



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Inkling

Kenneth Oppel
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

A moving but light-hearted story about grief, family and a sixth-grade rivalry. When Ethan's class is given the task of creating a graphic novel and magical ink jumps out of his father's sketchbook, a strange series of events is set into motion. To his younger sister, Inkling is Lucy, her beloved dog; to his father, Inkling is a second chance at a dwindling career and a chance to solve his family's money worries. Friends and enemies alike try to use Inkling to ace tests and create bestselling comic books, but to Ethan, Inkling is his friend – and he must do everything in his power save him.

Author Information:

Kenneth Oppel is the New York Times bestselling author of over two dozen children's books, including *Airborn*, *Every Hidden Thing*, *The Boundless* and *The Nest*, which was illustrated by Jon Klassen. He is the recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award, the Canadian Governor General's Award for Children's Literature and The Times Children's Novel of the Year. *Inkling* is his most recent novel. Kenneth lives with his wife and children in Toronto, Canada.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 4-6
- Ages 8-11

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Mishaps
- Drawing/Art
- Family
- Friendship
- Grief



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Before Reading

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel?

Exploring the Text

What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Inkling takes inspiration from art that it consumes, such as the *King Kong* poster and *Anne of Green Gables*. Visit your school library and choose a novel or a picture book, or find a painting or illustration online. Read/study the book or painting to replicate the author or artist's style. Discuss the idea of taking inspiration from art for your own art. What is the difference between being inspired by something and plagiarising it?

Ethan and his friends are working on a graphic novel as a class project. In groups, take a passage from the book and create a comic strip version of it. Use speech and thought bubbles for dialogue and inner monologues, but try to convey most of the action through the illustrations. Assign responsibilities to each team member, for example one person can create the text, another can sketch the illustrations, another can ink and colour, etc.

Describe Ethan's relationship with his dad, Peter, at the beginning of the novel. How does it change throughout the story? What are some key scenes that affect their relationship?

Inkling hates Peter's sketchbook and avoids it. Why do you think that is?

Do you think it is ethical for Ethan to claim that he drew the illustrations that were actually drawn by Inkling? Why does he tell people he did it? What do you think you would do in the same situation?

Write a guide to looking after Inkling. Consider what he needs to be fed, how to keep him safe, what makes him happy and what he is scared of. Use quotes from the text to support your guide.

Why do you think Vika is suspicious of Ethan and his father? Why does she leave school to spy on Mr. Ryland?

Ethan's mother, Olivia, passed away before the beginning of the story and her loss is still felt very strongly by Ethan, his dad and his sister. Infer from the text what life in the Ryland household might have been like before Olivia died. How is the family dealing with life without her? How does Inkling help the family rebuild?

Karl and Vika feed Blotter a stack of *Exterminatrix* comics and it develops a very different drawing and writing style to Inkling. Why is that? Describe the similarities and differences between Inkling and Blotter. What message can the reader take away from this about consuming a variety of art, rather than only consuming very similar art?

Compare the language Kenneth Oppel uses to describe Inkling (glistened, slithering, rippled, splotch, etc.) with the language used for Blotter (bubbling, oozing, belched, splattered, etc.). How does this language influence the reader's interpretation of these characters?

The last line of the novel echoes the first line. Why do you think Kenneth Oppel chose to connect the end to the beginning in this way?

Creative Responses to the Text

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

Imagine that a movie was being made of Inkling. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have. Also choose your ideal cast for the movie and create a movie poster.

Create a mood board of the story including words and phrases from the text and photos and illustrations that match what you saw in your mind while reading the book.

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