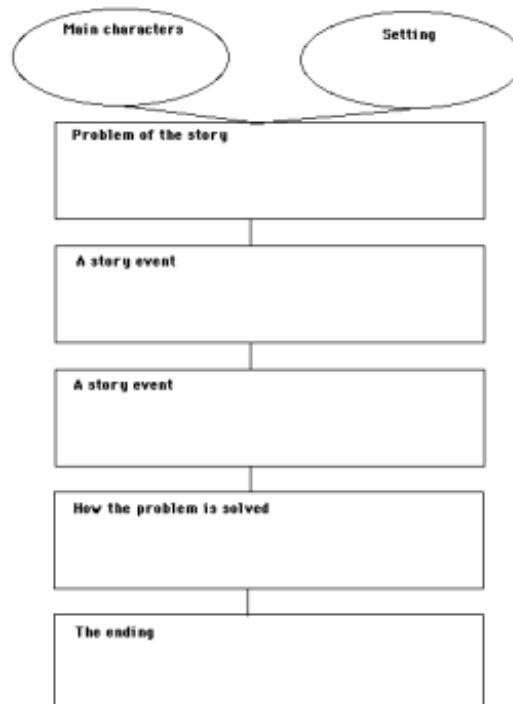
Introduction: This easy-to-read book is sparse and powerful. Students at and above level 3 will be able to read it independently. At lower levels, you may want to read the book aloud to students, either in part or in total.

The book also lends itself well to response writing. You may want to encourage free writing about the book. Students could volunteer to read what they have written.

Teaching Ideas

Before beginning the book, ask students to speculate about the title. Then read from the beginning to the end of page 4 and ask students to think again about the title. They might want to make notes in their journals about their ideas.

Read the text aloud [students may read along silently if they wish] from the beginning to page 21. Then ask pairs of students to make notes on a story map that includes spots for characters, setting [time and place], and significant plot events. **Story Map**



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Ask students to read back through the first 21 pages of the text looking for words and phrases that “capture” Bobby. Ask them to record these in their journals along with the pages on which the words/ phrases were located and a brief explanation of why these particular words/ phrases were selected. Ask students to share these with one another, either in groups of 3-4 or as a whole group. To conclude, ask students to decide on the single best word/ phrase to “capture” Bobby, again providing reasons for their choice. Share these in a whole group discussion. You may also want students to write about their individual decisions in their journals.

Ask students to reconsider the “then” and “now” organization that the author has used to tell the story. To do this, they might reconsider the first two sets of “then” and “now.” You can ask students what they notice about the pairs of text selections and to share their observations with one another.

Ask students to read to the end of Part I (p. 29). Then have pairs of students work together to decide a) if they agree or disagree with the following, and b) why they made these decisions. After pairs have made decisions, invite whole group sharing and follow-up discussion:

Bobby is a good parent.

Bobby’s mother Mary is a good parent.

Ask students to read through p. 49. Then ask them to add to the story map begun in response to the first part of the book. Remind students that they can revise the information they initially recorded, if they wish.

Ask students to skim pages 21-49 looking for more words/ phrases that capture Bobby’s character or personality. As above, ask students to share these with one another. Conclude the activity by asking students again to select the single most important or revealing word/ phrase.

Read pages 50-60 using DR-TA http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/dr_ta.pdf. Stops: extra space on p. 51, end of p. 53, space at the top of p. 56, end of p. 56, bottom of p. 58, and bottom of p. 59.

Ask students to continue collecting words/ phrases to describe Bobby (see above for procedure).

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Tell students that they are now about ½ way through the book. Do a Think-Pair-Share http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategis/think_pair_share.pdf with the following: What will happen to Bobby and Feather?

Read pages 64-74 aloud. Then ask students to reread the two episodes and compare them. A matrix may assist their note-taking:

| Aspect | The “fairy tale day” | “I gotta catch a break” |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Characters | | |
| Setting | | |
| Major plot developments | | |

After students have taken notes, ask them to a) draw conclusions, b) identify what they believe to be the most significant aspects of difference between the two episodes, and c) consider why the author might have elected to pair these two episodes. What message was she trying to send?

Ask students to read pages 76-86. Then divide students into two groups: One group should reread the “Then” sections, and the other group should reread the “Now” sections. Each group should identify what they consider to be important words and phrases. To conclude the activity, ask each group to report its findings to the other group.

Read all of Part IV aloud to students. Use Think-Pair-Share http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategis/think_pair_share.pdf to consider the following: Why did Bobby’s parents do what they did?

Ask pairs of students to a) decide if they agree or disagree with each of these sentences and b) make notes about why. After pairs have concluded their work, invite whole-group discussion about the sentences and students’ reasoning:

Bobby made the right decision about keeping Feather.
Bobby made the right decision about going to Heaven.

Culminating Activities

Ask students to return to the lists of words/ phrases collected about Bobby. Ask them to use these to develop a bio poem about him http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lessn398biopoem.pdf. Another poetic alternative would be

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the “I used to be..., but now I am...” poem frame.

Topics for discussion and/or writing: a) Is this a realistic book? Why? b) What will the future be like for Bobby and Feather? c) What is the most powerful or moving episode in the book? Why? d) What are some important parenting lessons Bobby learns over the course of the book? In what respects are Bobby’s adjustments a function of his age? Which adjustments would probably be faced by parents of any age?

Ask small groups of students to select an episode to prepare as a Readers Theater http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/readers_theater.pdf presentation. Remind them that they may use the text verbatim or make changes. Provide time for writing and practicing the scripts. Have scripts performed as a culmination activity.

Ask students to develop a timeline of major events from Bobby’s 16th birthday through the end of the book.

Ask students to write letters to Bobby.

WWW sites for more information:

http://www.childrenslit.com/f_johnson.htm This site contains interesting biographical information about the author.

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/blackhis/bl04-johnson.htm> This is an interview with the author.

<http://www.ohioreadingroadtrip.org/johnson/criticism.html>
This site contains a variety of information about the author and her other works.