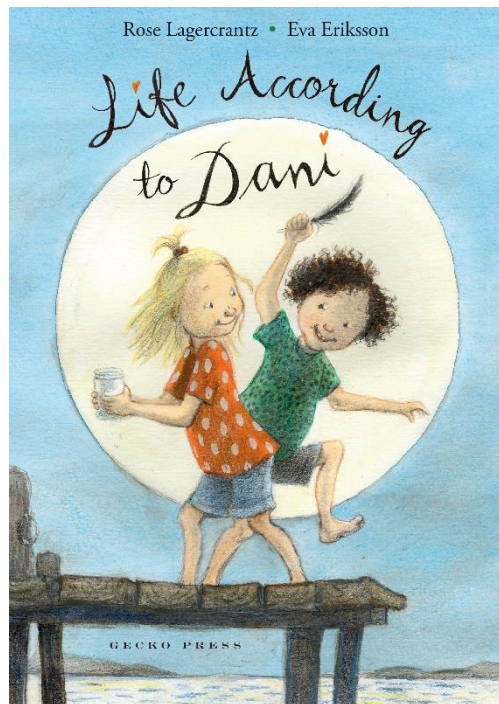


Teaching Notes

Life According to Dani

Written by Rose Lagercrantz and illustrated by Eva Eriksson



Synopsis:

It's Dani's first summer vacation—and the best ever! She is staying on an island with Ella, her best friend in the world. Her father is still in hospital but he calls every day, and Ella and Dani stay busy building huts, fishing, exploring and swimming. Then Dad turns up, but with his nurse too! This is not the visit anyone had imagined. This warm, funny story allows space for strong emotions, as Dani struggles with the idea of her father's new girlfriend, but it does so with a light touch.

The Author:

Rose Lagercrantz is a popular Swedish author of books for children as well as for adults. Her first book was published in 1973. She has received many of the top Swedish literary awards, including the August Prize and the Astrid Lindgren Prize.

The Illustrator:

Eva Eriksson is one of the world's greatest illustrators. She is consistently nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Prize and other international awards.

Themes:

This heartfelt illustrated chapter book explores several themes. These include friendships, loyalty, family life, new relationships and emotions.

The theme of friendship is explored as we see Dani spending time with her best friend, Ella. Ella and Dani will do anything and everything to make sure the other is happy. Ella will play music while skinny-dipping, defend Dani against her cousin, Sven and accompany Dani on Icelandic pony riding expeditions with Sadie, the nurse.



A further theme illustrated in the book is that of loyalty. Ella is extremely loyal to Dani and helps fight her corner when Dani is upset about her father arriving unexpectedly on the island with a new girlfriend. Dani questions and is upset by what she considers her father's lack of loyalty, as he had not called her or shared his news about Sadie. Dani's grandmother is unimpressed by Sven's lack of family loyalty when he lets slip the information about the new girlfriend.

Other themes portrayed in the book are the notions of family and new relationships. The book shows how a family can be made up of many different people with different roles. Ella's family includes her 'extra father', Paddy and Sven's family is made up of his mother and grandmother. Dani must come to terms with the fact that her family might have to grow from being just her and her father, to including Sadie.

A final theme is that of strong emotions. These are evident in Dani and Ella's joy as they frolic about in their summertime island adventures, and in Dani's concern, confusion and misery when her father has not called, and when Sven reveals the news about the new girlfriend. The emotion of anger is seen when Ella confronts Dani's father and Sadie on behalf of her friend. This anger is mirrored by Dani's grandmother when she disapproves of the way Dani's father handles the meeting. And finally the emotions of relief and happiness are expressed when Dani and her father reconcile and negotiate their new relationship on the phone at the end of the book.

Activities

1. Look at the cover image and title. What do you think this story might be about?
2. Below is a list of similes from the book. Find out and write down the definition of a simile followed by a drawing to illustrate the similes below:
 - 'She drew coconut peaks that looked like small knobby mountains' (p. 31).
 - 'Sweet as marzipan' (p. 60).
 - 'He was white as a sheet' (p. 73).
 - 'It was like a shiver running over the water' (p. 92).
3. As well as similes, there are many other language features in the book, for example:
 - metaphors: 'But suddenly a dark shadow fell on Dani' (p. 32).
 - idioms: "'We're stinking rich!'" (p. 39).
 - adverbs: 'She said tartly' (p. 43).
 - onomatopoeia: 'Dani sat down with a splash.' (p. 51).
 - personification: 'She could hear the wail of the violin.' (p. 45).
 - synonyms: "'S-A-D..." Sven said. Ella started to laugh. "You mean *wretched and miserable*?" (p. 58).
 - alliteration: 'Sharp sunlight' (p. 49).Find the definition of each language feature, then find other examples from the book or make up your own for each.



4. Write a list of all the things Dani and Ella do and see during their adventures on the island. Imagine that you are joining in with the girls and write a descriptive short story about an adventure you all have together on the island.
5. Dani and Ella have a summer job selling coffee, juice and buns to the ferry passengers (p. 36). In pairs, design and create an advertising campaign for their business, for example an advertisement with prices, a jingle they could sing on the local island radio, etc.
6. Dani and Ella go skinny dipping in the lake inspired by ‘the water sprite in old stories, who sits naked on a stone playing the violin. Anyone who hears him goes a bit crazy and starts dancing’ (p. 15). Use this water sprite as inspiration for your own short story. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your story as a children’s picture book for younger children.
7. The author describes Dani’s reaction to the news that her father has a new girlfriend by writing that she ‘felt a knife in her chest’ (p. 60) and it ‘felt as if the eagle had its claws into her’ as ‘she turned white under her suntan’ (p.61). What do these descriptions tell us about how Dani is feeling? Do you think her feelings are justified? Why/why not?
8. When Dani and Ella see a shooting star and need to decide on a wish, ‘Dani didn’t have to think for long. She always had a couple or three or four wishes stored up’ (p. 107). Think of a wish you have stored up for when you see a shooting star and write an illustrated poem or paragraph about it.
9. At the end of the book Dani ‘felt warm and light inside even though it was so dark around them. Happiness had turned up again!’ (p. 107). Alongside happiness, which other emotions can you find in the book, for example, being scared, brave or sad? When you find an emotion in the book, examine the illustrations that accompany it. How has Eriksson interpreted the feeling in the illustration? (Think about size, composition, etc). Draw your own picture that expresses another emotion, such as, anger, joy or love.
10. Who is your favourite character in the book? Why? Write a character study of your choice.
11. In pairs, take turns to read your favourite chapter aloud to one another. Discuss which is your favourite chapter and why? Do you agree with your partner’s choice? Why/why not?
12. Draw an illustrated plot summary of the main events of the book.
13. Examine the illustrations in the book. What attracts your attention to a particular picture? Do the pictures mirror the text or go beyond what the story tells you? Do you like the style? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Find another book illustrated by Eva Eriksson, such as *My Happy Life* (Gecko Press, 2012), *My Heart is Laughing* (Gecko Press, 2014), *Watch Out for the Crocodile* (Gecko Press, 2014) or *When I’m Happiest* (Gecko Press, 2015). Compare and contrast the illustrations. Are there many similarities or differences?



G E C K O P R E S S

14. Choose your favourite illustration from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it, for example, a painting, drawing, photograph, model, poem, etc. Or design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
15. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What do you like about it? Why? What do you dislike about it? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten.
16. This standalone book is the fourth in a series of books which include, *My Happy Life* (Gecko Press, 2012), *My Heart is Laughing* (Gecko Press, 2014) and *When I'm Happiest* (Gecko Press, 2015). If you have not done so already, find and read one of these books. Write a one-page summary of your chosen book.