

Cats Can Save the Day

By Daniel Scheffler



It was Saturday morning in the Da Silva household, and Bianca was daydreaming as she waited for her family to come down for breakfast. Her mind was filled with the things she learned at school that week and what she would do for the weekend. Her mind was so busy, and she had so many rushing thoughts, that she didn't see the neighbor's cat climb through the window. The next minute, the spotty cat was curling around Bianca's legs. Bianca, as if falling from the sky, snapped out of her daydream and saw the feline smiling up at her.

"Purr, purr, purr."

"Oh, hello, Mister Chopsticks! I have missed your little visits," Bianca exclaimed.

The cat reminded her of the visit to her grandmother in Portugal last summer. Granny Da Silva lives near the ocean in a small beach cottage and had four cats that were all the size of dogs. Bianca couldn't believe her eyes when she first saw them. The one, obviously the ruler of the lot, filled an entire comfy chair in her granny's lounge. Bianca tried to pick him up but he was just too heavy. His name was Pedro, and he just flopped down and rolled onto his back with his white tummy showing, ready for Bianca to give it a scratch.

Bianca's sister, mother and father were allergic to cats. They would start sneezing and their eyes would water terribly. So the family was not allowed to have its own cats. Bianca loved the opportunity to pat Chopsticks. He came to visit often when her family wasn't around, searching for scraps and, of course, some loving. Bianca handed that out easily, as she just adored the little guy. She jumped up from her chair, and opened the enormous double door fridge to grab some of last night's chicken for the cat. Chopsticks knew what was coming, so he purred harder and looked very excited.

Bianca felt good to be able to love someone else's cat this way, and wondered if Chopsticks had the same kind of love from the neighbors. She never really saw the next-door neighbors so she couldn't imagine Chopstick's life with them. As usual, Bianca started dreaming about what happened next door. She imagined the neighbors were at work all day and never home to look after the cat. She imagined Chopstick's bowl to be overflowing with kibbles, poured into it just once a week, carelessly.

Bianca's daydreaming was always like this. She would start thinking about something and the next moment, minutes would have gone by, and she would totally have lost her bearings. Sometimes she would snap back to reality and have space travelled, or been at a concert in the park, or even swimming with sharks in the ocean. Her mother always told her to use her daydreams as inspiration for her drawings. Bianca had wanted to be an artist since a young age. When she was very little, she would make scribbles on everything, always scribbling wherever she could. Now that she was older, she started to draw her daydreams with some amazing results.

Her creative energy was flowing, and her brain was still, as if in meditation, when she was drawing. After daydreaming, she would head to her tiny bedroom and lie on the floor listening to the radio, just drawing for hours, with no breaks—not even to eat. She used colors and pencils and paints, and whatever she could find. For her it was sheer bliss. She never felt so alive as when she was expressing this creative vigor in her.

Chopsticks was a big inspiration to her, and she started drawing comics where Chopsticks was the hero and would have to save the neighboring cats from disaster. Sometimes Chopsticks, in the green cape she designed for him, would have to rescue some young kittens from a burning building, or even a female cat that got stuck up in a tree. She took Chopsticks on these crazy adventures that she drew stories of, and that was her favorite thing to do in the whole world.

“I wonder what will be your next adventure, Chopsticks?” said Bianca.

The cat just purred as he ate his pieces of chicken from the saucer Bianca had put down for him. She was thinking how Chopsticks could be happy from getting just a tidbit of chicken, and how he looked totally satisfied.

Bianca poured some milk and cereal into a bowl for herself. She had waited for too long now; her family was obviously still sleeping with no intention of getting up so early. She pulled out some paper and started drawing with colored pencils. She started dreaming up a whole new storyline for Chopsticks. First she was going to give him a brand new suit, not just a cape.

Chopsticks suddenly became Captain Chopsticks in Bianca’s drawings, and she filled pages and pages of him flying all over the world, helping fellow cats. Bianca laughed out loud as she drew some booties for Captain Chopsticks—she had decided a superhero cat needed to have protection for his little paws. She made them silvery and shiny; leather boots that looked like they could propel the cat into the space age, or at least up to the moon.

Captain Chopsticks was on the Great Wall of China helping cats stuck out in the rain, and he was in Australia running next to kangaroos to bring home a litter of kittens. The hero was all around the globe, even in the Amazon, saving a bunch of adventure-seeking cats stuck on a little canoe. And so the drawings went on. Bianca had endless ideas, and they just came to her as she was sitting in the brightly lit kitchen.

Bianca started to question whether she would like to live a similar life, like Captain Chopsticks, and travel the world saving people. And that led her to the next daydream of her in a superhero suit flying across the world saving people in distress.

“That’s a funny image, Chopsticks—me, in a tight pink Lycra suit!” Bianca laughed.

But Chopsticks just licked his paws and stared at her. He stopped for a moment as if to laugh with her, but he didn’t in the end. He just continued to lick himself clean.

“Well thanks for the comments, Chopsticks,” Bianca said to the cat.

“Who are you talking to?” Bianca’s father said, suddenly.

“Oh, no one. I was just drawing,” said Bianca.

Chopsticks quickly jumped out the window and made himself scarce. He knew that Bianca might adore him, but the rest of the family not as much. Bianca finished her cereal, and kept drawing as her father peered over her shoulder looking at her work.

“I can’t believe how amazing your drawings are, my girl,” he said.

“Thank you,” Bianca replied.

“Where do you get the inspiration for this Captain Chopsticks? He looks like a real action hero star,” he said.

“Oh you know, from cats stuck in memory,” Bianca said with a little smile.

The family suddenly all came down, and Bianca moved her drawings aside to spend time with everyone. Coffee and croissants were going around the table as everyone laughed and chatted about the perfect weekend ahead.

Bianca listened for a second, but almost immediately went back into her daydream.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Chopsticks?

- A Chopsticks is a kangaroo in Australia.
- B Chopsticks is a cat that visits Bianca.
- C Chopsticks is a cat that lives with Granny Da Silva.
- D Chopsticks is a kitten in a burning building.

2. When in the story does Bianca daydream?

- A in the beginning of the story ONLY
- B in the middle of the story ONLY
- C in the beginning and end of the story ONLY
- D in the beginning, middle, and end of the story

3. Bianca daydreams a lot.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A Bianca daydreams about what happens next door and dreams up a new storyline for Chopsticks.
- B Bianca cannot believe her eyes when she sees how big Granny Da Silva's cats are.
- C Bianca's sister, mother, and father are allergic to cats, so her family does not have any cats.
- D After Chopsticks arrives, Bianca jumps up from her chair and opens the fridge to grab some chicken for the cat.

4. What might be one reason that Bianca's drawings are amazing?

- A She loves the opportunity to pat Chopsticks.
- B She is waiting for her family to come down for breakfast.
- C She has drawn a lot ever since she was little.
- D She visited her grandmother in Portugal last summer.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A the pains and struggles of growing up
- B the importance of choosing your friends carefully
- C the importance of a good education
- D the connections between life and art

6. Read the following sentence: "She started **dreaming up** a whole new storyline for Chopsticks. First she was going to give him a brand new suit, not just a cape."

What does the phrase **dreaming up** mean?

- A burning or setting on fire
- B making food or cooking
- C making up or imagining
- D cleaning up or organizing

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

First, Bianca daydreams about Chopsticks saving others; _____, she daydreams about herself saving others.

- A next
- B earlier
- C such as
- D primarily

8. Name two things that Bianca daydreams about.

9. What does Bianca draw?

10. How are daydreams a link, or connection, between Bianca's life and her drawings? Explain your answer with evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 935

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8. Name two things that Bianca daydreams about.

Suggested answer: Students may respond with any two examples from the story. These include Chopsticks, herself, space travel, swimming with sharks, and so on.

9. What does Bianca draw?

Suggested answer: Students may give a general response: Bianca draws her daydreams. They may also give specific examples of the daydreams Bianca draws, such as Captain Chopsticks flying around the world.

10. How are daydreams a link, or connection, between Bianca's life and her drawings? Explain your answer with evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by evidence from the story. Students should recognize that events in Bianca's life, such as a visit from her neighbor's cat, are the basis for many of her daydreams. These daydreams become, in turn, the basis for many of her drawings.