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Dibs in Search of Self
Virginia Axline

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. Dibs prefers to be left alone. He alienates himself from others, to the point of sometimes attacking teachers or other children when they approach him. His mother, however, wants to leave him where he is. Imagine you are the parent of another child in Dibs' class. Compose a letter to Dibs' mother relating your feelings about having him in class with your child.
2. Dr. Axline says, "At one time, he seemed to be extremely retarded mentally. Another time he would quickly and quietly do something that indicated he might even have superior intelligence." Write a letter to Dibs' teachers explaining why you think he might be hiding his intelligence from them.
3. Dibs' mother admits that he has a problem, but at first she is unwilling to enlist special help for him or to send him to a school for children with emotional disorders. Instead she used her social and family connections to enroll him in a prestigious private school. List at least one other obvious way Dibs' mother seems to use her wealthy status to keep from having to deal with his difficult behavior.
4. Dibs' mother compensates for his problems by praising his sister, calling her "a perfect child." Dibs' mother thinks that she has failed with him, so she stresses the good behavior of her "normal" child. Write a paragraph about how you think this attitude might make Dibs withdraw into himself even more.

Chapter 3

9. Dibs' parents didn't think he would ever change. When parents or teachers have low expectations for children, it can have negative consequences for their education and their self-esteem. Write an article for a parent-teacher newsletter about how low expectations for children can affect them, both immediately and later on in life.

10. Dibs has a lot of locked doors in his life. For example, when Dr. Axline arrives at the family's house, she hears Dibs screaming, "No lock door! No lock door!" Dibs is often locked in his room by his parents, who are embarrassed by him. Write an email to Dibs' parents in which you explain other ways of disciplining Dibs or keeping him occupied.

11. Dibs' mother wants to pay Dr. Axline for seeing Dibs, but she refuses. Dr. Axline says, "She had probably often been able to pay her way out of taking this much involved responsibility for Dibs." Dr. Axline realizes that Dibs' mother uses money to try to pay off her problems. Does it work? Write a list of the things Dr. Axline notices about Dibs' mother during their first meeting that make it seem as if she is really very unhappy, despite her wealth. Then make a list of the pros and cons about being very wealthy.

Chapter 14

40. Dibs' feelings are hurt when a girl walking by the window says something rude to him. How do you think the girl might have reacted if she was told about his history? Imagine Dr. Axline had followed her and told her about Dibs. Complete the following dialogue between them:

Dr. Axline: I wanted to let you know how your comment hurt that little boy's feelings.

Girl: He was being rude!

Dr. Axline: Well, you should know...

41. When Dibs tastes the scouring powder by the sink, Dr. Axline exclaims, "That's scouring powder. Not good to taste!" Dibs is taken aback by her reaction and seems to be hurt by it. Would you have reacted as Dr. Axline did, possibly jeopardizing Dibs' trust, or would you have let him taste the scouring powder without warning him? In general, explain, if you feel its better to learn by experience or better to learn through what others say.
42. Although Dr. Axline tells Dibs that the water is hot, he insists on testing it himself. Think of a time when you were given a warning about a certain activity and you tried it anyway. Write a letter to the person who advised you. Explain why you had to find out for yourself, and whether you regret your decision.
43. Dibs often reverted to role-playing while he was playing in the therapy room. Role-playing often helps people come to an understanding about their feelings. What one person, either real or fictional, would you want to be? Write a short letter to that person, explaining why you'd want to change places with him or her.

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54. Dibs' mother says the walls were coming down between her and Dibs as well as Dibs' father and Dibs. What do you think about different types of "walls"? Do they separate people or provide limits that make people secure? Make a list of different kinds of walls, real and symbolic ones. Across from each write whether you feel it separates or joins. We have begun the list for you.

Fence *provides good borders*

Door *gives openings between people*

Brick Wall *prevents seeing; may encourage breaking it down*

Chapter 18

55. Hedda and Miss Jane tell Dr. Axline about Dibs' progress in school, and Dr. Axline is surprised that he is mostly hiding his abilities from his teachers and classmates. Make a list of the positive and negative aspects of Dibs' behavior.
56. Dibs needed to learn to accept who he was before he could change his behavior. Answer the following letter to an advice columnist explaining why it is important to love yourself and accept who you are.