

Like Jake and Me Study Guide

Like Jake and Me by Mavis Jukes

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Plot Summary

Like Jake and Me is a picture book for young children by author Mavis Jukes. This book is about a young boy whose mother has remarried and is expecting twins. Alex is a small boy who feels as though he has little in common with his stepfather, Jake. However, while helping Jake find and dispose of a spider that frightens him, Alex discovers that everyone has fears and that even strong, confident Jake occasionally needs someone's help. Like Jake and Me is a sweet story of self discovery.

Alex is watching his stepfather cut up wood for the fireplace when his mother comes out to join him. Alex's mother is expecting twins and therefore has a huge belly that makes it nearly impossible for her to bend over. Alex helps her pick up some change she spilled as they watch Jake together. Virginia, his mother, then asks if he thinks a bottle she placed over two pear blossoms that now contains two perfectly formed pears are ready for picking. Virginia wants to fill the bottle with pear nectar and trick her sister into attempting to figure out how the pears got inside the tiny mouth of the bottle.

Alex asks his mother about the twins, wondering if they will be like him, a little boy who enjoys ballet, or tough like Jake. Virginia suggests they might be like both of them. Alex then goes to help Jake bring in the wood. As Jake stacks the wood, Alex sees a wolf spider on his neck. Alex talks to Jake about it, but Jake thinks they are talking about Virginia. When Alex finally explains that he is talking about a wolf spider on Jake's neck, Jack panics and begins tearing off his clothing. Alex searches each piece of clothing as Jake takes it off, but he cannot find the spider. Soon Jake is standing naked on the front porch, still panicking over the missing spider. Virginia joins them and finds the situation amusing.

Alex explains the situation to Virginia and she spots the spider in Jake's hat. Jake swings Alex up into his arms to thank him and they dance. Virginia says she can feel that babies dancing inside of her and Alex realizes that the twins are just like both he and Jake.



Like Jake and Me

Like Jake and Me Summary

Like Jake and Me is a picture book for beginning readers written by Mavis Jukes, a board certified lawyer who abandoned her law career to write.

Alex watches his stepfather, Jake, split wood on the edge of the cypress grove near their home. Alex is amazed with the power in Jake's arms and thinks he will never be able to do that. Virginia, Alex's mother, calls him to her. She says she needs Alex's help in picking up some change she dropped in the grass. Virginia is largely pregnant with twins and cannot bend over easily. When Alex has done that, Virginia takes him to the pear tree and asks if he thinks the bottle she placed over two pear blossoms earlier in the year are ready to be picked. Inside the jar now grows two perfect pears. Virginia plans to put pear nectar in the jar and cause her sister some confusion as she attempts to figure out how the pears got into the jar in the first place.

Alex asks Virginia about the babies, wondering if they will be boys or sisters. Virginia suggests they might be one of each. Alex wonders who the babies will be like, him or Jake. Virginia suggests both, but Alex cannot see that. Alex twirls for Virginia, showing him some moves he learned in a ballet class his father signed him up for. Virginia tells him to show Jake, but Alex thinks Jake is not the ballet kind of guy. Instead Alex offers to carry the axe for Jake, but Jake will not let him because the axe is very sharp.

Alex follows Jake into the house and nearly causes a catastrophe by getting in front of him while Jake is carrying a tall stack of wood. Jake warns Alex to be more careful in the future. Alex tells Jake he looks like a movie cowboy and Jake tells him he once was a cowboy, revealing a big belt buckle with a longhorn steer on it. Jake then suggests to Alex that he pull out the loose tooth he has been playing with all day, but Alex says he is too afraid.

Alex sees a wolf spider on Jake's neck. Alex starts telling Jake about wolf spiders. Alex knows a lot about spiders because his father is an entomologist. However, Jake thinks they are talking about Virginia. When Alex finally tells Jake that he is talking about a spider on his neck, Jake goes tense. Alex tells Jake the spider has crawled down his back. Jake asks Alex to help him take off his jacket, but the spider is not there. Jake asks Alex to go on the porch with him and continue searching for the spider. Alex helps Jake take off his shirt, but there is no spider. Alex suggests it might have crawled into his pants. Before he can take off his pants, however, Alex must help Jake take off his boots. When he does, one of the boots hits Alex in the face and he loses his loose tooth. Alex then helps Jake with his pants, but the spider is not there. Jake then removes his undershorts, standing naked on the porch.

Alex holds up Jake's hat to hide his nakedness as Jake puts his underpants back on. Jake's foot gets caught and he backs into the hat's feather, causing him to jump and



spin in midair, making Alex remark on his dance skills. Virginia comes up on the porch and demands to know what is going on. Alex explains that they are searching for a wolf spider, causing Jake to shiver. Virginia begins searching for the spider and finally spots it on Jake's hat where it sits on his head. Alex snatches the hat off of Jake's head and causes it to crawl off into a crack on the porch. Jake is so happy that he picks Alex up and dances him around the porch. Virginia tells them the babies are dancing inside of her as well, making Alex realize that they babies can be just like he and Jake.

Like Jake and Me Analysis

Alex feels like he is a different kind of person from his stepfather, the kind who cannot split wood and be tough. Alex feels that his interest in ballet dancing and spiders is one that Jake will never share. When Jake finishes splitting the wood, he will not allow Alex to help him, making Alex feel even less like his stepfather. However, discovering that his stepfather is deeply afraid of spiders gives Alex an edge up because his biological father studies spiders and Alex knows a great deal about them.

Alex helps his stepfather find the spider and saves him from the one that has been crawling on his neck. Jake is so happy that Alex has helped him that he dances with him on the front porch of their small house. It is this sudden moment of bonding that helps Alex to see that he and his stepfather are not so different. This gives Alex new optimism into his new family and into his own abilities.

This is a story of a new family formed after divorce. The mother has remarried and is now expecting two babies, something that has caused her older child, Alex, to feel insecure in his role in the family. However, by helping Jake find and dispose of a spider that causes him great fear helps Alex find a place of security in his new family and the heart of his new stepfather.



Characters

Alex

Alex is a young boy living with his mother and stepfather, Jake. Alex's mother is pregnant with twins, something that both excites and worries Alex. Alex likes Jake, his stepfather, but he feels as though they have nothing in common. Alex wants to help Jake with his chores, but Jake keeps telling Alex that it is too dangerous and that Alex is not big enough to help. This makes Alex feel left out and as if he and Jake have little in common.

Alex likes ballet and he knows a great deal about spiders. However, Jake dislikes spiders. Alex finds himself helping Jake find a spider that crawled onto his neck. Alex is the hero of the day when he finds the spider and makes it go away from Jake. By doing this, Alex and Jake bond and become better friends.

Jake

Jake is Alex's stepfather. Jake was once a rodeo cowboy and he has a belt buckle that suggests he once won a major competition in his chosen event. Now Jake is a father and husband, anxiously awaiting the delivery of twin babies. Jake is a tough guy who can split wood easily and seems to have nothing in common with his stepson. In fact, Jake is concerned about his stepson's safety and will not allow him to help with the splitting of wood.

Jake, however, has one fear. Jake cannot stand spiders and the idea of a biting spider crawling on his body frightens him. When Alex points out that there is a spider on Jake's neck, Jake begins to panic and asks Alex to help him find and get rid of the spider. When Alex is successful, Jake dances with him on the porch in his gratitude.

Virginia

Virginia is Alex's mother. Virginia is very pregnant with twin babies. This causes a great deal of excitement in the house as Alex and the rest of the family plan for the new babies. Alex wants to know who the babies will be like and Virginia hopes they will be both like he and Jake. Alex does not think this is possible since he and Jake are so different until he helps save Jake from a spider and discovers they have more in common than he originally thought.

Alex's Dad

Alex's dad is an entomologist, one who studies spiders. For this reason, Alex knows a great deal about spiders. Alex's dad is also someone who understands his son's softer



side and encourages it by signing Alex up for ballet lessons. This is something Alex feels that Jake would not understand and therefore does not share it with him until he sees Jake dance on the front porch of their house.

Virginia's Sister

Virginia shows Alex a bottle on a pear tree that she placed over two blossoms in the spring so that the pears would grow inside the bottle. Virginia plans to pick the bottle with the pears inside and pour pear nectar over them to make her sister guess how she got the pears inside.

Twins

Virginia is pregnant with twins. Alex wonders at the beginning of the story if the twins will be more like him or Jake. At the end of the story, when Virginia suggests the twins are dancing, Alex decides that the twins will be like both he and Jake, rather than one or the other.

Wolf Spider

Alex sees a wolf spider on Jake's neck after he brings some wood into the house. Alex talks about the spider and thinks that Jake is being brave by allowing the spider to remain there. However, Jake has misunderstood what Alex is talking about and begins to panic when he finally does understand. Alex helps Jake strip his clothing off and find the spider, which turns out to be on Jake's hat.

Movie Cowboys

Alex has an image in his mind of what cowboys look like because of the movies. They often wear hats and jeans with boots and big belt buckles. When Jake brings wood into the house, Alex thinks that he looks a lot like a movie cowboy. It is then that Jake tells him that he once was a cowboy and shows him his belt buckle.

Ravens

Alex sees the ravens fly away as the sun goes down, marking the end of the day. Jake also has a raven feather in his hat, something Alex sees as manly, as very cowboy-ish.

Someone's Coming

While Jake is naked on the front porch in his frantic search for the spider, Alex thinks he hears someone coming. This person is not named at first and Alex realizes that Jake



will not want to be seen naked by a stranger, so he holds up Jake's hat to hide his nakedness. This causes Jake to step back into the feather on the hat and to jump into the air, making Alex think he looks like he is performing a ballet maneuver. The someone coming turns out to be Virginia, Alex's mother.



Objects/Places

Loose Tooth

Alex has a loose tooth that he plays with through most of the story until it falls out when he helps Jake take off his boots.

Wood

Jake spends the early part of the story splitting wood which is most likely where he came in contact with the wolf spider that provides tension later in the story.

Axe

Jake uses an axe to split the wood. Alex wants to carry it back to the house when he is done, but Jake will not allow it because the axe is too sharp.

Pear Tree

There is a pear tree growing in the yard outside of Alex's house that he shares with his mother and stepfather.

Bottle

Virginia places a bottle over two pear blossoms on the pear tree in order to cause two pears to grow inside the bottle so that she might trick her sister into trying to figure out how the pears got in there.

Woodstove

Alex's family has a woodstove in their house for heat that requires wood to warm the house.

Boots

Jake wears boots. When Alex tries to help him take the boots off, one hits him in the mouth and causes him to lose a tooth.



Leg Warmers

Virginia is wearing leg warmers that make Jake think of fuzzy legs when Alex talks about the spider.

Reindeer Coat

Alex's mother, Virginia, is wearing a coat that has a reindeer on it.

Coins

Virginia drops some coins and asks Alex to pick them up for her at the beginning of the story to make Alex feel useful.

Belt Buckle

Jake has a belt buckle with a silver longhorn steer on it suggesting he was once a rodeo competitor.

Hat with Raven Feather

Jake wears a hat with a raven feather in it.



Themes

Common Ground

At the beginning of the story, Alex is watching Jake split logs and he thinks that he will never be strong enough to do something like that. As the story continues, the reader learns that Alex has taken ballet lessons and greatly enjoyed them, but he does not believe that ballet is something Jake might enjoy. It is clear to the reader from the very beginning of the story that Alex feels that he and Jake have very little in common.

As the story continues to develop, the reader becomes aware that Jake feels that Alex is too small to do some of the chores around the house, such as splitting logs and carrying the heavy, sharp axe. However, one chore Alex discovers that Jake is not brave enough to tackle is dealing with a wolf spider. Jake is deeply afraid of spiders, especially spiders that are said to bite. Alex does not mind spiders, however, and he helps Jake find and rid himself of the spider.

Jake and Alex are very different people. However, as the story progresses, Alex discovers that he and Jake have much more in common than he ever would have imagined, making common ground a theme of the story.

Step Families

Part of the reason Alex feels different from Jake in this story is because Jake is his stepfather. Alex and Jake have not known one another very long and this causes Alex to be unsure of who and what Jake might expect from him. Alex forgets that the same goes for Jake. Jake knows as little about Alex as Alex knows about him.

Being a part of a step family can be very difficult for a young child, especially when it appears that his new stepfather is so different from himself and his past experiences with grown men. For Alex, having a stepfather makes him feel different. This story is Alex's journey in getting to know his stepfather and learning that they really do not have so many differences as he might have first thought.

Parental Love

In this story, it is clear to the reader that Virginia loves her son very much and can see how left out he feels in Jake's world. Virginia does all she can to make Alex feel a part of the family and to get to know Jake. At the same time, the reader can see that Jake goes out of his way to be patient with Alex and that he cares about Alex's safety. It becomes clear that Jake cares about Alex just as much as his mother, just in a different way.

This story is about a young man finding his place in his new family with a stepfather and his beloved mother. Alex struggles to find common ground with his stepfather only to

find that his stepfather has a fear of spiders that brings the two of them together. At the end of the story, Alex finally becomes aware of his place in the family with the help of his stepfather's show of affection, making parental love a strong theme of the story.



Style

Point of View

The story is told in the third person point of view. The author tells her story through the eyes of Alex, a young boy who is struggling to find his place in his new family with stepfather, Jake. The author reveals all of Alex's thoughts and emotions through the use of the third person omniscient point of view.

The point of view of this story works well because it allows a quick intimacy between the reader and the main character of the story. Short stories such as this one have to grab the reader from the first lines in order to quickly develop an intimacy that is important to keep the reader interested in the overall story. For this reason, this author chose a point of view that would allow her to tell the story through the eyes of the main character in a realistic voice that would catch the reader's attention from the first sentences.

Setting

The story is set in the front yard, front room, and porch of Alex's family home. The author never gives the reader any hints as to where or when this story takes place, but from descriptions of the house and yard the reader believes that it is set in a rural area where there are many ranches and farms, a place where a man can undress on his front porch and not be concerned with passerby who might be offended by such actions.

The setting of the story is important for several reasons. First, the setting as a family home is important because it helps to establish the relationship between the main characters. Second, the setting in a rural area helps support the conflict of the story, the spider that frightens Jake and allows Alex to become his hero. Finally, the setting of the story is important because it allows for uninterrupted time alone between Jake and Alex to allow for the bonding that is crucial to the main theme of the novel. For these reasons, the setting of the story works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in simple English. The intended audience of this story is small children and their parents. For this reason, the story is written with simple language that allows for easy comprehension of the themes of the story. There are no foreign phrases or slang in the novel that might confuse a beginning reader, nor is there any complicated language that could cause a barrier to the beginning readers comprehension of the plot.

The language of this story is important because of the intended audience. Due to the fact that the intended audience of this story is young children, most commonly beginning readers, the language must be kept simple and the grammar must be basic.

The author of this story has achieved this simplicity without talking down to her audience. For this reason, the language of this story works well with the plot.

Structure

The story is written in fourteen pages with illustrations on each facing page of the text. The story is short and tells a well written story of the struggle of one boy attempting to find his place in his new family. The story is told in a linear fashion in exposition and dialogue, telling a well-rounded story.

The story has one well-constructed plot. The plot of the story follows Alex as he tries to find something in common with his stepfather and stumbles upon a fear he had no idea his tough stepfather might harbor. This fear is one that Alex has conquered; therefore he is able to help Jake overcome it. In doing so, Alex finds common ground with his stepfather.



Quotes

"Alex was watching his stepfather, Jake, split wood at the edge of the cypress grove."
Pg. 1

"Alex's mother was standing close by, under the pear tree. She was wearing fuzzy woolen leg warmers, a huge knitted coat with pictures of reindeer on the back, and a red scarf with the name Virginia on it." Pg. 3

"One of the branches of the pear tree had a glass bottle over the end of it. Inside were some twigs and leaves and two pears." Pg. 3

"Months ago, Virginia had told him that the pears, and the babies, would be ready in the fall." Pg. 5

"Gracefully he lifted his arms and rose up on his toes. He looked like a bird about to take off." Pg. 5

"The air was so cold Jake was breathing steam." Pg. 7

"On his belt buckle was a silver longhorn steer." Pg. 9

"'Well, everybody's chicken of something,' said Jake." Pg. 11

"Just then Alex noticed that there was a wolf spider on the back of Jake's neck. There were fuzzy babies holding on to her body." Pg. 11

"On his chest was a tattoo of an eagle that was either taking off or landing." Pg. 17

"Jake turned his shorts inside out, then right side in again. No spider." Pg. 21

"'Like Jake and me,' said Alex. And Jake whirled around the porch with Alex in his arms." Pg. 29



Topics for Discussion

Who is Alex? Why does he admire Jake? Why does he believe that he will never be strong enough to chop wood? Why does Alex feel left out? How does the reader know this? What does Virginia do to cheer her son up?

Who is Virginia? What is special about Virginia? Why does she need help picking up change? Why does she ask Alex's opinion about the jar with the pears in it? How did the pears get into the jar? What does Virginia plan to do with the jar? What does this say about Virginia's personality?

Who is Jake? What is he doing when the story begins? What does this say about Jake? Why does Alex admire this about Jake? What does Jake say when Alex comments that he looks like a movie cowboy? What is most noteworthy about this comment? What is on Jake's belt buckle? What does this say about Jake's past?

What activity does Alex enjoy that he feels Jake would not appreciate? Why does Alex feel this way? Who got Alex involved in this activity? How does Alex feel about this person? What other activities does Alex feel he cannot share with Jake? Does Alex continue to feel this way at the end of the story?

Why does Jake tell Alex he should stay out of his way toward the middle of the story? Why is Alex in Jake's way? What does this say about the way Alex feels about Jake? What do Jake and Alex talk about as Jake starts a fire in the woodstove? What does Jake believe they are discussing? What does Alex think they are discussing? How does Jake discover that they are talking about two different things?

What fear does Alex learn Jake has? How does Alex feel about this fear? Does Alex share this fear? Why or why not? How does Alex help Jake overcome his fear? Why does Jake undress on the front porch of their house? Why does Alex help him? What does Alex lose while they are on the front porch? How did he do this? How does this prove Alex is braver than he believed himself to be?

Why does Jake dance with Alex at the end of the story? Why does Alex come to believe the twins in his mother's belly will be like both him and Jake? Is this a good thing? Does Alex like Jake? Does Jake like Alex? How does the reader come to this conclusion?