

About *FIREFLY*

Firefly lived in the park across from her mother's home. It was safer there. But after the bad night happens, and her baseball-bat-wielding mother is taken away, social services sends Firefly to live with her Aunt Gayle. She hardly knows Gayle, but discovers that she owns a costume shop.

Yes, Firefly might be suffering from PTSD, but she can get used to taking baths, sleeping on a bed again, and wearing as many costumes as she can to school.

But where is “home”? What is “family”? Who is Firefly, for that matter ... and which costume is the real one?

About PHILIPPA DOWDING

Philippa Dowding has won many marketing industry awards and has had poetry and short fiction published in journals across Canada. Her children's books have been nominated for numerous literary awards in Canada, the U.S., and Europe, including the SYRCA Diamond Willow, OLA Silver Birch, OLA Red Maple, and Hackmatack awards. In 2017, she won the OLA Silver Birch Express Honor Book award for *Myles and the Monster Outside*. Dowding currently lives in Toronto, ON.

Curriculum

Grade 6, 7, 8 Language (Reading)

Grade 6, 7, 8 Health and Physical Education (Mental Health Literacy)

Student Objectives

After reading *Firefly* students should be able to:

- Develop interpretations about texts using stated and implied ideas from the texts as evidence
- Demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex and difficult texts by summarizing important ideas and explaining how the details support the main idea
- Identify the point of view presented in a text, determine whether they can agree with the view, in whole or in part; and suggest some other possible perspectives
- Identify various elements of style – including voice, word choice, the use of hyperbole, strong verbs, dialogue, complex sentences, foreshadowing, metaphor, and symbolism – and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of texts
- Extend understanding of texts by connecting the ideas in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights; to other familiar texts; and to the world around them
- Identify people, resources, and services in the school and the community that can provide support when a person is dealing with mental health issues and choices or situations involving substance use and addictive behaviours, and describe how to access these supports
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between mental health and mental illness and identify possible signs of mental health problems
- Demonstrate an understanding of how incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies into daily routines can help maintain mental health and resilience in times of stress
- Explain how word choices and societal views about mental health and mental illness can affect people and perpetuate stigma, and identify actions that can counteract that stigma

Getting Started

- Discuss what “taking something for granted” means.
- Introduce the concepts of mental health and therapy. Define PTSD, dissociation, and fugue states.

Discussion Questions

- Why does Firefly react the way she does to the pancakes, hot bath, and hot chocolate?
- After reading the first chapters, what can you infer about Firefly's life with Joanne-the-mother?
- What is the significance of the "Stray cat" song? Why does the author repeat the song throughout the book?
- What appeals to Firefly about wearing costumes?
- Why does Firefly prefer to be called Firefly?
- A therapist at Jennie's tells Firefly "Telling people isn't weak, Firefly. It's the truth. Just tell the *right* people. The ones who will actually hear you." (Chapter 21) What does the therapist mean by this? Why is it significant to Firefly?
- What causes Firefly to stand up to Norman (Not-So-Skinny Kid)?
- Near the end of the novel, Firefly begins to sleep in the bed rather than on the floor. (Chapter 23) What is the significance of that?
- Compare and contrast Juggers and Firefly. How are they similar? How are they different?
- What devices did the author use to try to make you sympathize with the character? Were they effective?
- What strategies does Firefly use to cope with her emotions?
- What did you think Firefly was going to wear for Halloween? Was the firefly costume satisfying, or were you disappointed she wasn't a lobster? Discuss why you think the author chose a firefly costume for her character.
- Of all the costumes Firefly wore, what was your favourite? Why?

Activities

- The cover artist used imagery from the book to give people an idea of what the book is about. Design a new cover that features what the book means to you.
- Write a paragraph about a costume you would want to wear and why. Optional: Include a sketch.
- The author created a fictional women's shelter that she named after Jennie Smillie Robertson — the founder of Women's College Hospital and Canada's first female surgeon. Research a real women's shelter in your area and write a report or make a presentation on your findings.