

The Wild Christmas Reindeer

Written and illustrated by Jan Brett

Introduction

In this marvelously original story for the Christmas season, we are taken to the Arctic where we meet a young girl, Teeka, and eight of Santa's reindeer. Given a difficult and important job to do Teeka tries much too hard and behaves in a way which is destined to fail. Children will identify with Teeka's struggle to do well, and will rejoice with her when she discovers one of life's previous lessons.

Jan Brett's illustrations of the magnificent reindeer living on the tundra help tell the tale of a little girl who gathers enough inner strength to act with kindness and love.

Story Summary

It is the beginning of December, and Santa has asked young Teeka to ready his reindeer to fly with him on Christmas Eve. Teeka is happy to do this, but a little worried, too. The reindeer have been free on the tundra for a year, and Teeka is not sure she can catch them and train them to pull the sleigh. She decides to be strong and firm. Teeka screams at the reindeer, brushes them too hard, and ignores the routines that make them comfortable. Instead, Teeka tries to force her will on them. Soon the reindeer are wilder than ever. Teeka learns, just in time, that with soft words and gentle hands, the reindeer can get it right.

Before Viewing the Video

Ask the children how they feel when someone yells at them or bosses them around. Ask if they can think of a time when they have been the ones yelling or bossing someone else. Urge the children to listen for the moment when Teeka changes the way in which she treats the reindeer.

Questions About the Story

- 1.) Why was Teeka a little afraid when Santa asked her to get the reindeer ready for him?
- 2.) Teeka was sure that the reindeer wouldn't want to come in from the tundra. Why?
- 3.) When the reindeer were being herded toward Winterfarm, the one named Tundra gave Teeka the most trouble. Why did he give Teeka a hard time?
- 4.) How did the reindeer show they were upset?
- 5.) When Teeka was grooming the reindeer to make them look good for Santa why did their ears turn pink?

- 6.) When Teeka tried to make the reindeer stay in line they ran away wildly. What could Teeka have done to make everything go more smoothly?
- 7.) When the reindeer were sprawled out on the snow with their antlers locked, they could not move. "A frosty silence hung in the air". What do you think these words mean? Why do you think the author chose the word "frosty" in this sentence?
- 8.) Teeka began to cry when she saw the reindeer all tangled together. What did she realize?
- 9.) How did Teeka show the reindeer that she was changing? What did she promise to do?
- 10.) When the reindeer heard Teeka speaking in a new voice, how did they feel?
- 11.) How did the reindeer practice the next day? Where was Tundra?
- 12.) How did Teeka feel as she watched the reindeer carry the sleigh off into the night?

Activities and Discussion

1. **DRAMA** Children often love to perform. Have small groups act out the story of Teeka and the reindeer. Slightly older children might want to try the story without using any reindeer, but concentrating on the character of Teeka and her actions and reactions. Remind the children of the discussion which took place before hearing the story about being bossy or kind. Change the characters and problems and let the children improvise different stories, while maintaining the bossy/kind theme.
2. **CUSTOMS** Do a bit of research with the children to find out how the concept of Santa and his reindeer are portrayed in other cultures. For instance, the reindeer in Teeka's world have different names than they might have in other cultures. What are they called elsewhere? What does Santa look like in other countries? Does Santa drop off presents? What are some of the other Christmas holiday customs enjoyed around the world?
3. **THE ARCTIC** The names of the eight reindeer in this story are: Tundra, Lichen, Crag, Bramble, Heather, Windswept, Snowball, and Twilight. Discuss how these names pertain to the Arctic, where the story takes place. Examine the fine art in this story and try to find other pictures and photographs of the Arctic. Point out the lichen, tundra, crags, etc. Ask the children to think of eight new names for the reindeer, as if the story had taken place in the jungle or the sea.

4. **THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS** Religious schools will want to tell the traditional story of the holiday, and perhaps discuss where the ideas of Santa, the reindeer, and the presents originated.
5. **ART** Set aside a large table on which the children can recreate life on the tundra. The white snow-covered ground could be made from cotton, papier maché, or soap bubbles. The children can work in groups, and each one can concentrate on a different part of the diorama. Included in the scenes could be vegetation, animals, a small village, perhaps even Santa's sleigh filled with presents.
6. Especially at Christmas, teachers and parents try to provide opportunities for children to learn the lessons of kindness, giving, and love, all of which have been explored in this story. Find a group your class can visit (another class, nursing home, day care center,) and share the day with others. Make treats to bring along, do art projects, sing songs, play games, and enjoy friendship.
7. **ABOUT REINDEER** Another name for reindeer is caribou. Reindeer have been around as long ago as the great Ice Age. They have thick woolly coats, so they must live in the North where it's cold. They have large splayed feet that act as snowshoes. Both the bucks (males) and the does (females) have antlers. When full grown, they rub their antlers against trees so that the velvety outer skin of the antlers falls off and the antlers become sharp, for fighting.