

Feedback: A Powerful Tool for Raising Student Achievement in Language Arts

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Holly M. Searl

A Fish for Benny

By Tommy Ann Clements

What happens when Benny goes fishing?

"Rats!" I groaned. "Is *he* coming along?"

I stared disgustedly at my new stepbrother, Benny, sitting in the back seat of my Dad's car. Benny is eight, short and thin with beady eyes and big ears. Now that Mom and Dad are divorced, I only see Dad every other weekend, and Benny is always honing in. He ruins everything.

The time we went hiking, he got a blister. The zoo made him sneeze. At the baseball game he got a peanut up his nose. If Dad has to remarry, I don't see why he picked Benny's mother. I mean, she's OK. It's just too bad that Benny was included in the deal.

Today Dad and I were going deep-sea fishing for the first time. Now it was spoiled.

"Joe" Dad said in his patient voice, "Benny is your brother—"

"Some brother!"

"We'll have a good time," Dad promised. "Better bring a jacket."

"What for?" I glanced at the steel-colored Florida sky. "It's hot today."

The fishing boat was a scabby old tub, but when you're only paying fifteen dollars a person for three hours of fishing, you don't get the Queen Elizabeth II. There were several people on board, sitting on benches on each side of the deck. A few were in the cabin.

The captain's mate gave each of us a rod and reel and a bucket of bait before we cast off.

"We're making up a jackpot for whoever catches the biggest fish." The mate said.

"If you guys want in on it, it will cost you a buck apiece."

Dad gave him three dollars. I figured paying for Benny was wasted money. He probably wouldn't even bait his hook.

I was right. The kid stared suspiciously into the bucket and made a face.

"This stuff stinks. What is it?"

"Dead fish," I told him.

"Do I have to touch it?"

"If you want to bait your hook, you do."

"Here, Benny," Dad said, "take my rod. The hook's baited and in the water. I'll use yours."

"OK!" said Benny. He gripped the handle of the rod as if his life depended on it.

A breeze has sprung up and the waves were choppy. Some clouds slid over the sun. Nobody caught anything.

Then Benny said, "Something's jerking my line. What should I do?"

"Jerk back!" I told him. I reached for his rod. "I'll get it for you."

"Let him do it, Joe," Dad said. "Pull, Benny, and hang on tight!"

Wouldn't you know it? Benny caught the first fish—a little snapper—and he acted as if it were a prize marlin.

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Meanwhile the sky had grown dark, and the breeze had turned into a still wind. The waves rose higher. Drops of rain slapped our faces, the temperature dropped, and thunder rumbled in the distance. The boat rocked like a runaway cradle.

Dad's face turned green.

"I think I'll go below," he said as he handed me his rod. "Look after Benny."

He staggered across the deck and bent over the rail.

I had expected Benny to get seasick, but not Dad. Well, the kid would probably be next.

The waves were really high now. One second the boat seemed to be standing on a hilltop and the next it would plunge into a valley. I clung to the rail and watched the waves rise and fall.

My stomach suddenly heaved, and a bitter taste rose into my throat. I learned over the rail and lost my lunch.

I'd never been so sick in all my life—and I was freezing! Goose bumps stood out on my arms like grapefruits. Why hadn't I worn a jacket? Why had I even come? Who needed to do deep-sea fishing anyway? I suddenly realized I hated fish—especially the dead ones in the bait buckets. The stink of them filled my nose, my head—my stomach! Breakfast followed lunch.

"Maybe you'd better go inside the cabin, Joe," said Benny. "I'll help you."

"I don't need any help!"

But I did. I was so weak my legs trembled. I could never have crossed that squirming deck if Benny hadn't supported me. The kid was stronger than he looked. He helped me down the steps and steered me to the bench where Dad was sitting with his head drooped on his chest.

Dad briefly stared at us with bleary eyes before closing them again. I knew just how he felt.

It was warmer in the cabin, but I kept shivering while I tried to keep my stomach from crawling into my mouth.

Benny took off his windbreaker and draped it over my shoulders. "You'd better lie down on the bench and put your head on my lap," he said.

I lay there for the rest of that miserable voyage. When I finally tottered off the boat, I said I'd never step off solid ground again. Dad said he felt the same way.

I thanked Benny for his jacket—and for his skinny thighs, which had made a pillow for my woozy head.

"No problem! Benny grinned. "What are brothers for?"

"To make money!" I pointed at the bundle of dollar bills he was carrying. Because of the storm, nobody else had caught a fish, so Benny had won the jackpot.

He deserved it.

Theme 1-A Fish for Benny
Harcourt Holistic Reading Assessment

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“The River Never Sleeps”

1. What is the theme of the story? Use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer.

The theme is to listen because his grandfather told him not to go to a certain place but he did anyway. Which means...to behave and listen and do not wander off. In other words listen to you elderly and you will be safe.

Grade 5 Response

Feedback:

The last sentence identifies the theme. The evidence from the text and your own experience needs to be more specific.

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2. What is the theme of the story? Use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer.

The author is telling us we should always listen to our elders or parents because what they tell you may be important, not a joke. And just because something happened a long time ago, doesn't mean it can't happen again.

Grade 5 Response

Feedback:

The first sentence identifies the theme. The evidence from the text and your own experience needs to be more specific. Have you found this theme to be true in your own life?

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What is the theme of the story? Use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer.

The theme of the story is to give people 2nd chances. In this story, Joe’s parents are divorced but his dad remarried. Unfortunately for Joe, his dad’s wife has a son named Benny. Joe thinks that Benny always ruins trips to places. So now they’re going fishing and Joe thinks Benny is going to ruin it. But then Joe starts feeling sick. So Benny helps him feel better even though Joe doesn’t want it. But then he figures Benny isn’t so bad and gave him a second chance.

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What is the theme of the story? Use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer.

The theme of the story “A Fish for Benny” is that it is very nice to help someone that is in need of help. For example in the story Benny help his stepbrother feel better because he got sick on the boat while they were fishing. He gave him is jacket because it was very cold and he was very sick. Then they became the greatest of stepbrothers.

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What is the theme of the story? Use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer.

A fish for benny is about a boy who gosc fishing with his dad and brother he was a little jellous of his brother. The theme for this story is have confident in your self or love your family and don't be jellouis of your brothers or sister's. Joe wanted to spend time with his dad Both can spend time with there dad what I learned from this story is don't be jellous of your brother or sister because they spend time with your mom or dad they both love you that is what I learned and the theme to.

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Card Sort

Task: Work with your table group to create categories for the feedback statements that you will find in the envelope. Make as many categories as your team determines appropriate and use the sticky notes to label each category.

What is Descriptive Feedback?

- Specific
- Relates directly to the learning
- Comparison to models, samples, exemplars
- Related to performance, not personal

(adapted from Davies, 2000)

Why Descriptive Feedback?

- The purpose of descriptive feedback is to *provide opportunities for the learner to make adjustments and improvements* toward mastery of a specified standard.

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