



THE DIRT DIARY
by Anna Staniszewski

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2017
Grade 6-8
Submitted by Rush Seitz, Student,
School of Library and Information Science, LSU, Baton Rouge

Title: *The Dirt Diary*
Author: Anna Staniszewski
Publisher: Sourcebooks Jabberwocky
Pages: 256

SUMMARY

Stealing! Snooping! Lying! Rachel is working on a way to rekindle her parents' marriage. Borrowing money from her college fund so she can buy a plane ticket to her father's new home in Florida is the latest development in her plan to convince her father to return to her mother, but she needs to replace the money in her college fund before her mother finds out. To earn the money, she takes a job as her mother's assistant, helping with her duties as a maid on the weekends. She is soon horrified to discover that many of her mother's clients are the families of kids who attend her school. When her schoolmates make the same realization, they alternately befriend, belittle, and betray her, creating an all-around frustrating situation. Rachel works through the challenges by baking desserts, hoping to win a baking contest and the prize money that comes with it. Before she finishes returning the money though, her mother does something that shatters her world.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Anna Staniszewski was born in Poland and emigrated to the United States. She fell in love with stories written in Polish and English, and after graduating from high school, she earned a BFA in Theater from Sarah Lawrence College before entering the workforce. After a stint at the Eric Carle Museum, she returned to school, attending Simmons College in Boston and receiving a MA in Children's Literature and an MFA in Writing for Children. She is currently a professor at Simmons College, while also teaching at other institutions in the Boston area.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Author website: <http://www.annastan.com/>



Author interview: http://editedtowithinaninchofmylife.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/friday-feature-journeys-toward_15.html

OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR

The Dirt Diary: The Truth Game (2016)

I'm With Cupid (2015)

The Dirt Diary: The Gossip File (2015)

The Dirt Diary: The Prank List (2014)

My Very UnFairy Tale Life (2011)

RELATED TITLES

The Center of Everything by Laura Moriarty

How to Rock Braces and Glasses by Meg Haston

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

- Ask students to write a reflective essay about a real or hypothetical event that they do not want their parents to discover. What might inspire the deception? Why wouldn't their parents approve? Is there a scenario in which their parents might understand or condone their actions? How might the conclusion change if this assignment called for more highly fictionalized writing?
- Break the class into small groups, and assign one or two chapters from *The Dirt Diary* to each group. Have students produce a skit about the events that take place in the assigned chapters. Also, have each group develop one or two questions to facilitate discussion with the audience.

Social Studies:

- Develop a timeline of major events in *The Dirt Diary*.
- Discuss the distance between Florida and New England and all aspects of moving across the country: mode of transportation, cost, motives, time, and effects on friends, family, and others.
- Explore the United States on a map. Ask the class to name where they want to live after finishing school and to conduct research on what it will entail to move to their chosen city from where they currently live.
- For a fun activity, suppose someone wants to relocate overseas. What is required? Consider VISAs, passports, transport of property, employment, and citizenship. Explore "dual-citizenship" and what it takes to become a citizen of another country.

Art:

- Following the information in the book, draw a map of the city in which Rachel lives.
- Make a poster advertising Rachel's mother's cleaning service.

Math:

- Calculate how many weekends of work it would take for Rachel to earn enough money to pay back the amount she borrowed from her college fund if she consistently earned the amount that she earned on her first weekend working as a maid.

- Explore the different methods of transportation that would allow Rachel to travel from New England to Florida. How much would each cost? What is the overall best method of travel? The worst method? Why?

Vocabulary:

Ballistic	Divorce	Impulsive
Consequences	Evidence	Incriminating
Convince	Frustrated	
Disappointment	Hesitant	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Rachel not want her mother to know about the money she borrowed from her college fund? Provide evidence from the text to support your response.
2. Why does Rachel use phrases such as “Holy fried onion rings” or “My goldfish,” which are not common in most speech? What in the book leads you to believe this?
3. What exactly is the “Dirt Diary” that Rachel writes? Define it and its significance for Rachel. Draw evidence from the text.
4. How does Rachel plan to repay the money she borrowed? Provide evidence from the text. In your opinion, is this the best she can do? What else could she do?
5. What did Rachel find in Mr. Hammond’s bathroom? What rumor did she start? Why? Provide evidence from the text.

RELATED WEB SITES

“Honesty is the Best Policy” Lesson Plan

<https://character.org/lessons/lesson-plans/middle/john-a-carusi-middle-school/>

A lesson plan about trust, honesty, and the consequences of lying.

Good Character

<http://www.goodcharacter.com/>

Information about teachers’ responsibilities in forming students’ good character.

Friendships Lesson Plan

<http://www.goodcharacter.com/YCC/BeingFriends.html>

A teaching guide for healthy friendships.

Making Money Lesson Plans

https://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/foreducators/lesson_plans/all_ages.php

Financial literacy lesson plans.