

The Hundred Dresses Study Guide

The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes

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Plot Summary

In "The Hundred Dresses," Wanda Petronski, in the hope of fitting in with the other girls of her class, claims to have one hundred dresses at home, though she wears the same faded dress to school every day. Several of the girls begin to tease Wanda about her claim until Wanda turns in a hundred drawings of beautiful dresses. Maddie, one of the girls in the class, feels guilty because she never stood up for Wanda and that guilt is multiplied when she learns Wanda has moved away because of how she was treated.

Wanda Petronski is the new girl in Room 13. Peggy is the most popular girl in the class and Maddie is her best friend. Wanda lives in a poor neighborhood with her father and brother. She doesn't have a mother. Wanda is not readily accepted into the groups of friends and she doesn't seem to really know how to fit in. She wears the same faded blue dress to school every day. It doesn't fit well but it's always clean.

One day, a student named Cecile arrives with a new crimson dress. Everyone is admiring the new dress. Wanda stops and becomes part of the group of girls. She shyly whispers to Peggy that she has 100 dresses lined up in her closet at home. Peggy immediately seizes on the statement and laughs at Wanda. The other girls follow her lead. They ask why she never wears any of them to school and she explains that they are party dresses. Soon, most of the girls are teasing Wanda and laughing about her 100 dresses.

Maddie doesn't laugh and she knows she should step up and say something to stop the teasing. But Maddie is poor herself and she's afraid that the other girls will make fun of her if she says anything. She doesn't object and the teasing goes on for days. Sometimes the girls tease Wanda on the school yard. Sometimes Peggy waits for Wanda at the corner of Olive Street and begins the teasing before they even reach the school.

Meanwhile, the lessons go on. Wanda sits in a corner of Room 13 where most of the noisy boys sit. Most of the students in that corner don't get good grades and there is usually mud on the floor, tracked in by the students who walk to school from the country.

One day, Miss Mason announces that it's time for the annual drawing contest. The girls are to draw a dress and the boys are to draw a motorboat. One boy and one girl will be chosen as winner of the contest. When it's time to turn in the drawings, the children are amazed to find that Wanda has turned in 100 drawings. Each is a beautiful dress and it's obvious this is the 100 dresses she claimed were lined up in her closet at home. Everyone agrees that she is a talented artist and it's no surprise when she wins the prize.

But Wanda isn't at school to collect her prize or to receive her congratulations. She has been absent for a couple of days by this time. Miss Mason reads a letter from Wanda's father, Jan Petronski, who says he is tired of his children being teased. He says people have made fun of them, including their name, and that he's moving them to a larger city



where he hopes their name won't stand out so much. Miss Mason says she can't imagine that any of the students in her class teased Wanda.

Maddie and Peggy feel guilty that they played a role in making Wanda's life so miserable that her family moved. They go into the neighborhood where Wanda lived but find the house is already vacant. They write Wanda a letter, intending to apologize, but they wind up just writing a friendly letter. At the Christmas party, Miss Mason reads a letter from Wanda. She says she wants to give a specific drawing to Maddie and another to Peggy. Maddie later realizes that the girls wearing the dresses resemble Maddie and Peggy.

Peggy accepts the drawing and the letter as signs that everything is alright with Wanda and she moves on. Maddie, however, continues to deal with the guilt that she didn't speak up for someone who became so unhappy that the family moved to escape the situation.



Wanda

Summary

The first chapter, titled "Wanda," opens on Monday in Room 13. Peggy is the most popular girl in the class. Madeline, known to her friends as Maddie, is Peggy's best friend. Another girl in the class, Wanda Petronski, is absent, but no one really notices. Wanda sits in a corner of the room where mostly boys sit. The boys are all from the countryside and the students in this corner usually have mud on their shoes from their walk to school. Most of the boys in this corner don't make good grades and they are very noisy. Wanda is not noisy. She sometimes smiles but never laughs out loud. She lives in a poor neighborhood called Boggins Heights. Wildflowers bloom there in the summer but it's not a good neighborhood.

No one really notices Wanda during class but the girls often gather around her before and after school, and during the breaks when they are all in the school yard. Wanda is absent again on Tuesday. Again, no one really notices except big Bill Byron, who sits behind Wanda. He puts his "long legs around Wanda's desk "like a frog," making the other students laugh.

On Wednesday, Peggy and Maddie wait outside school. They expect Wanda to come along any minute and plan to "have some fun with her." Wanda never shows up. When another student, Jack Beggles, runs into the class, Maddie and Peggy know they are late. Jack always rushes to his seat just as class is beginning. By the time Maddie and Peggy get to their seats, the class is already reciting The Gettysburg Address. Class begins every morning with the class reciting this speech.

Analysis

One of the important details revealed in this chapter is the seating arrangement in Room 13. There is a corner of the room where several noisy boys sit. It seems likely that the teacher has assigned seats and that's why the boys sit in that corner. They are noisy and they don't make good grades. They also arrive at school with mud caked on their shoes because they walk to town from the surrounding countryside. No one really knows why Wanda sits among these boys. The Narrator suggests that the teacher might have assigned Wanda this seat because her shoes are often muddy. It's later revealed that Wanda probably doesn't make good grades, and that may be why the teacher has her sit there. Regardless of the reason, setting Wanda apart in this way has also set her apart in the minds of the other girls in the room. The teacher may not have meant to do so, but she is part of the reason Wanda isn't making friends and winds up being an outcast.

Peggy and Maddie are introduced in this chapter. Peggy is very popular and Maddie is her best friend. There are several other girls in the class and it seems that they are all



friendly with each other, though some of the girls are closer than others. This seems typical of any classroom and the relationships seem believable.

The class begins each day by reciting the Gettysburg Address. This is the famous speech given by President Abraham Lincoln at the commemoration ceremony at Gettysburg, an important battle in the Civil War. The final lines of this speech include references to the soldier who died in that battle and call for “a new birth of freedom.” This is an important ideal because Wanda's family are likely immigrants. Their last name indicates they could be from Poland. Many families have arrived in America in search of a better life, including the freedom to live their lives without persecution. Wanda finds herself persecuted by the other students in the class, partly because of her last name.

Discussion Question 1

How do you think Wanda's seat in the classroom affects her inability to make friends with the other girls? Would her life have been different if she'd been seated among the girls of the class?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the reasons Wanda and her family might have come to America?

Discussion Question 3

List what you know about the friendship between Maddie and Peggy. Keep the list and add to it as you find additional details in the story.

Vocabulary

precarious, reciting, unison, session, vain, perish, rarely, caked, scuffling, contrary, entertainment, managed



The Dresses Game

Summary

Maddie and Peggy take their seats and then look at the desk where Wanda usually sits. She isn't there and the desk is dusty, meaning she might not have been there for at least a couple of days.

Wanda lives "way up on Boggins Heights." This is a very poor neighborhood. The children go there in the summer to pick wildflowers. The first house in the neighborhood belongs to "old man Svenson." He lives alone and there are rumors about him, including that he "was no good." Some people say he's harmless but the children still rush past his house, anxious that he might see them. He lives alone with just a dog and a cat. Wanda's house is farther into the neighborhood and she lives with her father and her brother, Jake.

Wanda's last name is Petronski. No one else in school has a name like that. Wanda always wears the same faded blue dress. The dress is clean but it looks like it's never ironed right so it hangs awkwardly. She doesn't have friends. She walks to school alone and stands alone in the school yard unless the other girls gather around, intent on making fun of her.

Often, Peggy begins the teasing. She asks Wanda about the dresses she has at home. Wanda always insists she has "a hundred" dresses "all lined up in my closet." She agrees when Peggy suggests they are made of silk and velvet. The girls then allow Wanda to walk away but they burst into laughter before she's gone far. They talk about the one faded blue dress she wears everyday and wonder why she would tell such an incredible lie. Wanda then stands by the brick wall, all alone, and waits for the school bell to ring.

Sometimes the girls meet Wanda on Olive Street on her way to school. They ask about the dresses and sometimes ask about her shoes. Wanda insists she has 50 or 60 pairs, all in her closet at home. After they laugh at her some, the girls begin to drift away with their friends. Peggy, who started the game, is always the last to leave along with Maddie, Peggy's best friend.

Maddie doesn't think it's right to tease Wanda in this manner. She wants to tell Peggy to stop but she is afraid. Maddie is also poor. She often wears Peggy's hand-me-down dresses. Maddie's mother adds some trim or does alterations to the dresses so that they look a little different. Despite this, Maddie knows that the girls might begin to tease her at any time. She is afraid to stand up for Wanda because she believes the other girls might begin to tease her instead of Wanda.

Maddie has known Peggy for a long time. Peggy isn't cruel. She stands up for little kids who are being bullied. She cries if she sees an animal being hurt. Wanda knows that



Peggy would say she wasn't being cruel to Wanda. She would say that she doesn't understand why Wanda lies about the dresses and she would point out that Wanda has never cried.

Analysis

The story is written from Maddie's perspective and this means the reader never sees Peggy's thoughts. There's no way to know why Peggy teases Wanda or what she really thinks about Wanda. There is, however, a paragraph in which Maddie reveals what she thinks Peggy feels. In that paragraph, Maddie imagines Peggy saying that Wanda shouldn't lie about having the dresses. She also believes that Peggy would say Wanda isn't "an ordinary person" because of her last name. This indicates a level of prejudice that may very well be part of the girls' everyday lives. The reader should remember that the story was written in the 1940s. The adults of this time still remember World War I and the country is about to be involved in World War II. The world politics of the day are complex and many foreigners are hated simply because of the actions of their countries. The girls may get their attitudes about Wanda's heritage from their parents.

The man who lives at the entrance to Boggins Heights is another example of this prejudice, which is an important theme during this time. His last name is Svenson and there are many rumors about him. This name also indicates the man is an immigrant or that his parents or grandparents were. The fact that there is some distrust toward him and that there are rumors indicate that he isn't well received in the community and that may be another extension of the world politics of the day.

Maddie and Peggy are best friends but Maddie apparently isn't certain that Peggy would stand up for her. Maddie wants to speak up for Wanda. She wants to make Peggy and the other girls stop teasing her but she fears the girls will turn their attention to her. This is an indication that Maddie isn't secure in Peggy's friendship and that she isn't certain that Peggy is a kind person. It seems to contradict her earlier statement that Peggy isn't mean.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Peggy is trying to be cruel to Wanda?

Discussion Question 2

What new details are revealed in this chapter about the relationship between Maddie and Peggy?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Wanda insists that she has a hundred dresses in her closet at home?



Vocabulary

intruders, furthermore, forgotten, scattered, silk, velvet, exclaimed, exaggerated, cruel, circulated, disgracefully, scurry, strewn, surrounded, incredulously, stolidly, shrieks, peals, obviously, derisively, nudge, fringe, disperse, mock



A Bright Blue Day

Summary

One day, Maddie thinks back to the day Wanda first said she had a hundred dresses. It was a bright blue day in October. Maddie and Peggy were walking to school together and Maddie notices that the weather made everything look beautiful. Other children were walking to school and their clothes captured the light in a wonderful way.

Cecile is another girl in their class. On that day, Cecile was wearing a new crimson dress. The brilliant red color captured the attention of all the other girls and they gathered around to admire Cecile. She has “fancier” clothes than the other girls and takes dance lessons. As the group gathered around, Wanda arrived with her brother, Jake. Jake always arrived at school early because he helped the janitor with the tasks around the school, including starting the furnace and raking leaves. On that day, Wanda left Jake's side and remained with the other girls.

As they were all admiring Cecile's new dress, Wanda whispered something in Peggy's ear. Peggy asked her to say it again, and Wanda said that she has “a hundred dresses at home.” Peggy and the other girls said no one has that many dresses but Wanda insisted. She said they are “for parties.” Someone asked why she didn't wear any of them to school and Wanda didn't answer, but insisted again that she did have a hundred dresses. Peggy took the lead, saying “the child” might be afraid of getting ink or chalk on them. Everybody laughed but the bell rang, breaking up the conversation. As they rushed away, Peggy said Wanda's dresses sounded “bee-you-tiful.” Everyone laughed again.

For the most part, everyone forgets about Wanda except when they see her outside school and begin teasing her. Maddie thinks back about that day and says it all happened so quickly that she didn't have time to say anything about it.

Analysis

Maddie thinks back about the day when Wanda had first said she had a hundred dresses. Maddie remembers that the weather was beautiful and that everything looked brilliant in that light, including Wanda in her faded blue dress. But after Peggy teased Wanda about her hundred dresses, Maddie's attitude changed. She says nothing looked as pretty as it had a few minutes before the teasing began. This indicates that Maddie sees the teasing as wrong from the first moment, even though she doesn't think she can do anything to stop it. This is an important look at Maddie's perspective. The day doesn't seem to change for anyone else and it indicates that Maddie might be the only person who sees the teasing as wrong.

There is a large group of girls gathered around Cecile to admire her new crimson dress. This seems typical of girls of this age and it seems reasonable that they might form a



group like this to talk about Cecile's dress and to dream of dresses they want for themselves. Wanda joins this group and no one even really notices that she's there. This indicates that the girls aren't intent on teasing her until she speaks up but they also aren't interested in making friends with her. It seems that Wanda wants to be part of the group and is desperate to say something that will earn her the friendship she seeks. That's why she says she has a hundred dresses. Once everyone starts teasing her, Wanda may feel that she has no choice but to insist that it's true. It's later revealed that she does have a hundred drawings of dresses, but Wanda doesn't elaborate or tell anyone that she is talking about drawings rather than actual dresses.

Wanda's family is poor. They live in a poor neighborhood and she has only one dress. Jake goes to school early each day and helps the janitor with chores around the school. Some mornings he helps light the furnace and other days he helps rake leaves. It's likely that Jake is being paid a small salary for his work around the school and that this money is vital for the family's existence. Nothing is ever revealed about Wanda's father, including what he does for a living, or what happened to her mother. This is another example of the limited perspective.

Discussion Question 1

Maddie doesn't speak up when the teasing first begins. Do you believe it's more difficult for Maddie to speak up later?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the situation in which Wanda claims to have a hundred dresses. Why do you think she makes this claim?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think no one offers to be friends with Wanda before she makes the comment about having a hundred dresses?

Vocabulary

flashed, vividly, swishing, admiring, slender, granite, especially, jolly, shimmered, jaunty, absentmindedly, shrugged, enveloped, finery, suspiciously



The Contest

Summary

Maddie thinks about the situation and she's glad that she has never made fun of Wanda. She knows she can never tell Peggy that she shouldn't make fun of Wanda. She wishes she had the courage to write Peggy a note asking her to stop. Maddie, however, is afraid. She wears Peggy's hand-me-down dresses. Her mother changes them some, adding trimming in the hope that no one will realize that it's Peggy's old dress, but Maddie is afraid that the girls will begin to make fun of her if she speaks up for Wanda.

Wanda sometimes talks about specific dresses and thinking about that makes Maddie wonder who'll win the drawing contest in their class. The girls are supposed to draw a dress and the boys are supposed to draw a motorboat. One girl and one boy will win a medal as a prize. Peggy usually wins the girls' contest. Maddie thinks more about the contest and forgets all about Wanda.

Analysis

An interesting aspect of this situation is that Wanda can describe specific dresses. She talks about one that's red and green and another that's blue. If the girls had stopped making fun of her, they might have recognized that Wanda has a vivid imagination. Someone comments that a girl would look like a Christmas tree in the red and green dress. They are making fun of her but sometimes the comments are sarcastic so that they might seem like genuine admiration if the girls didn't keep laughing at Wanda.

The book was copyrighted in 1944 and the drawing contest seems to be an example of this era. In modern day classes, girls and boys would not likely be assigned different subjects for their drawings. The fact that the girls are to design a dress and the boys are to design a motorboat is in indication that the gender roles were well defined during this time.

Discussion Question 1

What is the drawing contest that's coming up?

Discussion Question 2

How does this contest differ from a drawing contest that might be announced in a modern-day class?



Discussion Question 3

Do you think the other girls might begin to make fun of Maddie if she had spoken up for Wanda? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

disguise, trimmings, accord, announce, uncomfortable, timid, brilliant, shuddered, uncomfortable, sash, admiration



The Hundred Dresses

Summary

It's raining on the day the winner of the contest is to be announced. Maddie and Peggy hurry to class. They are amazed when they arrive because there are beautiful drawings of dresses all over the classroom. There are 100 in all and the boys' drawings are displayed in another room. Jack Beggles wins the contest in the boys' division.

Miss Mason says Wanda submitted the 100 drawings and the judges decided that any one of her drawings would have won the contest. That means Wanda is the winner in the girls' division. However, Wanda is not in class. Miss Mason gives the students permission to walk around and look at the drawings. Everyone claps and some of the boys stomp on the floor, then they rush to look at the drawings. Maddie points out a blue dress that Wanda had described. Peggy says Wanda draws well.

Miss Mason directs everyone back to their seat. She has a letter from Jan Petronski, Wanda's father. She reads the letter aloud. It begins with, "My Wanda will not come to your school anymore." Mr. Petronski goes on to write that people have made fun of Wanda and Jake because of their last name, and that they are moving to a larger city where there are "plenty of funny names." Everyone is silent after Miss Mason finishes. She says she can't imagine that any of her students made fun of Wanda. She says it's sad and that she wants the students to think about it.

Maddie is sick over this turn of events. She knows that she never teased Wanda but that she never stood up for her, either. Maddie feels she is guiltier than Peggy because Peggy never thought their teasing was hurting Wanda while Maddie knew it was wrong. Maddie knows that she has to do something. She plans to go to Boggins Heights after school, even if she has to go alone. As soon as school's dismissed, Peggy suggests that they go to Wanda's house to see if she's already gone. Maddie is glad Peggy had the same idea.

Analysis

The students are amazed at the beautiful drawings and they probably realize now that Wanda was talking about these drawings when she insisted she had a hundred dresses at home. The student applaud when Miss Mason announces that Wanda is the winner. No one is upset, including Peggy who is usually the one who wins the girls' contest.

When Maddie learns that Wanda has left, she feels a deep sense of guilt over her role in the events. She has never said anything when the other girls were teasing Wanda and now she's glad that she never joined in, but she also knows that she should have spoken up and put a stop to the teasing. This is an important theme in the book and Maddie's guilt will stay with her, making her determined never to repeat this mistake.



Discussion Question 1

Maddie says she is guiltier than Peggy. Do you agree?

Discussion Question 2

How do the other students react when Wanda wins the contest?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think the other students might have treated Wanda differently after she won the contest, if she'd still be in school?

Vocabulary

drizzling, naturally, gasped, dazzling, lavish, murmured, admiringly, assembled, exquisite, opinion, unfortunately, tense, expectant, deliberately, purposely, unfamiliar, thoughtlessness, miserable, dismissed



Up on Boggins Heights

Summary

Peggy and Maddie head to Boggins Heights right after school. Peggy seems to want to justify her actions toward Wanda. She says that she never called her “a foreigner” and never made fun of her last name. She then says that she always thought Wanda was “too dumb” to realize that they were making fun of her. Then Peggy says she's amazed at Wanda's drawing, and admits that Wanda can draw better than she. Maddie doesn't join in Peggy's conversation and spends her time hoping they will find Wanda still at home. She wants Wanda to stay and imagines that she and Peggy will stand up to anyone who tries to tease her from this point. Maddie is soon sad again, wishing that she could return to the way things were before everyone started making fun of Wanda.

They continue to Wanda's neighborhood. In the summer, wildflowers bloom all over the area but now it's just ugly and drab. There is trash all over a small brook.

They come first to old man Svenson's house and hurry past. They know that some people in town say he shot someone but others say he's harmless. They are relieved that it's too cold for him to be in his usual spot, outside in an old chair. They soon see a “little white house with lots of chicken coops” and Maddie believes that's Wanda's house. She notices that the house is “shabby but clean,” just like Wanda's faded blue dress.

Peggy knocks on the door but there's no one home. They call out but no one answers. Peggy suggests they might be gone somewhere and will be returning. They discover the door is unlocked and go inside. The house is totally empty and Maddie realizes that the house would not offer much protection from the cold of winter. They see a small room with a closet in the corner. Maddie thinks about Wanda saying that her dresses were “all lined up in the closet.”

They consider how they might reach Wanda. They wonder if old man Svenson knows where the family went. They think that they might write a letter and see if the post office will forward it. They see a cat and wonder if it belonged to Wanda, but then they see it at Mr. Svenson's house and decide it must belong to him. They can't work up the courage to knock on his door but then they see him coming up the road. Peggy yells at him, asking if he knows where Wanda's family went. He turns around and mumbles something but they can't figure out what he says. They rush home and Mr. Svenson goes on to his own house.

Maddie and Peggy run all the way back to Olive Street. Maddie knows that she's never going to forget about Wanda and how she made Wanda so unhappy. Even when she's having fun with Peggy, she remembers that she didn't stand up for Wanda and she becomes sad.



Peggy says there's nothing they can do. She also says that she asked Wanda questions about her dresses, and that her questions probably gave Wanda good ideas for her drawings. Peggy says Wanda might not have won the contest without Peggy's questions giving her the good ideas. Maddie considers Peggy's words, hoping they'll make her feel better, but they don't. Maddie knows that she will never again fail to speak up for someone. She knows that it might mean she loses Peggy as her best friend, but knows she can never stand by while someone else is so unhappy.

Analysis

Peggy's comments as they are headed to Boggins Heights provide an important look into her character. She says that she had never made fun of Wanda's name, as if that justifies the teasing about the dresses. Then she says she had always believed Wanda was so dumb that she wouldn't realize they were making fun of her. This indicates that Peggy was aware that they were making fun of Wanda. This is also a very unkind thing to say about Wanda. This seems to indicate that Peggy isn't as innocent in the situation as Maddie wants to believe. It's left to the reader to determine Peggy's motivations and whether she is a mean person or simply got caught up in the situation.

Wanda's family is poor. There is no doubt of that fact. Some people automatically assume that poor people will also be trashy and unintelligent. Prejudice is one of the themes of the story and this is another kind of prejudice. When Peggy and Maddie arrive at Wanda's house, they discover that the house is small and shabby, but it's also neat.

The neighborhood in general is trashy. Maddie and Peggy see trash around a brook at the edge of the neighborhood but there isn't any sign of that around Wanda's house. They also see the small closet and Maddie immediately thinks about Wanda insisting that she has a hundred dresses in her closet at home.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Peggy is mean or did she get caught up in the teasing without really meaning to hurt Wanda's feelings?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Boggins Heights and Wanda's house.

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Maddie has daydreams about saving Wanda from all sorts of dangerous situations?



Vocabulary

gruffly, dismal, assailed, vanished, consoled, wisps, amends, frail, dilapidated, muttering, disconsolate



The Letter to Room 13

Summary

Maddie and Peggy get together on Saturday to write Wanda a letter. They plan to tell her that they're very sorry for teasing her but they can't find the words. In the end, the letter is just a friendly way of saying "hello." They do tell her that she won the contest and ask if she likes her new home and her new teacher. They mail the letter to Boggins Heights, hoping that it will be forwarded to Wanda. As soon as they send the letter, they feel better.

They don't get the letter back so they believe it might have found its way to Wanda. But she doesn't write back. Maddie wonders if Wanda is too mad to answer.

Maddie thinks about the way Wanda looked and about how the dress never looked like it fit right, as if it wasn't ironed correctly. They suddenly realize that Wanda doesn't have a mother and that she probably washed and ironed her own dress. They also remember that the dress was always clean, and that Wanda had to wash it each night for school the next day.

Peggy mostly forgets about Wanda but Maddie can't put it out of her mind. She imagines standing up for Wanda. She imagines a group of girls teasing Wanda and that she stands up for her, saying Wanda is "just a girl." In her imagined scenes, the other girls are ashamed of their actions and Wanda is grateful. Sometimes, Maddie imagines saving Wanda from horrible situations, such as a sinking ship or a runaway horse. Wanda's eyes are always dull as she thanks Maddie. Maddie always says Wanda doesn't have to thank her.

As Christmas approaches, the children prepare for a Christmas party. They perform the play about Tiny Tim and Cecile does a dance called "Passing of Autumn." Then Miss Mason announces that she has a letter from Wanda. Wanda writes that she wants her classmates to keep her drawings because she has a hundred new ones in her new home. She says a specific drawing of a green dress should be given to Peggy while a drawing of a blue dress should be given to Maddie. She says her new teacher is not as good as Miss Mason and ends the letter with "yours truly." The letter is decorated with a Christmas tree surrounded by the buildings of a large city.

Maddie and Peggy carefully take their drawings home. They notice that the town is getting ready for Christmas. There are stacks of Christmas trees outside one store and a window is decorated with candy canes and other Christmas designs. Peggy says Wanda's letter and the drawing indicates "she really liked us." She believes the entire situation has come to an end and that "everything was fine." Maddie hopes Peggy is right but feels sad that she will never be able to apologize to Wanda or to "make things right."



At home, Maddie puts her drawing on the wall and notices that it makes her shabby bedroom look much better. She thinks about how she stood by, saying nothing as the other girls teased Wanda, and that Wanda was nice enough to give her a drawing anyway. She cries a little.

Suddenly, Maddie looks more closely at the picture. She realizes that the girl wearing the dress looks exactly like Maddie. The hair, eyes, and mouth are all the same. She realizes this means Wanda drew the picture especially for Maddie. She rushes to Peggy's house and asks to see her drawing. The girl in that drawing looks like Peggy. Maddie points out the similarities and Peggy says this means Wanda really did like them. Maddie agrees, then her mind drifts back to the school yard with Wanda insisting that she has a hundred dresses at home, "all lined up."

Analysis

Maddie spends a lot of time thinking about Wanda and all the times she should have stood up for Wanda. She begins having daydreams. In these, she imagines herself standing up for Wanda when other kids are teasing her. Maddie imagines saying that Wanda is just a girl, like any other girl. In her daydreams, Maddie imagines the other girls feeling ashamed for teasing Wanda. With this image, Maddie promises she will never again stand by while someone is being bullied.

In her daydreams, Maddie also imagines herself standing up for Maddie in all sorts of dangerous situations. She imagines saving Maddie from a sinking ship and from a runaway horse. In her imagination, these dangerous situations are probably no more frightening than the idea of standing up to Peggy and the others for teasing Wanda. This is an example of the peer pressure that pushes the situation even when it might have naturally come to a stop.

In her daydreams, Maddie always rescues Wanda but she notes that Wanda's eyes are "dull." This is Maddie's guilt making her remember how she let Wanda down. This guilt is a theme seen throughout the book as Maddie struggles to live with the memory of doing nothing to stop the teasing.

Maddie is still struggling with the guilt she feels over having let Wanda down. She probably wonders what Wanda thought about the girls in her class. Then Maddie notices that the girl in her picture looks like Maddie. Maddie takes this as a sign that Wanda drew the picture especially for her, and Peggy agrees. This seems to indicate that Wanda had been thinking of the girls in her class as she drew the pictures, and that she was hoping to make friends. This need for friendship, or the need to fit in, is an important theme in the book.

The ending of the story is somewhat anti-climatic in that the situation remains largely unresolved. Maddie never gets to apologize to Wanda but she learns an important lesson. The reader may imagine what happens when the next strange family moves into town. It seems that Maddie is determined never to stand by while another girl is bullied,



but she is also human and she will likely continue to worry that she will be teased for standing up for someone new. It's left to the reader to decide whether this is a lesson that remains with Maddie and impacts her future decisions.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Maddie stands up for people in the future? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Maddie's discovery that the girls in the pictures are Maddie and Peggy?

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Wanda feels after moving away and why do you think she gave her drawings to the girls who had teased her?

Vocabulary

hitched, rescued, equalize, decorated, transparent, interest, autumn, defending, reflected, finality, brilliancy, shabby, hastily, auburn, clattered



Characters

Wanda Petronski

Wanda Petronski is a new student in Room 13. She lives with her father, Jan Petronski, and her brother, Jake. The family is very poor. They live in a poor neighborhood called Boggins Heights. Wanda's older brother, Jake, works with the school janitor every morning, probably as a way to earn a little money to help the family.

Wanda has only one dress. It's blue and very faded, and she wears it to school every day. The dress is always clean but it doesn't fit her very well and it's obviously been worn a lot. Wanda wants to fit in with the other girls in her class but she obviously doesn't really know how. When the girls are all talking about clothes, Wanda announces that she has 100 dresses. She says they are party dresses in every color imaginable. It's obvious that Wanda doesn't really have 100 dresses and it doesn't occur to anyone to ask her more about them. When the girls begin making fun of Wanda about her 100 dresses, Wanda becomes defiant and doesn't try to explain.

The full details are not revealed in this story, but some of the other children make fun of Wanda's last name. She isn't a native of the area and, as an outsider, is not accepted into any of the groups of girls who are friends. Wanda apparently tells her father of her difficulties and her father decides to move the family away. Wanda writes a letter back to her classmates after she moves and it seems that she holds no hard feelings toward them. Looking closely at the letter, it may be that Wanda is simply trying to be the better person or that she's making the point that she can be nice even when the girls weren't nice to her.

Maddie

Maddie is a student in Room 13. Her best friend is Peggy, though Maddie admits that her own family is poorer than Peggy's family. Maddie wears hand-me-down dresses but her mother changes them up some so that it's not so obvious they were worn by Peggy. The fact that Maddie has a mother is one of the main things that sets her apart from Wanda.

Maddie talks about the bright, clear day in October when Cecile first wore the crimson dress to school. She is an intelligent and observant girl to have noticed that the weather makes everyone's clothes look better than usual that day. But she is also sympathetic and knows right from wrong. After the girls begin teasing Wanda, Maddie notices that the day isn't as bright and wonderful as it had been. The weather hasn't changed. Maddie has changed because she knows that the teasing directed at Wanda isn't right.

Maddie never participates directly in the teasing. She doesn't call Wanda names and she doesn't ask her about the 100 dresses. Despite that, she realizes that she's also wrong because she doesn't stand up for Wanda when the other girls are teasing her.



Maddie feels she is on shaky ground. She knows that the other girls could find reasons to tease her just as they are teasing Wanda. She's afraid that standing up for Wanda will make the other girls tease her as well. Maddie isn't brave enough to stand up for Wanda, but she still realizes that she is wrong for not speaking up. When Peggy has come to believe that everything is alright, Maddie continues to feel guilt. She says that Peggy never really felt she was doing anything wrong while Maddie always felt that she should stand up for Wanda.

Peggy

Peggy is the most popular girl in her class and her best friend is Maddie. Peggy is not a mean girl but she believes it's funny to tease Wanda about the 100 dresses. When the girls learn that Wanda's family has moved away, Peggy says she never thought Wanda would take the teasing so seriously. When the class gets a letter from Wanda, Peggy feels relief and accepts that everything is alright.

Miss Mason

Miss Mason is the teacher for the students in Room 13. She is a nice teacher and she expects her students to behave themselves. When she reads the letter from Wanda's father that indicates Wanda has been teased, she says she hopes the students in her class are not involved in teasing Wanda.

Bill Byron

Bill is the large boy who sits behind Wanda. When Wanda is absent, "Big Bill" can put his legs on each side of her desk, "like a frog." This makes the students in that corner of the room laugh.

Cecile

Cecile is another of the students in Room 13. She arrives at school one day wearing a new crimson dress and attracts the attention of all the students. She takes dance lessons and wears better clothes than most of the students.

Jan Petronski

This is Wanda's father. He doesn't appear in the story but writes a letter to Miss Mason after Wanda leaves school. He is the one who reveals to Miss Mason that students have been teasing Wanda and says he's moving her to a larger school where she will fit in better.



Jack Beggles

A student in Room 13, Jack is always barely on time. He is also the student who wins the boys' prize for drawing in the contest.

Jake Petronski

Jake is Wanda's brother. He usually goes to school a little earlier than the other students because he helps the school janitor with any jobs there are to do around the school. He helps with things like getting the furnace running or raking up leaves.

Old Man Svenson

This is an old man who lives in the yellow house that's the first house in Boggins Heights. He is usually alone and there are rumors about him, including that he shot a man, but most people say he is harmless. When Maddie and Peggy discover that Wanda's family is already gone, they consider asking Mr. Svenson if he knows where they've moved to, but they aren't brave enough to actually knock on his door.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Faded Blue Dress

This is the dress that Wanda wears to school everyday. The dress is the only dress Wanda has and Maddie notices that it's always clean, but it's still faded and it's obviously her only dress. This dress is why Peggy begins to tease Wanda about her claim of having 100 dresses at home.

The School Yard

This is basically the playground where Maddie, Peggy, and the other students play. The school yard becomes a place where the girls relentlessly tease Wanda.

Cecile's Crimson Dress

Cecile is a girl in Maddie's class. She has better clothes than most of the students and she arrives at school one day wearing a new crimson dress. The girls all begin talking about clothes and Wanda, in an attempt to fit in, announces that she has 100 dresses.

Old Man Svenson's House

This is the house where Old Man Svenson lives at the very beginning of Boggins Heights. The house is dilapidated and trashy, and it represents the poor neighborhood where Wanda lives. The fact that the children rush past it and are afraid of Old Man Svenson is an indication of their fear of poverty in general.

The Gettysburg Address

The students in Miss Mason's class open each day by reciting the Gettysburg Address. This is the famous speech given by President Lincoln at the commemoration of the battlefield at Gettysburg. The speech includes a passage about freedom for all the people of America.

October's Bright Blue Weather

There is a day in October when Cecile wears her new crimson dress and Maddie notices that everything looks bright and wonderful on that day. She says every girls' clothes catch the "sun's rays like bright pieces of glass." Then Wanda makes her announcement about having 100 dresses which prompts Peggy and the other girls to



tease her. Maddie says things don't look so bright after that, though the weather hasn't changed at all.

The Drawing Contest

This is a contest for the students in Miss Mason's class. The girls are to draw a dress and the boys are to draw a motorboat. Peggy usually wins the contest for the girls but Wanda wins this year.

The Drawing of the Blue Dress

This is the drawing Wanda gives to Maddie. It's not until she gets home with the drawing that Maddie realizes Wanda has drawn Maddie wearing the dress.

Wanda's Letter

This is a letter written by Wanda to Miss Mason and the children in Room 13. She says she has 100 new dresses all lined up in her new house and lists two pictures of dresses she wants to give Maddie and Peggy. This letter makes Peggy feel that everything is okay with Wanda, but Maddie continues to feel some guilt over how she treated Wanda.

The Christmas Party

This is an event at school just before the Christmas holiday. There are several performances, including Cecile's dance. It's during this party that Miss Mason reads Wanda's letter to the class.

Settings

Room 13

This is the classroom where Wanda, Maddie, and Peggy attend school. The room is divided into sections, including a corner of the room where most of the loud boys sit with those students who don't make good grades. It's also noted that this corner of the room is where most of the mud is on the floor. The room is a typical classroom and this is where Wanda's drawings are displayed.

Boggins Heights

Boggins Heights is a poor area of town where Wanda Petronski lives with her father and brother. Wildflowers grow in the area during the summer months and some of the children go there to pick them, but it's not a good place to live. There is an old man who lives in a yellow house at the edge of the neighborhood and all the children are afraid of him.

The Petronski House

This is a small but neat house in Boggins Heights where Wanda lives with her brother and father. Maddie and Peggy go to the house after the Petronskis have moved away. When Maddie and Peggy go inside, they discover the house would provide very little protection against the weather.

The Corner of Olive Street

This is a corner near the school where some of the girls sometimes meet up to walk to school together. Maddie and Peggy sometimes wait here for Wanda and Peggy teases Wanda about her "100 dresses" the rest of the way to school.

Wanda's Closet of Dresses

Wanda says she has 100 dresses, all lined up in the closet at her house. When Maddie and Peggy go to Wanda's house after she's moved, they discover that there is a very small closet but it's empty when they arrive there. The closet was never filled with real dresses but Wanda's drawings provide an imaginary wardrobe that makes her happy.



Themes and Motifs

The Effects of Bullying

Wanda doesn't fit in and that makes her a target for bullying. She sits in a corner of Room 13 and it's mostly boys in that corner. It appears Miss Mason instructs her to sit there, maybe because this is where most of the country boys sit and they often leave mud on the floor from their walk to school. She may have thought Wanda would also leave mud on the floor or there may have been some other reason. Whatever the reason, seating Wanda in that corner sets her apart from the rest of the girls and that's the first step in her inability to fit in. This makes her a prime target for bullying.

Peggy doesn't feel she's doing anything wrong by teasing Wanda about her dresses. She says she was only kidding and that she never expected Wanda to take it so seriously. When Wanda's father writes a letter to Miss Mason about the bullying and announces that he is moving with his children to a larger city, Miss Mason is upset. She says she can't believe that any of her students would be so hateful, indicating that it must have been someone else who bullied Wanda.

Wanda's father indicates that some people have made fun of his children because of their last name. The details of this aspect of the bullying is not revealed in the story and it may have been a different group of children who teased Wanda about her name. It may also have been Wanda's brother, Jake, who was teased about his name. Peggy seems to see this as something more serious than teasing Wanda about the dresses. Peggy says she never teased Wanda about her name.

Another aspect of this theme is seen in Maddie's reaction to the teasing. Maddie feels that the girls are being cruel to Wanda by constantly teasing her about the dresses. She wishes it would stop and she knows that she should step in and stop it. The problem for Maddie is that she knows the girls might turn their attention to her, teasing her about her hand-me-down clothes or the fact that she is also very poor.

Prejudice

Prejudice is an important theme in the book, driving a great deal of the action. The prejudice begins with the attitudes of several of the girls toward Wanda. The students don't befriend Wanda because she is different. Her last name sets her apart even aside from everything else. The name is foreign and there isn't anyone else in that area with that last name. In that era, the world politics is such that many people would feel suspicious and angry toward people from some foreign countries.

The attitude toward Wanda is furthered by the fact that she's poor. Many people believe that the poor are unintelligent, dirty, and not to be trusted. This is the attitude toward Wanda but some of the stereotypes are not true. Wanda's family lives in a shabby house but it is kept neat. There isn't a lot of trash around it as there is in other parts of



the neighborhood. The same can be said of Wanda's dress. Though the blue dress is faded and never looks like it fits Wanda just right, it's always clean. Maddie comes to realize that Wanda probably washes it herself each evening so that it will be clean for school the following day.

Old man Svenson is another example of this theme. He lives in Wanda's neighborhood and his house is not as clean as Wanda's. There isn't much information about him but there are rumors about him. It seems likely that he is an outcast just like Wanda's family, and that's because he has a foreign name.

While Maddie's situation is not as serious as Wanda's, she does not feel secure in her social standing. She wears hand-me-down dresses from Peggy and her family is also poor. This is one reason Maddie is afraid of speaking up for Peggy. She is afraid that the other girls will turn on her if she speaks up.

The Need to Fit In

Wanda is an outsider in this community and in this school. There are not many details about the characters prior to the events of this story, but it seems they are all very familiar with each other and probably have lengthy histories together. They probably have been attending school together for most of their lives and they all know each other well. Wanda arrives as an outsider and she doesn't immediately fit in with the other students for several reasons.

Wanda's last name is Polenski and there are no other families in town with similar names. There are probably not many people who move into the town and a stranger with an odd name stands out. Wanda is also somewhat shy. She doesn't speak up often and she talks quietly. She doesn't read well which may be partly because she is uncomfortable reading in front of the entire class. All these things come together to make it difficult for Wanda to fit in, but that doesn't mean she's happy being an outsider. Wanda desperately wants to fit in with the other girls.

That's why she says that she has a hundred dresses at home. She says it very quietly and has to repeat it in order to be heard. She only speaks up when she's with a group of girls who are making a fuss over Cecile's new crimson dress and she is obviously looking for a way to be part of the conversation. However, speaking up makes her the target of other girls' teasing and she faces that teasing every day after that.

Maddie is another example of this theme. Maddie isn't a cruel person and she can tell that the teasing bothers Wanda, but she doesn't speak up. Maddie has a place among the girls in her class but she knows that position is tenuous. Her family is poor and she knows that she runs the risk of having the girls tease her the same way they tease Wanda. Maddie fears that she will no longer fit in if she stands up for Wanda.



Guilt

Maddie feels a deep sense of guilt over her role in teasing Wanda. Peggy also feels guilty but her guilt is not nearly as deep as Maddie's. Peggy doesn't seem to feel that she has done anything wrong by teasing Wanda. She tries to explain her actions by saying that she didn't believe Wanda was smart enough to know the girls were making fun of her. She also says she hasn't ever teased Wanda about her last name. She seems to be indicating that teasing Wanda about her name would have been worse than teasing her about her dresses, but Peggy says that Wanda isn't an ordinary person because her name is strange. It all adds up to making Peggy guilty of bullying Wanda, but Peggy insists she hasn't done anything wrong.

Maddie, on the other hand, is more in tune with Wanda's feelings. The first time the girls tease Wanda, Maddie is there but she doesn't realize what's happening or think about stopping it until it's too late. When the girls next corner Wanda and begin teasing her about her dresses, Maddie sees what's happening but chooses not to say anything. This makes Maddie feel horrible even though she isn't brave enough to speak up.

Maddie could have argued that she didn't join in the teasing. When the other girls were teasing Wanda about her dresses, Maddie always remained quiet. But Maddie has always known the teasing hurts Wanda's feelings and that it's wrong. She says that she is guiltier than Peggy because she was fully aware of how wrong it is.

The Desire for Possessions

The entire situation involving Wanda's dresses begins when the girls are gathered around a fellow student, admiring her dress. Cecile's family is obviously wealthier than most of the students in the class. Her clothes are "fancier" and she takes dance lessons. On the day she arrives at school wearing a new crimson dress, everyone gathers around to admire it. One girl in the crowd says she wants her mother to buy her one just like it. The girls are all admiring the dress when Wanda claims to have a hundred dresses at home.

Wanda's family is very poor. When Maddie and Peggy go searching for Wanda, they find her house is empty and unlocked. Maddie notes that the house is not well-built and that it would not provide much protection from the winter weather. Wanda also doesn't have a mother, which means that Wanda probably washes and irons her own dress each night. She doesn't have any options to wear different dresses to school so she makes her only dress as nice as she can for each day.

Maddie's family is also poor. Maddie wears Peggy's hand-me-down dresses but Maddie's mother adds trims and makes the dress look a little different so that the other students won't recognize the dress. Maddie's mother obviously realizes that the other students might make fun of her for wearing a hand-me-down dress and she does her best to save Maddie from that situation.

Another example of this theme is seen in one of the final scenes of the book. Maddie accepts the drawing from Wanda and takes it home. She puts it on her wall and uses it to cover up a tear in her wallpaper. Wallpaper was a common means of covering the bare boards of a wall in this time frame and small tears happen just by bumping the wall. Maddie uses the drawing to make her room look better, and she says that it immediately brightens the room.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person with a limited perspective. The reader sees the events of the story from Maddie's point of view. This limitation means that the reader doesn't know what's going on in the thoughts of the other two main characters, Peggy and Wanda. This limitation means the reader has to make some assumptions based on the dialogue and on Maddie's observations.

An important example of this limitation is Peggy's motivation. Peggy is pretty harsh with Wanda, teasing her relentlessly about her 100 dresses. Maddie says that Peggy isn't a mean person. She says Peggy stands up for little kids who are being bullied and she cries if she sees an animal being mistreated. This seems to indicate that Peggy isn't really trying to be cruel. After Peggy learns that Wanda and her family are moving away, Peggy tries to explain herself. She says that she never made fun of Wanda's name and that she hadn't expected Wanda to be smart enough to figure out that they were laughing at her. This seems cruel as well. It's left to the reader to decide whether Peggy is being mean or if she truly doesn't realize that she's hurting Wanda's feelings.

Maddie seems to be a reliable voice in the story. She admits that she feels guilty for not standing up for Wanda and that she's afraid the girls will start making fun of her if she does speak up. She also admits to feeling guilty about her role in the teasing even after Peggy is apparently reassured that Wanda is alright. Maddie learns a lesson from her guilt and pledges never again to stand by while someone is being bullied.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in a straightforward manner. The overall tone is one of hope though there is an undercurrent of distrust and bullying. Wanda hopes that she'll be accepted into the groups of girls in Room 13 and that she will make friends among the girls. She seems to hold onto this hope even when several of the other girls tease her constantly. She refuses to be pushed into saying that she doesn't have 100 dresses even though the other girls constantly harass her about it. It seems that she hold onto the hope that the teasing might stop and that the other girls might stop laughing at her. That never happens.

The story is divided between narrative and dialogue though there is more narrative. The reader with an average vocabulary shouldn't find many unfamiliar words. The book is aimed at young audiences and the story, narrative, dialogue, and message are all appropriate for this age group.

The story was copyrighted in 1944. The wording fits in with this time frame. There are some terms that readers may not immediately understand. For example, it's noted that some of the students get "good marks." This is an out-dated term for good grades.



There are not many of these terms and the reader should be able to figure out meanings based on the context.

Structure

The story is divided into seven chapters of varying lengths. The title of each chapter gives some indication of what's going to happen in that chapter. The first chapter is "Wanda." Readers are introduced to the main characters, including Wanda Petronski. The second chapter is "The Dresses Game." In this chapter, Wanda tells the other girls in her class that she has 100 dresses in her closet at home and this prompts several of the other girls to laugh at her. Peggy turns this into a game and torments Wanda by constantly asking her about her dresses. In "A Bright Blue Day," Maddie recalls the day Wanda claimed to have 100 dresses and how the entire situation got started. In "The Contest," the students learn about a drawing contest. The girls are to draw dresses and the boys are to draw motorboats, and one girl and one boy will win a prize for their drawing.

In "The Hundred Dresses," students arrive at Room 13 to find 100 drawings of dresses. The drawings are beautiful and the girls finally realize this is what Wanda meant when she said she had 100 dresses. In "Up on Boggins Heights," Maddie and Peggy have learned that Wanda has moved. They go to her house, hoping to catch her before she leaves. "The Letter to Room 13" is the final chapter of the story. Wanda writes a letter to the class and Miss Mason reads it aloud. Wanda asks that Peggy and Maddie take specific drawings as a gift and the girls discover that Wanda had drawn them as the girls modeling the dresses. Peggy accepts that everything is alright with Wanda but Maddie continues to feel guilty for not standing up for her.

The book is also divided by drawings that go with the events in the books. There is a scene in which Maddie and Peggy write a letter to Wanda. The girls feel better once they mail the letter. The drawing immediately after this scene shows the two girls and a mailman. These drawings are very vague. The people have few details so it's left to the reader's imagination to decide exactly how the characters appear. The drawings go with specific scenes and are in keeping with the overall tone and language of the book.



Quotes

Today, Monday, Wanda Petronski was not in her seat. But nobody, not even Peggy and Madeline, the girls who started all the fun, noticed her absence.

-- Narrator (Wanda paragraph 1)

Importance: This statement is the first of the book and it indicates that no one even realizes that Wanda is absent. She has no friends and no one really thinks about her except when they're tormenting her about her claim that she has 100 dresses.

Nobody knew exactly why Wanda sat in that seat unless it was because she came all the way from Boggins Heights, and her feet were usually caked with dry mud that she picked up coming down the country roads.

-- Narrator (Wanda paragraph 4)

Importance: Wanda is seated in the back corner of the room where there are mostly noisy boys who don't do very well in school. It's noted that the teacher may have told her to sit there so that she'd keep all the muddy shoes in one section of the room. Whatever the reason, this seating is one of the first things that sets Wanda apart from the other students.

They often waited for Wanda Petronski – to have fun with her.

-- Narrator (Dresses Game paragraph 2)

Importance: The narrator is talking about Maddie and Peggy. This “fun” they are talking about is really bullying. They tease Wanda relentlessly about her 100 dresses.

Wanda lived way up on Boggins Heights, and Boggins Heights was no place to live.

-- Narrator (The Dresses Game paragraph 3)

Importance: Boggins Heights is a very poor neighborhood and it's another thing that sets Wanda apart from most of the other students. It's also an indication that she and her family are very poor and it explains why Wanda has only one dress.

And she wasn't just an ordinary person, else why would she have a name like that? Anyway, they never made her cry.

-- Narrator (The Dresses Game paragraph 28)

Importance: There are two important points to this quote. First is that some of the students are making fun of Wanda about her name. The second is that Peggy doesn't seem to think they are being overly harsh toward Wanda because she never cries. Peggy stands up for small children and she might have had a different perspective if she had realized how much the teasing hurt Wanda.

But supposed Peggy and all the others started in on her next!

-- Narrator (The Dresses Game paragraph 30)



Importance: Maddie is trying to work up the courage to tell Peggy to stop teasing Wanda. She realizes that the teasing is going too far but she is afraid to speak up. She fears that Peggy and the others will start teasing her if she speaks up for Wanda.

It all happened so suddenly and unexpectedly, with everybody falling right in, that even if you felt uncomfortable as Maddie has there wasn't anything you could do about it.
-- Narrator (A Bright Blue Day paragraph 50)

Importance: Maddie looks back on how the game of 100 dresses began and she realizes that it got out of control really quickly. She remember that Wanda announced that she had 100 dresses and Peggy began laughing about it, asking why Wanda didn't wear them to school. Wanda refuses to back down, insisting she has 100 dresses, and the other girls pick up the teasing immediately.

She wished she had the nerve to write Peggy a note, because she knew she'd never have the courage to speak right out to Peggy and say, 'Hey, Peg, let's stop asking Wanda how many dresses she has.'
-- Narrator (The Contest paragraph 1)

Importance: This is referring to Maddie. She wishes she could find a way to put a stop to the teasing but she is still afraid that the girls will begin teasing her instead.

The minute they entered the classroom they stopped short and gasped. There were drawings all over the room, on every ledge and windowsill, tacked to the tops of the blackboards, spread over the bird charts, dazzling colors and brilliant lavish designs, all drawn on great sheets of wrapping paper.
-- Narrator (The Dresses paragraph 5)

Importance: This is the first look Peggy and Maddie have of Wanda's 100 dresses. The students are all amazed at Wanda's talent and no one is surprised that Wanda gets first prize in the contest.

She had helped to make someone so unhappy that she had had to move away from town.
-- Narrator (The Hundred Dresses paragraph 19)

Importance: Maddie has just now realized the full impact of her decision not to speak up for Wanda. While she knows she wasn't among the girls who teased her, she also didn't do anything to help stop it.

Nothing would ever seem good to her again, because just when she was about to enjoy something – like going for a hike with Peggy to look for bayberries or sliding down Barley Hill – she'd bump right smack into the thought that she had made Wanda Petronski move away.
-- Narrator (Up on Boggins Heights paragraph 18)



Importance: This is about Maddie and it's a statement about her continuing guilt. Maddie is really regretting that she didn't stand up for Wanda and the guilt over that is keeping her from having fun in everyday things.

They knew she didn't have any mother, but they hadn't thought about it. They hadn't thought that she had to do her own washing and ironing.

-- Narrator (The Letter to Room 13 paragraph 5)

Importance: Peggy and Maddie are realizing that there's more to Wanda's situation than they had realized. This is the first time they've given much thought to the fact that Wanda's life was more difficult than they'd considered.