



Fish in a Tree Lesson Plan

Hunt, L. M. (2015). *Fish in a tree*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Objective: To teach students about dyslexia and the hardships people with learning disabilities face.

Part One: Before Reading

Before we start reading, I will introduce the book. The title of the story, *Fish in a Tree*, is based on an Albert Einstein quote:

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

I will have the students do a quick write in their writer’s notebook to contemplate and discuss what the quote means. They will then get into small groups and discuss their thoughts with each other. Some example discussion questions include:

- Infer what the book is going to be about, using the title, the artwork and Einstein’s quote.
- When might someone feel as if he or she is a fish in a tree? Have you ever felt this way? Do you know anyone who might feel this way?
- Why do you think the author, Lynda Mullaly Hunt, chose this title?

Part Two: Pages 1-91

Discussion: In this section, we learn that Ally has a hard time in school, and she doesn’t feel that she fits in. She says, “Maybe they think I can’t hear their words: Freak. Dumb. Loser” (p. 3)

- I will have a class discussion and discuss with the students the effect of these words. How do you think this makes Ally feel? How would you feel if someone called you these words?

- I will start a list on the whiteboard and have the students come up and write words or phrases that describe the way Ally sees herself and the way others perceive her. We would then come up with a list of kind words that we can use to describe ourselves and others.
- I will introduce the word Dyslexia. Have you heard of this word before? What do you think its like to have dyslexia?

Activity: On page 11, Ally says, “I wish I had my Sketchbook of Impossible Things. It’s the only thing that makes me feel like I’m not a waste of space.” In the sketchbook, Ally draws the images she sees in her “mind movies.”

- I will introduce the sketchbook activity. Students will keep a sketchbook for the duration of this book and sketch whatever they want. What they see, what they feel, etc. We will come back to it and discuss once we have read the whole book.
- We will also discuss why does Ally feel like a “waste of space”? What are her strengths? I will have students write their strengths in their writer’s notebook.

Part Three: Pages 92-175

Discussion: The concept of identity is a central theme throughout this book. Ally grapples with her identity and says, “I don’t know who to be. The one to admit that I can’t do it, or the pretender” (p. 98).

- We are going to put ourselves in Ally’s shoes. I will have the students write a monologue from the point of view of Ally to show her inner struggle with who she is and how she sees herself in the world. They will present their monologue to the class.

Activity: I will have the students go back and read the following excerpt from page 96:

“...people have been calling me “slow” forever. Right in front of me as if I’m too dumb to know what they’re talking about. People act like the words “slow reader” tell them everything that’s inside. Like I’m a can of soup and they can just read the list of ingredients and know everything about me. There’s lots of stuff about the soup inside that they can’t put on the label, like how it smells and tastes and makes you feel warm when you eat it. There’s got to be more to me than just a kid who can’t read well.”

I will print out a can of soup cutout like the one below and have students tape the sides and bottom of it in their writer’s notebook but leave the top open. I will then pass out pieces of paper and have students write their “ingredients” of their soup and put them in the soup can. What makes them who they are? What are their strengths? Put all those ingredients in and make you, your soup.



Part Four: Pages 176-267

Discussion: Mr. Daniels displays pictures of famous people including Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Albert Einstein, John Lennon, Walt Disney, etc. Then he reveals that they had or have dyslexia.

- I will break the students up into groups. They will choose one of these famous people and do research and find their accomplishments, important quotations, hardships they faced, etc. They will make a poster board with a picture of the famous person and all the information they found on them. They will then present it to the class. I will leave these posters up all year so they will be surrounded by successful people that didn't let their weaknesses stop them from succeeding.

Activity: As a class, we will brainstorm a list of themes that have been communicated throughout the text. These might include:

- The power of possibility and believing in yourself. (p. 177)
- Be yourself. Be who you are. (p. 184)
- The power of words we say to one another. (p. 185)
- Everyone is unique and special. (p. 221)
- Everyone has struggles to overcome. (p. 246)
- Believe in others. (p. 266)

The students will break into small groups and create a visual representation of the theme. They can do a skit, a dance, a video, a poster, etc. They have creative freedom as long as its visual and on one of the themes in the book. They will present it to the class.

Part Five: Post-Reading

I will have students define dyslexia after having read this book. They can refer back to the discussion in Part 2. We will discuss ways to be empathetic towards someone who has dyslexia. In addition to dyslexia, I will have students learn about a range of disabilities and how students can be sensitive to others.

- I will then have the students conduct the below WebQuest with a partner and learn ways to show sensitivity and understanding to people with learning disabilities. They will keep the below pdf in their writer's notebook to refer to through out the school year.
- https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_understanding_hidden_disabilities.pdf