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Family Discussion Guide for "Penny Lu Porcupine"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"Penny Lu Porcupine" tells the story of a young porcupine who, like all porcupines, is nearsighted but has an incredible sense of smell that leads her to amazing food discoveries. While Penny Lu's pointy quills make her look powerful and intimidating, she doesn't always feel that way inside—especially when she thinks about her greatest fear: encountering THE BEAR! Through her forest adventures, Penny Lu learns about her own strengths and discovers what real courage means when you're faced with your biggest fear.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **The difference between looking strong and feeling strong:** How our external appearance doesn't always match our internal feelings about confidence and bravery
- **Working with limitations and celebrating strengths:** Understanding that everyone has both challenges and amazing abilities
- **Facing your biggest fears:** Learning that courage means acting despite being scared, not never feeling afraid
- **Self-acceptance and confidence:** Discovering that real strength comes from knowing and accepting yourself
- **Using your unique abilities:** How what makes you different can also make you special and capable
- **The power of self-knowledge:** Understanding your own strengths and limitations helps you navigate challenges

Tip for Parents: This book offers wonderful opportunities to discuss how everyone has different abilities and challenges. Let your child's own experiences with feeling confident or worried guide deeper conversations about building genuine self-assurance.

Character Connection Questions

About Penny Lu

- How do you think Penny Lu feels when people see her impressive quills but she feels nervous inside?
- What makes Penny Lu's sense of smell so special and helpful?



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- Why do you think THE BEAR is Penny Lu's biggest fear?
- What would you want to tell Penny Lu about being brave?

About Strengths and Challenges

- How does Penny Lu's nearsightedness affect her daily life?
- What amazing things can Penny Lu do because of her incredible sense of smell?
- How does she learn to work with her limitations instead of being upset about them?
- What do you think Penny Lu's quills are really for, and how do they help her?

Big Ideas to Explore

Looking Strong vs. Feeling Strong

- Have you ever looked confident on the outside but felt nervous on the inside?
- What's the difference between appearing brave and actually feeling brave?
- How can someone look powerful but still have fears or worries?
- What helps people feel as strong as they look?

Working with Your Unique Abilities

- What are some things you're really good at, like Penny Lu's amazing sense of smell?
- How can something that seems like a challenge (like nearsightedness) be balanced by other strengths?
- What makes each person's combination of abilities special?
- How do you use your best abilities to help with daily challenges?

Facing Fears

- What do you think makes THE BEAR so scary to Penny Lu?
- How do you handle situations when you're worried about something you might encounter?
- What's the difference between being careful and being too afraid to try things?
- How can knowing your own strengths help when you face something scary?

Fun Conversation Starters

Animal Abilities and Senses

- If you could have an amazing sense like Penny Lu's incredible smell, which sense would you choose?
- What do you think the forest smells like to Penny Lu compared to how we would experience it?
- How do you think different animals experience the world with their special abilities?
- What would it be like to find your way around using mainly your sense of smell?



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Food Adventures

- What do you think are Penny Lu's favorite foods that she discovers?
- If you could follow amazing smells to find food like Penny Lu, where would you want to go?
- How does following her nose lead Penny Lu to both good discoveries and potential dangers?
- What's the most delicious thing you've ever found just by following a good smell?

Forest Life and Safety

- What do you think Penny Lu needs to be careful about in the forest?
- How do you think forest animals stay safe while still exploring and finding food?
- What would you do if you were nearsighted like Penny Lu and needed to be aware of predators?
- How do different animals protect themselves in the wild?

Discussion Activities

Exploring Senses and Abilities

- Go on a "smell walk" around your neighborhood and discuss what different scents tell you
- Practice using different senses (close your eyes and identify things by smell or sound)
- Talk about family members' different strengths and how they complement each other
- Create a "family superpowers" list highlighting what each person does especially well

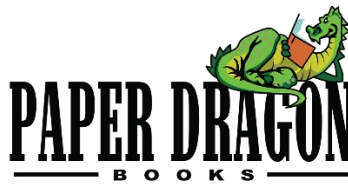
Real-World Connections

- Research how porcupines actually live and what their quills are for
- Learn about other animals with amazing senses (like dogs' sense of smell or bats' echolocation)
- Discuss how people work with vision challenges and develop other strong abilities
- Explore your local environment and talk about what animals might live there

Conversation Tips for Parents

Creating Safe Spaces

- **Acknowledge that everyone has fears** - validate that it's normal to worry about things, even when you look capable
- **Celebrate unique abilities** - help your child identify their own special strengths and talents



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- **Discuss the balance of confidence and caution** - it's smart to be aware of real dangers while still being brave enough to explore
- **Share your own experiences** with feeling different on the inside than you appear on the outside

Encouraging Self-Awareness

- **Ask about feelings:** "How do you feel when people think you're really good at something but you feel uncertain?"
- **Explore strengths:** "What are you really good at that helps you in daily life?"
- **Discuss challenges:** "How do you work with things that are hard for you?"
- **Connect to growth:** "How has understanding your own abilities helped you feel more confident?"

Making It Personal

- **Connect to family experiences:** Share stories about times family members felt nervous despite appearing confident
- **Celebrate differences:** Discuss how each family member has different strengths and that's what makes the family strong
- **Plan related activities:** visit nature centers, try activities that use different senses, practice being aware of your environment
- **Build confidence gradually:** help your child recognize their own growth in handling challenges

Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 5-7)

Focus on basic concepts of abilities, fears, and forest adventures:

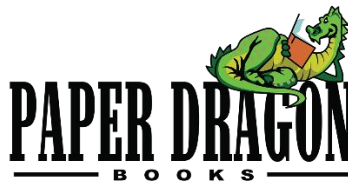
- What's your favorite thing about Penny Lu?
- How does Penny Lu's nose help her find yummy food?
- What would you do if you met Penny Lu in the forest?
- How do Penny Lu's quills help keep her safe?

For Older Readers (Ages 8-10)

Explore deeper themes of self-confidence, adaptation, and facing fears:

- How does Penny Lu learn to feel as confident as she looks?
- What does this story teach us about working with our limitations?
- How can understanding our own abilities help us face scary situations?
- What would you do if you had to face your biggest fear like Penny Lu does?

Handling Sensitive Topics



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Fears and Anxiety

- Acknowledge that everyone has things they're afraid of, and that's completely normal
- Discuss the difference between reasonable caution and fears that hold us back
- Emphasize that being brave means acting despite being scared, not never feeling afraid
- Connect to strategies for managing worry and building confidence gradually

Feeling Different or Having Limitations

- Celebrate that everyone has different abilities and challenges
- Discuss how limitations in one area often come with strengths in others
- Emphasize that what makes us different can also make us special and capable
- Connect to real-world examples of people who work with challenges and achieve amazing things

Self-Confidence vs. Appearance

- Validate that it's normal for how we feel inside to be different from how others see us
- Discuss how real confidence builds over time through experience and self-understanding
- Emphasize that it's okay to feel uncertain sometimes, even when others think we're very capable
- Connect to the importance of honest self-assessment and gradual confidence building

Activity Ideas

Nature Exploration

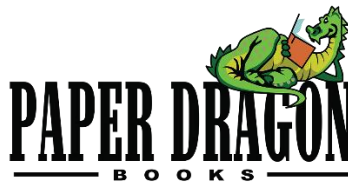
- Take "sensory walks" where you focus on different senses each time
- Research local wildlife and their adaptations
- Practice being aware of your environment using sight, sound, and smell
- Create a family guide to your local area highlighting different sensory experiences

Self-Discovery Activities

- Make "superpower charts" for each family member highlighting their unique strengths
- Practice activities that help develop confidence in small steps
- Create family stories about times each person overcame a fear or challenge
- Discuss how different family members contribute to keeping everyone safe and happy

Creative Projects

- Draw or write about your own forest adventures
- Create stories about animals with different special abilities
- Design your ideal forest home considering both adventures and safety
- Make up games that use different senses like Penny Lu's incredible sense of smell



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Remember

"Penny Lu Porcupine" provides wonderful opportunities to discuss self-confidence, personal strengths, and facing fears in a realistic and encouraging way. Penny Lu's journey from uncertainty to self-assurance offers a relatable model for children developing their own sense of confidence and capability.

Use Penny Lu's story as a starting point to explore your child's own unique abilities and help them understand that everyone has both strengths and areas of challenge. The book's message about working with limitations while celebrating special abilities can help your family develop a healthy, balanced approach to building confidence and handling fears.

Most importantly, let Penny Lu's discovery that real strength comes from self-knowledge and courage inspire conversations about how your child can develop their own authentic confidence and face their own challenges with both wisdom and bravery.