



Billie B. Brown: The Secret Message

By Sally Rippin

Illustrated by Aki Fukuoka

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Write a letter which includes some simple comments and questions.
- Explore some of the emotions highlighted in the story.
- Design and label their impression of the most beautiful sandcastle.
- Write a postcard.

About the Story:

Billie B. Brown is spending the day at the beach where she plans to build the biggest and most beautiful sandcastle imaginable. But when she notices the very big and very beautiful sandcastle being built by two girls nearby, Billie can't help but wish she could join them. Too shy to approach the girls, Billie continues working on her own sandcastle and stumbles across a small green bottle buried in the sand. Her discovery quickly attracts the interest of the girls and Billie soon finds herself happily playing alongside her new friends. But Billie's joy quickly turns to despair when she causes an accident that leaves the sandcastle in ruins and her bottle broken in half. Convinced that her new friendship is also broken and too scared to approach the girls with an apology, Billie comes up with a clever plan that will help her salvage her new friendship.

Before You Read the Story:

Read the title of the story to the students. Ask students to share their experiences with sending or receiving "secret messages." Invite students to comment on the link between the title of the story and the illustration of Billie holding a small green bottle. Now turn to the back cover and read the blurb aloud. Invite students to comment on the likelihood that the bottle contains a secret message. Based on the assumption that the bottle does contain a message, spend time imagining who the author of the message is and under what circumstances they have written it.

Questions and Activities:

Chapter One

- What is Billie's plan for her day at the beach?
- What causes Billie to feel jealous?
- Why is Billie so afraid to go over and ask the girls if she can play with them?

Activity: Direct students to Billie's impression of the biggest and most beautiful sandcastle as pictured on page 6 and invite students to offer their opinion of the castle and suggestions for improvement. Using the ideas generated in the discussion, ask students to design and label the features of their biggest and most beautiful sandcastle. Instruct students to give their sandcastle a name, which they are to write at the top of their design, and list the materials and tools they think they would need to create this castle underneath the design. Students can share and discuss their designs in small groups.



Chapter Two

- What is Billie doing at the time she discovers the glass bottle?
- Is Billie able to see what's in the bottle? Why or why not?
- Who notices Billie's discovery?
- What is Billie's super-duper idea?

Activity: Highlight the fact that Billie invents the idea of the glass bottle containing a secret message from a pirate. Ask students to imagine that this is actually true. Invite them to offer suggestions as to the location of the pirate when writing the message, the circumstances surrounding the pirate's need to send a secret message and the intended recipient of the message. With these ideas in mind, send students to brainstorm, plan and write a secret message from a pirate. Published messages can be rolled and stored in a mock glass bottle from which one message is withdrawn each day and read out loud to the class. Messages may then be bound and left in the reading corner.

Chapter Three

- What causes Billie's heart to flap around like a butterfly?
- Billie and Harriet spend some time chatting. What do they chat about?
- *It looks magnificent.* What does this describe?
- What makes Harriet and Charlotte gasp?
- Why is Billie so concerned when the girls discover there is nothing in the glass bottle?

Activity: Billie experiences many emotions in this chapter: excitement when Harriet approaches, shyness when she's speaking to Harriet, pride at having found the bottle and despair when she wrecks the sandcastle and her bottle splits to reveal her little white lie. Write these emotions on the board. Now highlight the way the author describes the feeling of excitement as your "heart flapping around like a butterfly." Invite students to share how their bodies respond to exciting events or news. Record their observations. Consider each description and assist students to invent a creative alternative to describe this sensation. As an example, students may note that their legs move around a lot when they are excited. A creative alternative could be that their legs bounce around like basketballs. Or, students may observe that their tummies feel funny when they are excited. A creative alternative could be that their tummies flip flop around like a fish. Consider making a display for each emotion and labeling a silhouette with these creative descriptions.

Chapter Four

- Billie is terribly upset. What does her mom suggest she do to fix the problem?
- How does a newspaper help Billie to solve her problem?
- Charlotte returns an empty bottle to Billie. What does Billie think this means? Is she right? Why or why not?

Activity: Instruct students to create and write a postcard from Billie to Jack that has references to a few important events that occurred in the story. Allow students to publish their postcards as real postcards and provide used stamps for effect.

Teacher Tips adapted from Hardie Grant Egmont.