Like One of the Family
by Kathleen Latzoni (p. 67)

Plot Summary
It is early in the next millennium and, in a cost-cutting measure, mental patients have been released from hospitals. The mentally ill are classified as “Irregulars” and segregated in special settlements. Joey brings Andy, an Irregular, home one day and his mom, Mrs. Kinley, agrees to adopt Andy. Meanwhile, at the hospital where Mrs. Kinley works, another Irregular is recovering from surgery. The Irregular cannot pay her hospital bill, so the hospital is reluctant to let her return to the Irregular’s camp because then other Irregulars might expect free medical care. After visiting the Irregular’s village, Mrs. Kinley decides to adopt the Irregular from her hospital as well.

Researching Other Social Issues
“Like One of the Family” deals with the treatment of the mentally ill. Students may be interested in researching other social issues and writing about them. This assignment encourages students to identify and research personal questions about topical social issues. A variety of assignments (as suggested below) may grow out of this research.

In addition to reading and discussing “Like One of the Family,” students may also read “The Cormorant in my Bathtub,” and “Theft,” which also deal with social issues. The class (or small groups) should then brainstorm social issues that are of interest. Possibilities include: homelessness, mental hospitals, oil spills, stereotypes, and crime.

List the topics on the chalkboard. After the class reviews its list, students should group themselves by topic according to their personal interests. Once in groups (groups of three to five are best), students should generate questions requiring research about their chosen issue. For example:

HOMELESSNESS:
• How do people become homeless?
• How does a typical homeless person satisfy his or her basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter?
• What is the federal government’s stance on the homeless problem in our country?
• What are our local laws pertaining to the homeless?
• What efforts are people making nationally and/or locally to help homeless people?

THE RESEARCH:
Each group member takes responsibility for one question. Students then go to the library and conduct research to answer their questions. Encourage them to use electronic databases and current magazines. Students will probably need 1 to 1-1/2 hours to conduct their research. See the Student’s Page for a worksheet the students can use in the library.

Responding Creatively to the Story
Once the research is completed, the teacher has a number of options for follow-up assignments:

1. Groups could make presentations to the class and share their findings using visuals. Students should be encouraged to make connections back to the stories whenever appropriate. For example, a student who has researched the effect of oil spills on wildlife could talk about what probably happened to the birds in “The Cormorant in My Bathtub.” The student might also discuss whether the main character’s actions to save the cormorant were realistic.

2. Students could write persuasive essays on an issue connected to their research. For example, a student might write an editorial which discusses the causes of homelessness and which encourages more civic activism to help the indigent. These essays could be sent to the editor of a newspaper, the director of a local cable talk show, or to a state/national legislator.
Responding Creatively to the Story continued

3. Students might use their research as the basis for their own short stories.
4. Students could stage debates on issues that grow out of the stories and their research. For example:
   Resolved: Preventing further environmental degradation is more important than expanding business and the labor force.

Connecting with Cultural Values and Students’ Lives

These questions may guide your students to a deeper understanding of how the story relates to their own lives. The discussion of the story may also be used to foster the positive values of compassion, respect, and social activism.

1. Do you agree with Mrs. Kinley’s decision to save the hospitalized Irregular? What would you do in her place?
2. Do you agree with any portion of Marcia’s argument against resuscitating the girl? Is her argument convincing in any way? Why, or why not?
3. What have the characters in the story done to make it easier for them to ignore the Irregulars? What evidence of stereotyping do you see?

Brainteasers for Critical Thinking

1. Have students read only to the point at which Joey’s mother lets him keep Andy. Stop and ask students to make predictions about what it means to be an Irregular.
2. What clues or insights into Mrs. Kinley’s character prepare you for her final decision? How does she become a more sensitive person?
3. How realistic is this situation in our society?
4. Describe Marcia’s attitude toward Irregulars. Why do you think she has one in her home? How do you suppose she treats that person?
5. How is Mrs. Kinley’s problem of the young girl at the hospital related to her situation at home with Andy?
SOCIAL ISSUES: RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

Story: _____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Topic or Issue: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

My Question(s): ____________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Summary of Research Findings: _______________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________

(Continue on back or a separate sheet of paper if necessary)

Connections to the Story: ____________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Sources: ___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Like One of the Family  (p. 67)

Name _____________________________    Date _____________

Vocabulary from “Like One of the Family”

Directions: Based on the way each word in bold below is used in the sentence, write what you think the word means. Then look up the same word in your dictionary and copy the definition that comes closest to the way the word is used in the sentence. Finally, write a sentence of your own using the word. Make sure the sentence shows what the word means. Use a separate sheet of paper.

Example: The last word dissolved into a shrill giggle. (p. 67)
- Definition based on context: faded, disappeared
- Dictionary definition: fades, takes on a different dimension (Webster’s Tenth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1994)
- Original sentence: As the stage show began, the brightly lit theater dissolved into darkness.

1. He looked up for the first time, an inane half-moon grin on his face. (p. 67)

2. He smiled ruefully, as if he knew she was lying. (p. 71)

3. “Yes, yes, I know, and it was very good of you to look after him,” she said hastily by way of consolation as she rushed into the den. (p. 74)

4. The noise, the confusion, the filth that was everywhere was overwhelming. (p. 78)

5. Mrs. Kinley didn’t answer. When Andy’s thoughts were clear, he was very perceptive—too much so, she thought. (p. 80)

Reading Check for “Like One of the Family”

Circle the letters of all the correct answers. Some questions have more than one correct answer.

1. Mrs. Kinley can tell Andy is an Irregular because he
   a. laughs at the wrong times
   b. loses his train of thought
   c. is violent
   d. refuses to wear clothes

2. At East End, where the Irregulars live, Mrs. Kinley sees
   a. a battle between Irregulars and the police
   b. a happy family on a picnic
   c. a wealthy family abandon their daughter
   d. Marcia and her husband

3. Marcia wants to solve the problem of the Irregular in the hospital by
   a. sending her back to East End
   b. killing her
   c. taking her to another city
   d. letting her live at the hospital

4. When Andy leaves home without permission, Mrs. Kinley
   a. hits him
   b. lets him go
   c. calls the police
   d. calls her husband at work

5. Mrs. Kinley decides to solve the problem of the Irregular in her hospital by
   a. killing her
   b. adopting her
   c. sending her back to East End
   d. sending her home with Marcia
Language Study in Context: Commas in Compound Sentences

When a conjunction such as “and,” “or,” or “but” is used to combine two complete sentences, writers normally use a comma before the conjunction. When a conjunction is used to join a complete sentence with an incomplete sentence, no comma is usually required. For instance, no comma is necessary between “damage” and “but” in The storm produced a great deal of coastline damage but not enough to close the nearby marina. Insert commas where necessary in the following sentences. Conjunctions are in bold. Use the sentences in the story to check your work.

1. She had named her biggest fear and it was all she could say while the reporter kept on talking on the screen. (p. 69)
2. She sleepily came downstairs and stopped at the doorway of the den. (p. 70)
3. She got the coffee out and began to search for the cereal, as if today’s breakfast would be like others. (p. 70)
4. “They don’t know what causes it but I’ve heard of Irregulars like that—they could be talking to you one minute and just go out of control the next.” (p. 71)
5. She didn’t particularly like Marcia but she had to admit that the young woman had a lot of information. (p. 72)
6. Marcia had been getting the whole place worked up about the Irregular and each of Mrs. Kinley’s employees kept coming in, one at a time, to tell her what they would do . . . (p. 75)
7. “That’s a good idea and I’ll have to consider it.” (p. 75)
8. The woman got up and left. (p. 75)
9. She stepped outside onto the sidewalk and took a quick glance up and down the street but there was no one around. (p. 76)
10. Someone darted out in front of her car and she quickly slammed on the brakes. (p. 78)