



Colette and the Silver Samovar

Nancy Belgue

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 141861

Consider the following question as you read *Colette and the Silver Samovar*:

How far would you go to bring your family back together?

Story

Colette Faizal is superstitious, so she worries when a fortune-teller advises her mother to “watch for the unexpected.” When everything the mysterious woman predicted seems to be coming true, Colette struggles to hold on to the last thing the fortune-teller told her: “You will know how to handle what lies ahead.”

Author

Nancy Belgue is the author of many books for young people, including *Casey Little—Yo-Yo Queen* and *The Scream of the Hawk*. Nancy’s writing has appeared in magazines in both Canada and the United States. She has acted in television commercials, training videos and documentaries. She is managing editor of the magazine *OUR HOMES (Windsor & Essex County)* and also works part-time as a library assistant.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- Colette wants to be a writer. She uses her journal to record her thoughts and feelings. She writes about the old man with the “exploding freckles.” Write a descriptive paragraph about a member of your family. Look for interesting and uncommon words to describe them.
- Colette is always looking for new words to add to her growing vocabulary. Have students compile a lexicon from *Colette and the Silver Samovar*, including words and their definitions. Challenge them to create a paragraph using as many of the words as possible.
- Direct students to watch performances of *Babram and the Snake Prince* on YouTube. There are many different versions of this folktale. As a class, explore folktales from the students' respective cultures. See if students can find different versions of the same story.
- Have students write a folktale and illustrate it. Consider creating a classroom anthology of folktales.
- One day Colette sniffs the spice jars in her kitchen and tries to come up with words to describe the smells. Have students bring in a variety of spices and, working with a partner, do the same thing. How can words help us to describe certain things? How do they sometimes fail us?

Social Studies

- Discuss how stories, such as traditional folktales, change when told orally. What is the value in oral storytelling? Brainstorm with students a list of cultures where there is a strong tradition of oral storytelling. Divide the class into small groups and have each group select one of these cultures to study. Students should learn about several of the folktales that were important to these cultures and be able to explain to the class how they were significant in explaining the wider world to the people in those cultural groups.
- Bahram's mother sends him to town to buy cocoons to make silk. Investigate the silk trade in ancient Persia and neighboring countries. What made silk so valuable? Have students learn about and map the Silk Road. What remains of it today?
- With students, plan a potluck of culturally significant dishes. Have each student research foods that are connected to his or her ethnic background and select a dish to make and share with the class. Ensure students' parents are aware of the assignment so they can help the students prepare their food items.

- Mr. Singh was a doctor in Pakistan, but when he moved to North America he could only find work as a janitor. Colette's dad was an engineer in Iran, but became a taxi driver in Toronto. Discuss with students the fact that many highly qualified immigrants with professional designations can't work in their fields because of red tape surrounding licensing requirements—and the fact that qualifying often costs a lot of money.

Science

- Colette's mother is struck by a car and sustains a head injury. Invite a doctor, nurse or other health professional to come to your classroom to discuss what happens when a person is in a coma. Discuss how to prevent head injuries.
- Ethelberta Jarvis' dog, Amos, scratches his eye with a stick. Discuss with students proper safety measures they should take in order to look after their own eyes. Broaden this into a discussion of how eyes grow and how corrective lenses work.

Math

- Colette's father travels to a different time zone. Have students investigate time zones and discuss why we have them. Have students calculate the difference in time between your classroom and classrooms in other cities in the world.
- Ethelberta Jarvis cannot pay for Amos's veterinarian bills. Have students research the cost of different procedures for domestic animals. Find out how much it might cost to treat a condition like Amos's.
- Divide students into pairs. Assign each pair a pet, such as a cat, cockatiel, rabbit, hamster, dog, turtle, rat, ferret, etc. Have the students investigate how much it costs to own that pet. Be sure to include the true costs of owning that pet, beyond simply buying food. Have each pair of students draw up a monthly budget to cover all the costs of owning that pet. They must include food, shelter (if applicable), bedding (if applicable), litter (if applicable), medicine or vitamins, and a constantly growing slush fund for possible illness. Come together as a class and share each pair's findings.

Health/Personal Planning

- Colette's family is torn apart by resentments and cultural differences. Discuss ways in which people of different cultures are similar. Are we more similar than different? Or more different than similar? Why is it so hard for some people to get along?
- Colette decides to sell her family's samovar to raise the money for Amos's treatment. Encourage students to brainstorm other ways she could have raised the money. Have students brainstorm and outline a fundraising plan.

- Colette's parents are very different from each other. They believe in different things, they contradict each other and they disagree constantly. But there is a lot of love and attraction between them. Discuss with students the two opposing adages: "opposites attract" and "like attracts like." Have them illustrate each. Then they should write a paragraph under the image that they feel is truest, explaining why they think so—and providing real-world examples.
- Throughout the course of the story, Colette is helped by a succession of strangers—and for the most part, she is happy to accept their help. As a young person in this world, she seems to have a natural sense of what's okay and what isn't. Have a discussion with students about how strict they need to be when applying the rules for "stranger danger." When is it okay to interact with strangers? When is it not?

Drama

- Have students write a screenplay of a folktale, then perform it for the class and their families. Extension: invite students to direct a video and, with parental permission, post it on YouTube.
- Folktales are often told in the oral tradition. Have students practice telling the folktale they wrote in Language Arts. Encourage them to bring in props and costumes to help illustrate their story.

Connecting to the Text

- Colette is a very real character with many unique qualities. Have students create a character web for everything they know about Colette. Include her family, her personality characteristics, her likes and dislikes, her preferences and anything else that students can figure out from reading about her.
- Ask students to define *setting*. Sometimes a story has more than one setting, as is the case with *Colette and the Silver Samovar*. What are the settings for this story? How important is the setting to this story? Is setting always this important to a story? Could the story have happened if the settings were changed? What would have to change?
- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make for a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there

- ◆ a variety of settings
- ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
- ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
- ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *Colette and the Silver Samovar*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment. Share these reviews with the class.

- Nancy Belgue uses similes to add description and texture to the story. When Colette sees the old man outside her building, she says he “looked me over like he was deciding whether or not to buy me.” A little later in the story, Colette describes a fall day: “It was October and the trees looked like they were dressed for a party, in gold and red and orange.” Pair students off and have them find several other examples of similes from the book. How do similes help enrich description? Assign each pair to write four similes, using the story as inspiration.
- The author uses descriptive language to paint a picture of how her characters look. In chapter 1, we meet Auntie Graves, who reminds Colette of “a little brown mouse,” and Mr. Singh, who has “serious brown eyes and a snowy turban on his head.” How do these descriptions help the reader to imagine the story? Have students find eight more examples of such descriptive language in *Colette and the Silver Samovar*. Share these with the class, and then have students create several such sentences of their own to describe their classmates, family members or items in the classroom.
- Have students create a timeline of the story to show the major events in the book.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Colette decides to sell her family’s samovar to help Amos get the medical care he needs. Discuss how you might have solved this problem.
2. Do you know any people who are superstitious? Are you? Can superstitions ever be helpful?
3. Colette’s father says she should be modest and discreet. But those qualities just aren’t that important to Colette. What do you think? Do you think modesty and discretion are valuable? Or is it better to just say what you think whenever you want?
4. Colette’s mother married a man from a different culture. Her parents were very angry when she announced she would marry the young Hamid Faizal—and they stopped talking to her. As you see it, is this fair? Why do people sometimes get so caught up in making sure their family members don’t marry “outside their culture”?

5. When they are listening to the folktale as told by her father, Colette's mother says that sometimes you have to do what is right, even if it's not in your best interests. What does she mean by this? Has there ever been a time when you did the right thing, even though it didn't help you at all? Explain.
6. Colette is angry when her father breaks his promise to wake her up before he goes to the airport. She says when she grows up she'll never break a promise to her kids. Has an adult ever broken a promise to you? How does it feel? Can you understand why sometimes promises are broken?
7. If you could write a letter to Colette's grandmother, what advice would you give her for how she should live her life?

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

I once read that certain themes come up over and over again in a person's life. For an author, these themes (kind of like a recurring dream) are the things we write about. One of the things that I write about is feeling left out, different, or not accepted. I think this comes from the fact that I moved around a lot when I was a child. In fact, I went to six different schools before eighth grade. That's why *Colette and the Silver Samovar* has a special place in my heart.

Colette is a misfit, just like I was. She is part of two different cultures, she is displaced from her home and familiar surroundings, and she is separated from her family. I am always interested to see how people respond to these kinds of challenges. In Colette's case, she uses the lessons in an old folktale that her father told her to help her find her way.

I think there are many lessons that can be learned from reading and from the wisdom of the past. I also think that people of the world are really more alike than we are different.

I hope that you enjoy Colette's adventures and that after reading about her you will see some things in a different way—just like she does.

Sincerely,
Nancy Belgue

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Coerr, Eleanor. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*
 Engdahl, Sylvia and Lois Lowry. *Enchantress From the Stars*
 Estes, Eleanor. *The Hundred Dresses*
 Ewing, Lynne. *Daughters of the Moon #4: Secret Scroll*
 Hesse, Karen. *Letters from Rifka*
 Konigsburg, E.L. *The Second Mrs. Gioconda*
 Little, Jean. *From Anna*
 Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*
 Scovell, Nell. *Eight Spells a Week*
 Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*
 Tan, Shaun. *The Arrival*
 Wayans, Kim. *Amy Hodgepodge #1: All Mixed Up!*
 Yolen, Jane. *The Bagpiper's Ghost: Tartan Magic, Book Three*

Nonfiction

- Cole, Joanna. *Best-Loved Folktales of the World*
 Gay, Kathlyn and John Kerschbaum. *They Don't Wash Their Socks:
 Sports Superstitions*
 Gillard, Marni. *Storyteller, Storyteacher*
 Jenkins, Steve. *Duck's Breath and Mouse Pie: A Collection of Animal Superstitions*
 Kandel, Bethany. *Trevor's Story: A Book About a Biracial Boy*
 MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*
 Mooney, Bill and David Holt. *The Storyteller's Guide*
 Shepard, Aaron. *Folktales on Stage: Children's Plays for Reader's Theater*
 Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood*
 Zipes, Jack. *Creative Storytelling: Building Community, Changing Lives*

Online

Storytellers of Canada
www.sc-cc.com

The Art of Storytelling
www.artofstorytellingshow.com

Aaron Shepherd's Storytelling Page
www.aaronsherp.com/storytelling/index.html

Lesson Planning for Folktales
www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson279.shtml

Folktale Writing Workshop
http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/folktalewshop_index.htm

Folktales from Around the World
www.eslstation.net/theREALWF/Folktale%20Links.htm

YouTube
www.youtube.com

Superstitions
www.csicop.org/superstition/library/common_superstitions

Samovars
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samovar>