

Introduction

This is the story of a brave puppy going to the hospital to get well. It is a tale of friendship - its power to heal, and community - everyone working together to help their patient.

Discussion

Many of the messages in this story are about kindness and caring. Children can learn about why kindness works and what they can do to help themselves and others when they are hurt or afraid. This book provides an excellent opportunity to talk about helping.

Social Responsibility

1. Friends look for opportunities to care for others.

- * Puppy begins to feel better when his friend arrives to be with him. Sometimes just being with someone, just showing you care, helps someone feel better. Why?
- * In the story, what do Patch's friends do to help him feel better? (They visit, bring flowers, make cards, read books, make music.) The puppies send pictures not of themselves, but of each other. They send their letters airmail, by the robins. Now the robins are part of the helping circle.
- * How does Patch help himself feel better? (He closes his eyes and imagines being at home in his garden and he imagines his friend chasing away the pain.) Can you try to use your imagination to make yourself feel better? What is your favourite place? What is your favourite activity? (Perhaps you could imagine yourself swimming or riding your bike.) What are your favourite things and how can they help you feel better? (books, puppies, snowflakes, ice cream ...)
- * In his dreams, Patch sees a special friend coming to watch over him. Can you imagine a friend, or someone you love, being with you, even when that person is not actually there? How do you do that?
- * Everyone is affected in some way when a friend is hurt or unhappy. Why do the faces of the crab and the doll change as the story goes along?
- * What makes children feel hurt or unhappy at school? How can you help? Be a responsible bystander. Stand up for your friends.

Community Helpers

Many of the people who help Patch in the story (friends, doctors, nurses, etc.) also can help you. Talk about helpers in your community (teachers, coaches, parents, etc.)

Language Arts

1. Vocabulary

- * Talk about the words "compassion" and "trust". Try to understand how someone else might feel; what does it mean to walk in someone else's shoes? What is "empathy"?
- * "Read" the nonverbal signs of emotions: Why does Mossy look so sad?
- * Talk about "conferring and consulting". Why do the doctors ask for help? When should you confer and consult?

* In native lore, the eerie cry of the loon is understood to say “Someone is sick. Everyone pay attention.” Paying attention is part of compassion. Who pays attention to Patch? Sometimes it is hard to think of someone else’s feelings instead of your own. You must make an effort to pay attention.

2. “Metaphors” created by the animals of the story

- * Newfies are rescue dogs and strong swimmers. Border collies (the head nurse) are experts at shepherding and managing others. Elephants are compassionate. Beardies are excellent therapy dogs, and sheep are soft and comforting. Here a sheep is both nurse and the anesthetist, and the puppy falls asleep counting sheep.
- * The story dragon represents pain. There are some friendly dragons, of course, but this one appears when the puppy gets sick.
- * Notice how the dark birds add anxiety to the story and the white birds add brightness and happiness.

Author Notes and Suggestions:

- * One of my beardies could jump any fence and did actually climb up into a tree to keep watch over the nearby pathway.
- * See how baby elephant’s cover is decorated with people pictures. When you take your pet to the vet, you will often see office staff wearing smocks decorated with animal pictures.
- * There are many references to children’s literature in this book. Other story characters come to visit Patch. See if you can find them. (Piglet with his red balloon [Winnie-the-pooh], Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, Babar, Mother Goose, Badger [The Wind in the Willows], the Frog Prince)
- * Can you think of other stories of friends? (*Frog and Toad* by A. Lobel, *Three Little Friends* by H. Heine, *Stellaluna* by J. Cannon, *The Mole Sisters* by R. Schwartz, *Corduroy* by D. Freeman, *Best Friends for Francis* by R. Hoban, *Stella, Queen of the Snow* by M.L.Gay, *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B.White, *The Wind in the Willows* b K. Grahame)
- * Discuss the title of the story, *The Patched Heart*.
- * Why are the cover and the end pages (which hold the book block into the cover) illustrated with patchwork quilts? What do quilts make us think of? Why are they comforting? Can you see how the end pages set the tone for the story?
- * Find other examples of patchwork throughout the book. (heart on cover, title, and dedication pages; puppy-patient on his blanket; cat-patient with quilt and patched eye; doll)
- * Why do you think the puppy was called Patch? How is the puppy’s name linked to the illustrations? Who was Patch Adams? (a special doctor, featured in a movie by the same name)

Activities

1. Make a co-operative quilt (paper or fabric). Each child can contribute one square. (Ideas for squares: favourite things to make someone feel better, pictures of ways of helping, favourite story pictures, favourite pictures from *The Patched Heart*.)
2. Create an author-study project by reading other books by this author.
 - * Helen Stewart has illustrated a quilt in all four of her children’s books (see especially *The Porcelain Doll*).

- * Discover the two puppies in an entirely different setting in *A Child's Enchanted Garden*.
 - * Helen Stewart both writes and illustrates all of her books. Can you think of other authors who do both? (Beatrix Potter, Arnold Lobel (*Frog and Toad*), Roslyn Schwartz (*The Mole Sisters*), Don Freeman (*Corduroy*), Marie-Louise Gay, (Stella books). Heine Helme (Friends books))
3. Patch's friends send him get well cards. Later, Patch and Mossy make cards to send to their hospital friends. You also can make cards to send to a sick friend or to a children's hospital. This is an excellent way of helping and of connecting with the community.