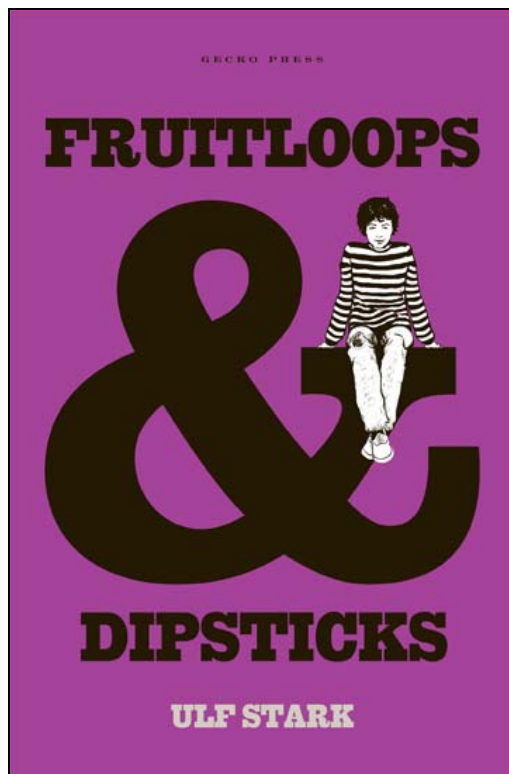


***Fruitloops and Dipsticks* by Ulf Stark**

Teaching Notes



Synopsis

Twelve year old Simone's mother is a fruitloop – she acts on impulse, often inappropriately. Their relationship is further strained when they move house, her dog is lost, her mother's boyfriend is constipated, and dying Grandpa moves in. Simone's anger is channelled into an elaborate lie: she pretends to be a boy at her new school. This leads to mistaken relationships with boys and girls and some comical situations. In the end Simone reveals her true self to everyone and farewells her Grandpa.

Author

Prize-winning author Ulf Stark has written around 30 books for children and young adults that have been translated into many languages (from Swedish).

Themes

The novel covers a wide range of themes including adolescent sexuality, identity, family influences, and life choices. In shaping her identity Simone must first deal with the difficult adults around her. Her relationship with her mother is volatile but she slowly learns to handle her embarrassment. Her Grandpa teaches her to embrace life and helps her start to form a non-conformist attitude. Simone is free to explore her attractions while 'hidden' in her boy persona.

The novel uses elements of a classic farce: mistaken identity, slapstick, exaggeration, and stereotypes. For example, Simone is readily accepted as a boy, she literally stumbles into trouble, characters talk at cross-purposes, and are divided into liberal or uptight (fruitloops and dipsticks).

Activities

1. Before reading, discuss the possible meaning of the title and the cover illustration.
2. 'There are no lies, only half-truths.' What does this quote at the start mean? How does Simone's behaviour reflect this statement. What is a lie and what is truth?
3. Simone longs for some stability at the start but is thrown into chaos instead. Does she find some stability by the end of the story? Discuss the essentials a child needs to be emotionally healthy.
4. What does the crystal ball symbolise for her? Can we know that the future will be safe and secure? (p.147)
5. Simone often wishes she had a 'proper mother' instead of a 'flaming goddess' (p.20-21). Why is Simone 'ashamed' of her mother? Brainstorm and list the qualities of a good mother.
6. What is Grandpa's definition of a fruitloop and a dipstick? (P.34). Who are the dipsticks and fruitloops in this story? Can people be so neatly divided in real life? Find examples of famous eccentric people.
7. What is the 'nastiness' that is taking over Simone? (P.34) Are feelings of anger and selfishness wrong? How can people express them safely?
8. Why doesn't Simone admit she's a girl sooner? What does it reveal about her personality?
9. Why does she blame Ingvar for everything? Why does Simone say sorry when he brings her a puppy?
10. What does Grandpa believe makes life interesting? (P.80) Do you agree with his philosophy that life should be an 'adventure'?
11. Grandpa can't decide if God is a fruitloop (p.80) or a dipstick (p.146). Debate his conflicting ideas about God.

12. Research the comedy form called 'farce'. Define mistaken identity, slapstick and stereotypes. This is a form commonly used in movies. Find some examples.

Further Reading

Two similar books explore the assumptions people make about gender and feature school children who 'become' the opposite sex for a time. *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler* by Gene Kemp is about a girl, and *Bill's New Frock* by Anne Fine is from a boy's point of view. Ulf Stark's novel series about 'My Friend Percy' are about a precocious boy bordering the teenage years. His stories often have a wise older character.