



Camp Disaster

Frieda Wishinsky

Reading level: 2.0

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Book Summary

Charlotte Summers hoped that Camp Singing Hills would be a chance to make friends and have fun but it's turned into a disaster. It's also disastrous for her counselor, Abby. Abby has no control over the girls in her charge. Instead, the control is held by the cabin's mean girl, Madison, and her crew. Charlotte realizes that she could tip the balance of power and unseat Madison, but does she have the courage to go for it?

Author Biography

Frieda Wishinsky is the award-winning author of over sixty books for young people. She loves humor, history and exploring new ways to tell a story. Frieda was raised and educated in New York City, where she earned a BA in International Relations and a Master of Science in Special Education. Frieda's books have been nominated for international awards, earned critical praise, and have been featured in magazines and newspapers around the world, including *The London Times*, *The Observer* and *The New York Times*. Frieda lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Note to Teachers

Camp Disaster involves scenes of bullying (physical, verbal, social and emotional). Please use your discretion with the activities in this guide, as some could trigger students who have experienced bullying.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Novel Study***

To engage students with the main characters in *Camp Disaster*, use the following as large group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises.

1. According to erasebullying.ca, bullying is aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power and/or the intention to harm or humiliate someone. How does Madison assert her “power” over Abby in chapter 1?

Prompt: Does she treat Abby as a mentor, counselor and authority figure, or position her as a servant or employee she can humiliate?

2. Throughout the novel, Ellie shows that she doesn't approve of Madison's bullying. At the same time, she also tells Charlotte that Madison “has issues,” not to “let her get to [her]” and to “hang in there” (ch. 3). Do you think Ellie keeps Madison's secret so Madison will leave her alone? How do you feel about how Ellie handles Madison?
3. What part does Madison's secret play in her bullying? Do her “issues” excuse her behavior? Consider that Ellie said, “Madison's particularly nasty this year” (ch. 3), which suggests that Madison might always have been a bully. She is known for being “vicious” (ch. 9) and for “never [giving] up” (ch. 11).
4. In chapter 15, we learn two things about Madison: She was bullied at camp by Helene the year before, when Helene held her head under water; and her father had been caught embezzling funds from his company. These things traumatized and shamed Madison. Does knowing this about Madison make us feel sorry for her? Does it help make Madison a more sympathetic character? Why, or why not?

The Writer's Craft

Writers choose words carefully so they best describe characters and scenes for readers. Consider the words used to describe Madison's actions in chapters 8 and 11. To what is she being compared? How does this deepen our understanding of Madison?

ch. 8 Madison *sneers...sputters...screeches...slides onto her bed.*

ch. 11 Madison *is scowling...snarls...spits out her words.*

Ask students to choose words to describe Abby and Charlotte. How are they different?

Creative Writing, Art

1. In chapter 12, Abby performs a song at the talent contest. Her music “fills the room with a sweet, smooth sound. She plays perfectly.” The song she sings is called “Sailing into the Night.” One of the lines reads, “Toss your sadness to the sea. You're not alone.”
 - ◆ Invite students to write the rest of the song (or one stanza, or a poem), incorporating images of the sea and sailing. Note: The song was about sadness and being alone but was also hopeful and “full of strength.”
 - ◆ Write a poem for Abby that describes her caring nature, musical talent and personal strength. How do these attributes help her survive Madison and her crew?
 - ◆ While sketching or experimenting with media like paint or fabric, imagine you are listening to the song. What textures, colors and images emerge for you?

2. Charlotte is great at drawing because she practices a lot: She sketches “all the time” (ch. 1). Abby plays guitar and sings beautifully. She says, “I’ve been taking lessons for a few years” (ch. 11). To get really proficient at something, we have to practice and keep at it.
- ◆ We know that Madison “never gives up.” Ask students to imagine she’s stopped bullying and has put her energies into something constructive, helpful or creative. What might that be? What could Madison be good at, if she changed her ways?
3. Charlotte went to summer camp “to make friends and have fun” (ch. 2). As a small group activity, invite students to compose a list of at least four “Rights for Kids at Camp.” What should all kids going to summer camp be entitled to?

Option: You may wish to explore the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. This is celebrated on November 20th in some countries. See the Websites below for educator resources and activities from Canada.

Drama

Invite students to work in pairs or triads and choose a scene from the novel involving bullying. Imagine the person/people being bullied stands up to them, defends themselves, and holds the bully/bullies responsible. What would the person/people being bullied say? Knowing what you know about Madison and Stella, how would they respond? For example, would they say “It was just a joke”? What will it take for them to stop?

Prompts:

- ch. 4 Puts grass in a camper’s soup last year
- ch. 4 Puts snails in Abby’s soup
- ch. 7 Puts a snake in Abby’s bed
- ch. 14 Tears, marks up and ruins a treasured sketchbook
- ch. 15 Defaces a guitar and writes “Loser” across it in red marker

Life Skills

1. Part of the fun of summer camp is the food! Many typical camp meals are served at Camp Singing Hills. Invite students to create a recipe book either in hard copy or online, including dishes from *Camp Disaster*.

Prompts: spaghetti and meatballs, apple crumble, chocolate chip cookies, coleslaw. Encourage students to try the recipes either at home or in classroom. If you were at summer camp, what would be your favorite meal?

2. Traditional outdoors summer camp is a perennial fun experience for many kids across North America, but there are many other kinds of camps, including sports, drama/theater, dance, martial arts, orienteering, computer science, video, rap, music, html coding, etc. As a research project, encourage students to find a day camp or stay-away camp that interests them. How much does it cost? What is the registration process? What will camp be like?

When offering resources, ensure there are options for camps at no or low cost, such as YMCA, Salvation Army, Boys and Girls Clubs, and through various foundations,

as well as camps where students can participate remotely, such as online. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts offer many opportunities to learn outdoor camping skills with minimal cost.

3. When Charlotte gets upset, she feels her heart pound, her knees buckle, and her stomach tighten (ch. 2 and 3). Although she tries self talk, it doesn't always work. Ask students to consider what they can do to find equilibrium and calm when they're experiencing anxiety or fear. Ideas to get students started: cleansing breaths, yoga, going for a run, listening to music, journaling, practicing an instrument, talking with friends. Teachers can share with students what they do to relax when they feel anxious or stressed.

Connecting to the Students

Bullying

1. Madison and Stella exhibit multiple bullying behaviors throughout the novel. Lead a large group discussion about bullying and the many forms it can take. In *Camp Disaster*, there are some obvious examples, like putting snails in someone's soup or destroying property, and many subtler examples, such as: excluding others, teasing, name calling, demeaning, shaming and harassing; violence, like kicking and poking; threatening violence; stealing; and vandalism.
 - ◆ There are four kinds of bullying: physical, verbal, social and emotional, and cyber-bullying. Define each, providing examples from the novel.
 - ◆ If someone is being bullied at your school or in your community, where can they go for help? List three options, including at least one that is confidential, such as the Kids Helpline. What are the best ways to get these resources to kids where you live? (e.g., online, in your classroom, posters at the mall, in the washrooms, etc.)
 - ◆ What is your school's policy on bullying? Where is it available for students and parents? After reading *Camp Disaster*, does the policy now have a deeper meaning?
 - ◆ Consider the bystanders who know someone is being bullied but don't do anything about it. What options and resources are available to them? Recall that in chapter 2, Charlotte said, "No one says anything. It's like we're watching a movie."
2. In chapter 15, after the destroyed sketchbook, notes and damaged guitar are discovered, Madison says, "I admit I wrote those notes, I was mad...And yeah, we planted those snails. But that was a joke. Just a joke." And Ellie says, "I don't understand *this*, Madison...You've gone too far." Ask students to consider the following:
 - ◆ Is writing humiliating notes because you're angry okay? What's a more appropriate way to deal with your anger? What could Madison have done instead?
 - ◆ Is planting a snail in someone's meal ever okay for a joke? What if Abby had an allergic reaction or had choked? What if Abby, who loves the outdoors, became traumatized the same way Madison did with swimming?
 - ◆ How far is "too far" when it comes to bullying, or is zero tolerance the solution?

Orca Currents with Similar Themes

In *Queen of the Toilet Bowl*, also by **Frieda Wishinsky**, Renata is chosen to play the lead role in the school musical. Now students who used to ignore her start saying hello and congratulating her. She is happy until it becomes evident that Karin, a wealthy girl who expected to get the lead role, will go to great lengths to ruin Renata's reputation. Renata must face Karin's bullying and learn to be proud of who she is.

Websites of Interest

www.stopbullying.gov

www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence--bullying-and-abuse-prevention/educators

www.erasebullying.ca/index.php

www.b-free.ca/home.html

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncd-jne/guide-acti-eng.php