

THE TROUBLE WITH DILLY: Teachers' Guide

SUMMARY:

Eleven year old Dilly Ahuja lives with her mother, father, brother and grandmother, above the family corner grocery store and Indian food take out. Exuberant, wildly imaginative and impulsive, Dilly plays Pee Wee hockey in the House League, in a mixed girls and boy team, loves words, and is often in trouble because she is easily distracted and forgets to do her homework.

As she decorates her family's grocery store for Christmas, she anticipates the wonderful pair of hockey skates she'll soon be able to buy; she's been saving for them for ages.

When she sees that new kid Gedion Imre, whom she calls Sulky-face, stealing a chocolate bar, she is outraged and tells on him, even though her mother had told her before to keep quiet about it.

The Imres rent the top floor apartment from Dilly's parents and are recent immigrants from Hungary. When Gedion's father returns some groceries to pay for his son's theft, Dilly is wracked with guilt, especially when she learns that Mr Imre has just lost his job and the family is struggling financially. Determined to make up for her thoughtlessness, she comes up with the most fabulous, beautiful, wonderful idea in the whole wide world. She'll throw a Christmas party for Gedion's family, like the ones Mr Imre said they used to have in his old country, Hungary.

With Dilly's best friends, April and Olivia, on board, the plan grows and grows until it seems that everyone wants to help, from Dilly's entire hockey team, to pipsqueak Simon, to Dilly's grandmother, a.k.a. The Great White Hen – at times with hilarious and disastrous results.

With everyone pitching in, Dilly hopes that she won't have to dip too much into the money she's been saving for her hockey skates, and that everyone will remember whose idea this party is in the first place. It'll be the most stupendous party, and everyone will clap and cheer, and insist that Dilly give a speech, and they'll carry her around on their shoulders....

But will the party be possible without Dilly having to dip into the money she's been saving for her precious skates? Or will everyone say that the trouble with Dilly is that she never sees anything through. With Gedion always glaring at her, Dilly wonders why she's even bothering in the first place. It would all be great if it weren't for Sulky-face.

GENERAL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS:

1) Girls and Hockey

- * Girls playing hockey in mixed teams
- * House league
- * Pee Wee Hockey
- * team spirit
- * new hockey equipment versus second hand

2) Neighbourhoods and Community

- * Corner grocery stores
- * Community Spirit
- * Coming together to help others

3) Culturally Diverse Communities

4) Friendship

- * the ups and downs of friendship
- * clubs with friends

5) Generosity and Giving

- * ulterior motives for generosity
- * good-heartedness and what it means to be truly generous

6) Christmas Traditions

- * Christmas traditions in Hungary
- * Christmas traditions and how they evolve
- * Christmas music and Christmas Carols
- * Community Christmas spirit

7) Inter-generational Relationships

- * Relationships with grandparents

8) Imagination

- * The power of the imagination
- * Imagination and creativity
- * Imagination and empathy
- * Imagination and exaggeration

9) Immigration

- * Immigration and looking for work
- * Some of the challenges of immigration
- * Being the new kid
- * Language barriers
- * Immigrants without language barriers

10) Impulsiveness and Guilt

- * Guilt and denial
- * Blaming others because of guilt
- * Guilt and making amends

11) Humour

12) Saving Money

- * Budgets
- * Saving for special things
- * Over spending

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1) Topics of Discussion:

- * Dilly tells on Gedion when she sees him stealing a candy bar. Why do you think she does this? Why did her mother not want her to say anything about it? Why do you think Dilly feels guilty, even though it was Gedion who stole the bar? What would you do in the same situation? What are some of the things that Dilly and her family discuss about the theft during dinner in Chapter 3?
- * What kind of person do you think Dilly is? How do her actions reveal her character? Remember, people are multi-faceted and have a range of characteristics, some positive, some not so positive.
- * Why does Dilly decide to have the party for the Imres?
- * What are some of the things Dilly, April and Olivia need to do in order to organize the party? What are some of the obstacles they face?
- * Discuss the other main characters in this book – April, Olivia, Dadiji, Simon, Gedion, Mr. Imre. What kind of people are they? How do their actions show or reveal their characters? Who is your favourite character in the book?
- * Why does Simon always hang around Dilly? Why does she think he hangs around her? At the end of the novel, what does Dilly learn about Simon that she hadn't understood before?
- * Discuss hockey and girls. How many girls are there in your class who play hockey? How many play in a mixed hockey team and how many in an all girls team? Why do you think so many more boys play hockey than girls? Does it have any connection to how much money is invested in men's hockey, and how much interest there is in their games as opposed to women's hockey? Do you think there should be more women's hockey on TV?
- * Discuss Dilly's rivalry with Connor. Is it believable? Why does Dilly resent him? Do you think he resents her, too?
- * Discuss Dilly's dream to own new skates. Does it make a difference to how you play, if you have new or second hand skates?

- * What is your favourite hockey team and why? Who is your favourite hockey player and why?
- * Discuss team spirit and community spirit. What do you think Dilly's community is like? Do they come together to help each other out? How does it compare with your community/neighbourhood? How is community spirit like team spirit?
- * How do you think Gedion feels when Dilly tells on him? How do you think he feels in school when he sees a group of kids with Dilly staring at him? Why?
- * What does Dilly feel about her grandmother, a.k.a. the Great White Hen at the start of the story, and at the end of the story?
- * Describe the holiday traditions celebrated in your classroom.
- * Make a class list of some of the different ways in which students in your class celebrate Christmas. Do any of these traditions originate from other countries?
- * What are the Hungarian Christmas traditions described in this book?
- * Celebrations and food seem to go together. What are some of the foods eaten by the students in your classroom during your celebrations? Who does the cooking? Do the kids help?
- * At the Christmas party there are three tables full of food. What are some of the foods mentioned? How many of those foods have you tried? Which would you want to try? What are your favourite foods?
- * Discuss friendships and what it means to be a friend. What are some of the positive ways of being a friend? What kind of behaviour is not helpful to keeping friendships? April, Olivia and Dilly squabble at times. Is this realistic in friendships? What kinds of things do you like about your friends and what is it about them that drives you crazy? What do you think April and Olivia feel about Dilly at times? Do they think she's too bossy? When and why?
- * Discuss which Christmas carols are sung or known by the kids in your classroom. Are there any traditional songs sung during other celebrations enjoyed by the kids in your class?
- * Discuss grandparents and your relationships with them. How are they the same or different from those of Dilly's relationship with her grandmother.
- * Discuss imagination and the power of the imagination. Is Dilly imaginative? Does it help her or hinder her? How does it help her? How does it get her in trouble? Does it help her feel empathy? What does that word mean?
- * Discuss what Gedion feels like at the start of the story. Why do you think he is sulky? Have you ever travelled someplace where you didn't know the language? How did you feel? If you haven't, try and imagine how you'd feel.
- * Discuss what you could do to help a new kid feel more at home. If you were new, what would you like others to do to help you?
- * One of the themes of this book is generosity. Dadiji, Dilly's grandmother, says at one point to Dilly: "I think you understand that when you help others you don't do it just to get praise. Or to get gratitude." What does she mean by that? Why does she say it? Does Dilly really understand that?
- * Why does Dilly decide to get Gedion those skates? What does it say about her that she does?
- * At the party, Mr Imre says he can't take charity. Why do you think he says that? What does he mean by that? Dilly's mother says to Mr Imre, "How can there be any talk of charity when there is love?" What does she mean by that?

2) Writing Exercises:

- * Write a journal entry that Dilly might write on the day she sees Gedion stealing the chocolate bar and tells on him.
- * Write a journal entry that Dilly might write on the day she and Gedion fight.
- * Write a journal entry that Dilly might write on the day of the party.
- * List the feelings Dilly goes through from the start of the story in the first chapter, to the end of that chapter.
- * List the feelings Gedion experiences from the start of the story to the end.
- * Write out the invitation that Dilly and her friends would have handed out to the class to tell them about the party. What would it say?
- * If Dilly were a flower, what kind of flower would she be? What kind of flower would April be, and Olivia, and Gedion, and Dadiji and Simon?
- * Write about a party you'd like to have. Who would be there? What would you eat? Describe all the foods you'd like to have, using as many of the five sense as possible.
- * Describe your favourite celebration and what you love most about it.
- * Make a list of five of the big words Dilly uses in the book, and write a sentence for each of them, to show their meanings. (Benevolent; empathy; astute; depression, exquisite, pipsqueak, affable, resplendent, etc)
- * Form a Writing Club, like Dilly and her friends. Write a story titled: **My Best Christmas Ever**.
- * Or, **My Worst Christmas Ever**.
- * Write a journal entry from the point of view of your favourite character in the book, on a day that is important to him/her.
- * Describe your dream skates. What kind of features would it have? If you could wave a magic wand and give your skates magic capabilities, what would you give them? Describe a scene showing what you'd be able to do with those skates.
- * Using only dialogue (as in a play) write a scene showing two friends having a fight.
- * Describe a scene that might happen after the story ends:
 - Dilly showing Simon how to skate.
 - The first time Connor sees Simon after reading the newspaper account.
 - Gedion coming to watch hockey with Dilly for the first time.
 - Gedion trying to show Dilly how to figure skate.
- * The Five senses: Make a list of five things you might see, hear, taste, touch and smell at one of the following:
 - a party
 - a hockey game
- * Write a letter that Gedion might write to a friend or family member in his old home, describing what happened at the party.

3) Art Projects:

- * Draw the following scene: Dilly, April, Olivia and Simon buying the Christmas tree
- * Cut out pictures of people from magazines and stick them onto a poster to make a collage of the party.
- * Cut out cardboard stars and decorate with paint and glitter
- * If you had to decorate a Christmas tree with home-made ornaments, what would you make? Some suggestions: popcorn garland; cranberry garland; pasta angels (<http://www.thriftyfun.com/tf19236029.tip.html>); cardboard stars; cardboard angels (<http://crafts.kaboose.com/cardboard-tube-angel.html>); fabric wrapped bundles of sweets, tied with ribbons.
- * Draw a picture of a pair of hockey skates you'd love to have
- * Do a diorama of a scene in a skating rink
- * Paint a picture of a hockey game

4) Drama activities:

- * Act out a dramatic scene from the book. Here are a few choices:
 - The scene in the store when Dilly tells on Gedion
 - The scene in Mr Minsky's office when Dilly, April and Olivia try to convince the principal to host the party at the school
 - Buying the Christmas tree
 - The carol practise at Dilly's house

5) Extra Study and Research activities:

- * In groups, research Christmas traditions in different countries and do a class presentation with a poster for each country.
- * Have a class party with parents where everyone brings one item of food that is special during their celebrations
- * Have a class party with some of the different foods described in the book on pages 149 and 150.