



Chance and the Butterfly

Maggie deVries

1-55143-208-0

\$6.95 CDN / \$4.99 US, PAPERBACK

5 X 7 1/2, 160 PAGES

AGES 8-11

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The Story

Chance is a foster child who has just been moved once again to a new home and a new school. Every time he turns around, he gets in trouble. In his third grade classroom he's been pegged as a problem child: he can't sit still, reading is hard for him and math seems forever beyond his reach. But Chance finds science fascinating, especially if it has to do with living creatures.

Then a long-awaited box arrives in the classroom. It contains caterpillars and all that is needed to raise them to butterflies. For Chance, school has suddenly become fun again. He chooses one of the caterpillars to be his own. One day he slips it into his pocket and takes it home. What follows could lead to tragedy...or to friendship and healing.

The Author

Maggie de Vries is the author of two picture books: *Once Upon a Golden Apple* (Penguin, 1991), written with Jean Little and illustrated by the late Phoebe Gilman, and *How Sleep Found Tabitha* (Orca, 2002), illustrated by Sheena Lott. Maggie is a writer, editor and teacher who divides her time between Vancouver and Victoria, B.C.

The Ideas

- Raise butterflies in your classroom while reading aloud *Chance* as a class and studying the life cycle of butterflies, just like they do in the book.
- Even if you can't raise butterflies in your class, you could still study butterflies. Fill the class with butterfly books. Find as many stories about butterflies as you can.
- Without putting any children in the class on the spot, talk about different shapes of families: adoptive, foster, grandparents raising grandchildren, extended families living together, single parent, blended.

- Write a story about a child. Give the child a family with any shape you choose. Then, on large paper draw the whole family and label the family members. What is it like for the child in your story to live in his or her family? What are the best things? What are the hardest things? If you like, you could get a group together to act out a scene from your story for the class.
- Read Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and William Barringer's *Gregory and Alexander* (Orca, 2003), illustrated by Kim LaFave, and compare those caterpillars with Matilda.
- Study the differences and similarities between butterflies and moths and between Painted Lady butterflies, Monarch butterflies and other kinds. What kinds of butterflies live in your part of the world? At what time of year and where are you most likely to see them?
- Ken is new to the class just like Chance. Write a story or create a storyboard with words or pictures about Ken. He loves kites. He is just beginning to have a friend. Other kids aren't very nice to him sometimes. You could write about what Ken thinks when he sees Chance in the park and his kite comes tumbling down.
- Evaluate Ms. Samson as a teacher. What do you think her greatest strengths are? In which areas could she improve?
- Have a debate in your class about what kind of animal you would most like to have in the classroom. Assign different animals to different people so that they can come up with arguments in favor of their animal. Should you hatch chicken eggs? Duck eggs? Salmon eggs? Or should you get a hamster? Or a tarantula? What about a possum or a llama? Some could be more serious ideas than others!
- Chance doesn't feel as if he has a home until the very end of the book. In fact, the word "home" isn't used in *Chance and the Butterfly* until the last page. What does home mean to you? What are the things that make you feel most at home? You could write about it, or draw or paint pictures.

- After your class has finished reading the book, write scenes from the book on slips of paper, scenes that could be frozen into tableaux. Divide into groups of four and pull a scene from a hat. You need to rehearse your tableau where none of the other groups can see. Then freeze into it in front of the class. Let the other groups guess which scene it is.
- Create a game like jeopardy from the book and your butterfly unit combined. You could have categories like, The Life Cycle of the Butterfly, Chance at Home, Chance at School, Butterfly Vocabulary. Then work in pairs to think of questions for each category. The questions have to have clear one or two word answers. For example: *The red liquid that drips from a brand new butterfly: What is maconium?* You could divide up into small groups to play; pairs could guess together, whatever involves everyone and doesn't put anyone on the spot.
- Create a huge wall display of a butterfly by cutting out an enormous butterfly or several enormous butterflies from the biggest paper in the school. Then draw a jigsaw pattern on the butterflies, cut them out and give one piece to each child. Once the children have decorated the pieces of paper as they choose and outlined their piece in a strong colour, the pieces can be arranged back into the butterfly and glued onto another large piece of paper.
- Get the book *The Butterfly Alphabet* by Kjell B. Sandved. This must be one of the most spectacular books about butterflies ever created. Sandved has photographed the whole alphabet in butterflies' wings! It took him many, many years.

A Few Words from the Author

Dear readers,

A few years ago, when I was working as a substitute teacher, I spent a week in a classroom where they were raising butterflies. When I arrived, the caterpillars had already formed chrysalides and were hanging from the butterfly bush under netting. The class was very, very excited and so was I!

Over the course of the week, we all watched those chrysalides closely. We saw the butterfly pattern begin to show through the thin skin of the chrysalis. We saw the chrysalides begin to crack and we saw the butterflies emerge and hang upside down while their wings dried. One butterfly fell to the table just like in *Chance and the Butterfly* and had to be lifted up on the handle of a paintbrush twice. And on Friday morning we got everyone lined up and ready to release the butterflies. One boy stayed behind near the school just like in the story. He was crying and crying because he didn't want to release the butterflies. I took him by the hand and he came along with us and watched as we let the butterflies go. Still, he was unhappy. Then, late that afternoon, he and a girl released the last two butterflies themselves. He was transformed. I thought that he saw how much it meant to the butterflies to be free. He would miss them, but he was happy that they would be free.

So, you see, the heart of *Chance and the Butterfly* came from that week. After that I started thinking about writing a short children's novel about that experience. It took me a long time to do it, though. I didn't know anything about the boy in my class except for that one thing that he did, so for my story, I made up Chance. I knew that he was troubled and I thought that if he were a foster child just arrived to a new home where the older boy doesn't like him, that would create some troubles that he would have to work out. I didn't really plan for him to take the caterpillar home, but when he picked it up after its fall, it just seemed like the natural thing for him to do!

The school is based on a real school in Surrey, B.C., where I did a lot of substitute teaching.

Once I got started working on the book, I needed to do lots of research about Painted Lady butterflies and about the program where kids raise the butterflies at school. I asked the teacher whom I had substituted for if I could visit her class two years later. I still remember when she called me to tell me that the box with all the materials and the little tiny caterpillars had arrived. I drove straight over there and took lots of pictures. Then I went back again when the caterpillars were a whole lot bigger. After I'd written a few chapters, I visited her school and read chapters to a few classes. They were lots of help.

When the book was finally published in September 2001, I was so excited. I love the cover picture that Don Kilby drew. He found that boy's picture in a photo file at the University of Toronto and used it to get Chance's expression just right.

Chance is a very special character to me. I hope that you like him as much as I do!

Sincerely,
Maggie

Chance and the Butterfly was shortlisted for the Sheila Egoff Children's Literature Award, 2002, and for the Silver Birch Young Readers' Choice Award, 2003.