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The Memory String



Synopsis

Each button on Laura's memory string represents a piece of her family history. The buttons Laura cherishes the most belonged to her mother—a button from her prom dress, a white one off her wedding dress, and a single small button from the nightgown she was wearing on the day she died. When the string breaks, Laura's new stepmother, Jane, is there to comfort Laura and search for a missing button, just as Laura's mother would have done. But it's not the same—Jane isn't Mom. In Eve Bunting's moving story, beautifully illustrated by Ted Rand, Laura discovers that a memory string is not just for remembering the past: it's also for recording new memories.

Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 7 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

Resentful of her new stepmother, Laura clings to a family heirloom, a "memory string" of buttons taken from special garments. As her father and her stepmother, Jane, paint the porch, Laura sits apart and fingers each button, loudly telling her cat about her great-grandmother's first "grown-up dress," her father's Gulf War service uniform and, last, the nightgown her mother was wearing when she died. Bunting's (Smoky Night) prose is as sure-footed as ever, but is much encumbered here by a contrived plot that has Laura losing the buttons and the family coming together in the search for

them. A rapprochement between Laura and Jane, who finds the final missing button, is all but inevitable. Even Rand's (Baby in a Basket) light-dappled watercolors can't rescue the story from its didactic intent; this is likelier to engage adults looking for books that address a particular subject (such as stepparenting) than children. Ages 5-8. (Aug.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Kindergarten-Grade 3-Within hearing of her new stepmother, Laura meanly recounts to her disinterested cat what each button on her memory string means. There's one from her great-grandmother's first grown-up dress, another from her mother's wedding dress, and one from the nightgown the woman was wearing when she died three years ago. When the impatient feline jumps away, breaking the string, the buttons fly everywhere. Laura's father and Jane help find all but one of them, but the girl is inconsolable. In the night, she hears them debating about whether to cut an identical button from her father's military uniform. Jane insists, "Laura would rather have that button missing than have a replacement-It's like a mother. No substitute allowed." She finds the lost item with a flashlight and she puts it on the porch where Laura can see it without being offended by the finder. However, in the morning the child has had a change of heart and asks Jane's help in restringing the beads. Rand's oversized, light-dappled watercolor pictures show the love and loyalty between the father and his new wife and their love for the prickly and still-grieving Laura. Bunting trusts readers to interpret behavior and understand complex emotions without her having to provide a moral or dramatic ending. Instead, the story offers a hopeful beginning and invites readers to think about ways to remember family history-including making one's own button memory string. Susan Hepler, Burgundy Farm Country Day School, Alexandria, VA Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Prior to reading this book to my class of third grade students, I wondered if the story would be too sad or "heavy" for them. Laura's mother has died and is dealing with her feelings for her step-mother. She has a "memory string" given to her by her mother with buttons that represent family memories. When the memory string breaks, she loses one of her most valued buttons, a button from her father's Army uniform that her mother had added when he returned from the Gulf War. My students loved the story and the wonderful illustrations. The story prompted many students to share their text-to-self connections relating to adjusting to a step-parent or dealing with the loss of a family member. We also did a writing activity involving their own memories and I had to give them very little prompting. The story had already stirred so many ideas and emotions in them, that they

were easily able to write about several memories of their own families. I fell in love with Eve Bunting's writing after reading this book!

During a training, a teacher modeled using this book; I was in tears by the end of it. I highly recommend this book to everyone, not just teachers. I think we can all relate to this book's theme and message!

Great for teaching writing techniques

The Memory String is a wonderful touchstone text that lends itself to writing activities. As a member of the Louisville Writing Project, the book was first introduced to me and used in this manner by Synthia Shelby. Students create their own memory strings in a writing activity after being read the book. This can be done with all grade levels. As a literacy leader at Meredith-Dunn School in Louisville, I developed a lesson that I took to several classrooms in the school. Once students (and teachers) create their own memory strings, suddenly, they have all sorts of seeds of ideas for writing in various genres. It shows students that memories are not always happy and exemplifies the resiliency of the human spirit. My students were able to connect with the character, and with each others' memories, initiating more dialogue to help with their writing processes. Eve Bunting has written so many texts that can be used to facilitate writing as well as help children to make connections and to consider social issues and how they impact them their world and future. Susan Brokenshire-Prater

I enjoyed this book a lot. I think that it speaks to how difficult it is for all of us to accept new situations and how difficult it is to lose someone that we love. One of this girl's prize possessions is her memory string and as the story unfolds around it, we get to see her learn to accept the new turns her life has taken. I found it fascinating to go and research button charm strings of the past after reading this book and then help my daughters to create memory strings of their own. The illustrations are beautiful as well.

Eve Bunting is one of my favorite children's authors. Once again the text is beautifully written and can be used to teach a variety of standards.

This is a sweet story about a little girl who loses her mother and her father is remarried. She has a

memory string with buttons from different family members. Each button is a special memory about that person. The story tells about the relationship between the stepmom and the little girl. I plan to use this book in my 3rd grade classroom. It's good for a lesson on schema or questioning.

just what I wanted

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