***Talking Buddies* Discussion Topics**

***Talking Buddies*** was written to shine a spotlight on the merits of learning a second language at an early age, while acknowledging the struggles inherent in the disruption of immigrating to a foreign land. I also felt it was important to highlight the benefits associated with a multi-lingual society that helps not only the new arrival, but English speakers in our country who are trying to master a second language.

After reading ***Talking Buddies***, you might want to ask your child/students the questions below. They may need to be modified to match the developmental level of the children, and are meant to begin a conversation. The children will probably present a point of view that had not occurred to you, so enjoy the exchange of ideas!

* Alejandro is having a hard time adjusting to his new school. How can his classmates make him feel more comfortable?
* Why do you think Tyler and Lila were so compassionate towards Alejandro?
* Why do you think it is challenging to learn a second language?
* Miss Kindhart wants her students to be good public speakers. Why is public speaking a valuable skill?
* Very often the illustrations tell the reader things the author does not state directly. Can you find an example of this in ***Talking Buddies***?
* Why do you think the author chose the title ***Talking Buddies***?
* Have you read ***Jamal and Me*** and/or ***Playground Heroes***? If so, are there any similarities between any of these books?
* If you could ask the author a question about ***Talking Buddies***, what would it be?
* Alejandro not only had to learn a new language, but he left his country and his beloved grandmother (abuela) behind. Do you have any suggestions for how to make his transition to his new situation easier?
* What would you bring with you if you had to go to a new country? What do you think Alejandro brought with him?

***Playground Heroes* Discussion Topics**

***Playground Heroes*** was written to help empower children to stand up to bullies whenever it is safe to do so. As this story demonstrates, bullies are often devious, and strike when no adult is watching them.

It is certainly not easy to confront bullies, whether it is done directly like Zoë and Elle did in this story, or whether adults are involved. It is imperative that schools, families, community organizations, faith organizations, etc. work collaboratively to give children the tools to fight back when they or their friends are bullied, and to implement programs that address this issue directly.

After reading ***Playground Heroes***, you might ask your child or students the questions below. They may need to be modified to match the developmental level of the children, and are meant to begin a conversation. The children will probably present a point of view you hadn’t thought of, so enjoy the exchange of ideas!

* Why do you think school is so challenging for Charlie? Have you ever had a classmate who has learning challenges?
* In Playground Heroes the bullies are very devious. Have you ever encountered bullies like the ones in this book?
* Should Zoë and Elle have gone to get Nana and Grampa or should they have stood up for Charlie themselves? Explain your answer.
* Have you read Jamal and Me? If so, are there any ways that Jamal and Me and Playground Heroes are similar?
* Do you think it is easy to stand up to bullies? What would give you the courage to stand up for someone who was being bullied?
* Zoë helped Charlie with his work when she could. What other things could his classmates do to help him?
* We know that the bullies did not like being challenged. Why do you think they walked away?
* Sometimes illustrations tell the reader even more than the words on the page. Which illustrations did you like best and why?
* Do you think Zoë should tell her teacher about what happened on the playground? Why or why not?

***Jamal And Me* Discussion Topics**

You and your class/child have just finished reading ***Jamal And Me***. As you know, there are many themes embedded in this book – some are clearly articulated and some are more subtle. If you want to maximize the impact of this book, you may want to have a follow-up conversation (or perhaps several).

Below are some questions you might ask your child or students. They may need to be modified to match the developmental level of the children, and are just a place to start a conversation. The youngsters will probably present a perspective you missed, so enjoy the exchange of ideas!

* Why do you think Jamal acted out when he first moved to his new school? Why is being the “new kid in school” so hard?
* What could Miss Iceburg have done when Jamal first came to his new school to make things easier for him?
* If you were advising Jamal about how to make friends in his new school, what would you tell him?
* Name at least three things Dr. Toughlove did to help Jamal.
* Do you think it would have been a good idea to send Jamal to another school when he was misbehaving? Why or why not?
* Write a book review about ***Jamal and Me***. Be specific about what you liked or disliked about the book and whether or not you would recommend it to your friends.
* Can you name three words to describe how Miss Iceburg felt about Jamal when he made poor choices?
* Let’s look at the book’s illustrations together. Which ones did you like best? Please explain.

**Additional Activities for Students**

* Think about Jamal in ***Jamal and Me,*** Zoe in ***Playground Heroes*** or Alejandro in ***Talking Buddies.*** If any one of them were writing in their diaries, what sorts of things do you think they would write about? Write your thoughts down in your own words.
* Using large print paper (11×17 inches works well), pencils, and markers and/or crayons, Design a poster that you think will encourage other children to read any of the three books discussed above.