



A Book Review & Action Plan for Using Renata Galindo's "My New Mom & Me"

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Book Review

It is challenging to find a children's book effectively dealing with the sensitive topic of adoption; "*My New Mom & Me*" by Renata Galindo provides an insightful description of the fears, challenges, and joys of a child and parent as they become a new family. The characters are portrayed as animals where-in the mom is a cat and the child is rendered as a puppy. The depiction of animals as the characters is an effective strategy helping to make this book more appealing to children, while also broaching a sensitive topic in a less traumatic way.

The story begins as the child arrives at a new home after being adopted. While the story includes minimal text, this book successfully illustrates the fears and concerns the child has about this new relationship. The book provides readers with a relevant portrayal of the child's nervousness and worries, as well as including the range of positive and negative emotions that may emerge as

the child transitions to a new life in this family. The story poignantly shows how the child deals with the concerns about looking different from the parent while the parent assures the child that their differences make them special. The story depicts the daily activities the parent and child do together as they learn to bond and become a family.

This book exhibits many positive elements. Adoption is represented in a straightforward, caring, and realistic manner as the story describes the typical emotions that may evolve during these types of transitions. The illustrations well exhibit the range of characters' emotions and as well tenderly capture their growing love and affection for one another.

Bibliotherapy Connections

This story may be sweet and simple, but the message is powerful and positive. Teachers, counselors, and social workers will find this book valuable for bibliotherapy where-in books are used in a therapeutic manner. Pardeck and Pardeck (1987) describe how bibliotherapy is especially useful for children that have been in foster or adoptive care.

Bibliotherapy is often described as a three-stage process (Dreyer, 1985; Iaquina & Hipsky, 2006). "Universalization or Identification" occurs in the first stage as children come to the realization that they are not alone as they meet characters in a story that are also facing similar problems. This is comforting to children going through a crisis as they often feel no one else has ever gone through what they are experiencing. The next stage is referred to as "catharsis." In this second stage, children make a connection with the characters that are finding a way to cope with similar problems. The third stage is identified as "Insight" where-by the child increases both their self-and world understanding. This means, the experience of reading this book with a caring adult supports children's perspective taking as well as nurtures their intrapersonal development.

Pardeck and Pardeck (1987) suggest as children discuss stories about sensitive topics with adults, they may find possible solutions to the problems they find in their lives. This book can serve as a conversation starter between adults and children as there are many valuable lessons to be learned from this uplifting story. However, it is important to do more than merely read the story; it is critical to provide children with opportunities to process what they are hearing. "What are the children actually learning from this story?"

Rozalski, Stewart, and Miller (2010) emphasize the importance of helping children apply what they have learned to their own lives in some way. In addition to the significance of rich discussions, a variety of follow-through activities can be helpful. An adult, conferencing with a single child, may further support his or her underlying thinking.

Action Plan

After introducing and reading the story, an effective strategy is to ask the child(ren) some key questions about the story. It is important that the conversations occur in a nonthreatening manner (Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). Some suggested questions to use with this book might include:

- *Why do you think the puppy felt nervous when arriving at his new home?
- *Have you ever felt nervous when you did something new or different?
- *Do some children look differently from their parents? How? Is that okay?
- *What did the new mom do in the story to show she loved her puppy?
- *What do your parents do to show they love you?
- *What kinds of things happened in the story that made the puppy mad?
- *Do you ever feel mad at your parents?
- *In the story, what kinds of things made the puppy sad?
- *Do you ever feel sad?
- *What did the new mom do to help the puppy feel better?
- *What do your parents do for you to help you feel better?
- *What did the puppy learn about being a member of a family?

After thoughtful and sensitive discussion, it is suggested to follow up with related activities. Pardeck (1990) recommends that you allow children to express what they have learned in some type of authentic way. It is important children be able to honestly portray their feelings, whatever they may be. These are some suggested activities that might follow the discussion of this book.

Drawing: Have the children draw a before and after picture of how the puppy felt when he first arrived at his new home and then show how he felt after getting to know his new mom. Discuss how and why his feelings changed.

Finger paint: Have the children create pictures that show different emotions experienced by the puppy (fear, anger, sadness, joy). Discuss what each picture represents and be nonjudgmental about whatever feelings the child chooses to express.

Clay/Playdough: Have the children use the clay or playdough to show how they feel when they get angry or sad. Then have the children use the material to show how they feel when they are happy. Discuss what the children can do when they feel these strong emotions of anger or sadness.

Puppetry: Have the children act out scenes from the story using puppets. Make sure you include the ending scene when there is some resolution to the challenges the puppy faced.

Application Scenarios

This book would be an excellent resource for adoptive families as it provides honesty and assurance that while forming a family has its challenges, this is all part of the natural process of becoming a family. It is not unusual for adopted children to struggle with the reality they may not physically resemble their adoptive parents; Galindo masterfully navigates this concern.

Additionally, this book may be especially valuable for:

- 1) Single adoptive parents as the book only represents the child and the mom; yet, the book is also useful for describing other family structures and differences.
- 2) Families with racial differences as it effectively addresses differences in families in a simple, yet appropriate manner.
- 3) Children and parents from non-adoptive families to help reduce the negative stereotypes and misconceptions that sometimes exist regarding adoptive families.

Conclusion

Galindo captures the heart of the reader as she shares the journey of this newly formed forever family. It provides hope, comfort, and reassurance for all those who become families through adoption. This book clearly supports the sensitive discussion of adoption. It would be used most effectively with children from three-to-seven years of age.

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