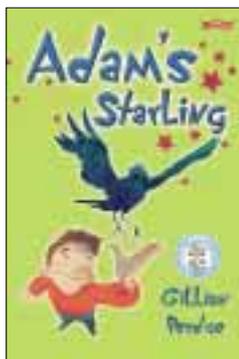


ADAM'S STARLING



by Gillian Perdue

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Adam is finding life difficult. His mum knows she is about to lose her job, his father works long and unsocial hours, and his grandfather is in a geriatric hospital. To make matters worse, he is being bullied in school, and no one in his family can suggest a way for him to deal effectively with the problem. Danny, Adam's perceptive older cousin, does his best to help Adam, but he can't be around all the time to protect and comfort him. His grandfather's trips down memory lane help to take his mind off his worries, and inadvertently provide him with the key to the problem. But it is not until a scruffy little starling comes into his life that the shy and sensitive Adam discovers his inner reserves of courage. In order to protect this starling, Adam takes on the bullies, discovering in the process strengths he never knew he had.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: e.g. dishevelled, tetchily, exasperated, quavered, emphasis, vigorously, grimy, gleeful, involuntarily, persistence, relented.
- ◆ Word-portraits: e.g. 'rake-thin old man' (p.10); 'two coins of colour' (p.11); 'hedgehog hair' (p.22); 'with the look of a whippet' (p.15); 'a not-very-nice kid' (p.15); 'milk seeped out ... forming a white map of Italy on the ground' (p.15); 'a small M of worry-lines across her nose' (p.22).
- ◆ Word-game: The Minister's Grandad. 'My grandad is a ...' Insert adjective beginning with the letter A, the next child inserts an adjective beginning with the letter B etc.
- ◆ Discussion: Many of the residents of the geriatric hospital were 'lost in their own worlds' (p.10). Grandad looked out the window, admiring the scenery, but he thought they were on a train. Adam wondered what he saw (p.13). What do you think Grandad saw, bearing in mind that he might have been visualising things he would have seen when he was much younger?
- ◆ Discussion: The drive to Adam's school usually took 'fifteen or even twenty minutes' (pp. 23–24). How do you travel to your school? Does anyone accompany you? If so, what do you talk about? Do you have any thoughts that you mightn't share as you journey to school?
- ◆ Discussion: Various nicknames or 'pet' names are mentioned in this book. Discuss the effect on the listener of affectionate names, like Lord Bountiful, Mr Panic, Madman Adam; and those said with a desire to hurt, such as little Addy-waddam, Addy-waddy, Lanky Lout or Stick Insect.
- ◆ Discussion: All the grown-ups in Adam's life gave him advice on how to deal with the bullies. Read their suggestions on pages 30, 51 and 89–90 and say whose advice you think is best. Can you think of a better way of dealing with bullies than is suggested in these pages?
- ◆ Discussion: 'Adam woke with the feeling that something good was going to happen' (p.60). Do you ever wake up with that feeling, without really knowing why? Try to describe the feeling. Do you sometimes get that feeling

at weekends? List the differences between a school morning and a weekend morning in your home.

- ◆ Discussion: The 'one where he'd been caned' was Grandad's most famous school story (p.64). If, in later years, Adam were to tell his, what might it be? What might your own most famous school story be?

- ◆ Discussion: Grandad quotes from a well-known poem, *The Village Blacksmith* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (p.63). This is obviously a poem that Grandad learned when he was in school. Find the rest of it and compare it with poetry you have read in school.

- ◆ Creative: Niamh tells Adam the story of the worm angel (pp. 57–58). Tell your own version.

- ◆ Creative: Adam nearly cries with laughter when he pictures his starling wearing 'metal boots ... with steel tips' (p.80). Think of other incongruous images for familiar objects or creatures and write a few sentences on each.

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: self-identity. Recognising, describing and discussing individual personality traits, qualities, strengths and limitations. Though he was afraid of the bullies, Adam was very strong when visiting his grandfather in hospital – in many ways Adam was better able to cope with these visits than was his mother. Discuss Adam's self-awareness and self-confidence, or lack of it.

- ◆ Myself: feelings and emotions. Identifying strong feelings and learning how to express and cope with these feelings in a socially appropriate manner. Adam's strong feelings were expressed in a very vivid way when he 'kicked Rory's desk harder than he'd ever kicked anything in his life' (pp. 128–129). He was 'so full of rage and strength, he couldn't sit down'. Discuss Adam's reaction and its appropriateness or otherwise.

- ◆ Myself: personal safety. Identifying people, places and situations that may threaten personal safety and beginning to realise that a strategy for keeping safe with people has to be developed and adhered to by each individual. Adam decided to visit the parking lot at the

back of the shopping centre and it was here that he was discovered by the bullies (pp. 72–73). Was it wise of Adam to visit such a deserted spot? Should he have gone without telling someone where he was going? Did he adhere to the rules about unsafe places?

- ◆ Myself and others: myself and my family. Understanding that families often undergo planned or unplanned changes that may be pleasant or difficult. Deirdre was facing the loss of her job and a resulting loss of income (p.54), and Adam at times felt sorry for himself that his parents were so busy (p.68). Family illness also causes stress in family life.

- ◆ Myself and others: myself and other people. Recognising, discussing and understanding bullying: why people bully, the behaviour that constitutes bullying, learning that bullying is always wrong, exploring and examining ways of dealing with a bully.

- ◆ Myself and the wider world: developing citizenship. Identifying the people who constitute the school community and the roles of individuals in contributing to the life of the school. Miss Hill, Niamh and Conor all treated Adam with care and consideration, while Shane and PJ treated him with a lack of respect.

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Weather, climate and atmosphere: weather and climate. Miss Hill taught the class weather lore (p.71). Collect and record weather lore from your own locality, such as the well-known sayings quoted on p.71.

VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Paint and design: perspective. Adam sat and gazed, 'to where the land seemed to melt into the sky, with an almost imperceptible line of white separating the two strips of grey' (p.70). Learn about perspective on pp. 32–33, *Discovering Art, Book 1*. Practise drawing perspective using the instructions given on those pages.

- ◆ Paint and design: mixing colours. The colours of Adam's starling were like petrol, 'the beautiful colour of petrol spilled on a path: greens, blues, a faint sheen of silver ...' (pp. 126–127). Scatter dry powder paints of different colours on a wet sheet of paper and watch the colours mingle.