

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Lottery Rose

by  
Irene Hunt

### Book Information

Irene Hunt, The Lottery Rose  
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Abused by his mom and her boyfriend, Georgie learns to hide his hurt. When he wins a small rosebush in a grocery store lottery, he gives it all the love and caring he has never had. His life begins to open up when the courts send him to a home for boys.

**Topics:** Community Life, Domestic Abuse; Emotions, Love; Family Life, Foster Children; Family Life, Growing Up

### Main Characters

Georgie Burgess the principal character of the story; a severely abused seven-year-old boy who undergoes a transformation when placed in a safe and caring environment

Hugh Collier Robin's grandfather; a former instructor of special teachers who help abused children learn; he helps Georgie realize he can learn

Miss Ames the school librarian, who lets Georgie repeatedly borrow a picture book of flowers

Miss Cressman Georgie's first grade teacher, who is unsympathetic to Georgie's family situation and allows the class to belittle him

Molly Harper an actress who lives across the street from the boys' school; she is embittered by the loss of her son and husband but undergoes a change after meeting Georgie

Mrs. Sims a loving woman who works in a local grocery; she provides temporary foster care for Georgie prior to his placement in the boys' school

Rennie Burgess Georgie's alcoholic mother, who allows him to be abused by her boyfriend

Richie a boy at the boys' school who enjoys taunting others

Robin Harper Molly Harper's retarded five-year-old son; Georgie teaches him to talk and plays with him

Sister Mary Angela the head of the boys' school; a kind woman who understands the needs of abused children

Steve the boyfriend of Rennie, who severely abuses Georgie

Timothy a young boy at the boys' school who befriends Georgie

### Vocabulary

**accustomed** familiar with, used to

**impudent** bold or shameless

**palmetto** a small palm tree with fan-like leaves

**peddler** a person who travels about selling things to make money

**retarded** slow in mental, emotional, or physical development

**terrazzo** a polished floor material made of stone chips or marble set in mortar

**vespers** a Christian worship service held in the late afternoon or early evening

### Synopsis

Held back for a second year in first grade and still unable to read, Georgie Burgess has been labeled incorrigible and retarded by his teachers. He finds solace in a peaceful dream world of flower gardens suggested by the pictures in his favorite library book. Georgie often plays hooky from school and wanders the streets. He is severely abused by his mother and her boyfriend, Steve, and at times, Steve does not allow him to go to school until his wounds heal a bit. He has many scars from his past beatings.

One day during the school lunch hour Georgie returns quietly to the apartment where he lives to find his mother drunk, as usual, on the couch. There is no food to be found. Steve is not around, as he sometimes disappears for a week or two at a time. Georgie leaves to buy a can of beans at the corner grocery. By making the purchase, he is automatically entered in a lottery drawing. On the day of the drawing, Georgie wins a rosebush. He

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gleefully runs out of the store to find a place to plant his bush, thinking he won the best possible of all prizes. He can find no suitable place for his rosebush and returns to the apartment after dark. Georgie sneaks in but awakens Steve. Georgie is severely beaten, and his life is saved only by the intrusion of concerned neighbors. His rosebush is rescued from the debris.

With Steve in jail and Georgie's mother's health rapidly failing due to alcoholism, Georgie becomes the temporary foster child of Mrs. Sims, a clerk at the grocery store. He stays with Mr. and Mrs. Sims until a judge sends him and his rosebush to a rural boys' residential school run by an order of nuns. Georgie becomes enamored by the garden owned by Mrs. Molly Harper, which is adjacent to the school. Mrs. Harper has become embittered since the death of her husband and son in a car accident, and she wants nothing to do with the boys from the school. Georgie insists on planting his rosebush in her garden, against the advice of Sister Mary Angela and Hugh Collier, Mrs. Harper's father. Georgie plants it secretly at night and inadvertently ruins Mrs. Harper's special lilies. She angrily pulls out the rosebush and threatens to destroy it. Georgie is livid and yells back but collapses because of the exertion. Mrs. Harper, seeing the wounds on Georgie's back, is moved with pity. Georgie is carried back to the school, where the fever from his infected wounds rages for days. He emerges from the illness weakened. He learns that his rosebush has been planted in Mrs. Harper's garden. Georgie is happy his bush is safe, but he holds tremendous bitterness towards Mrs. Harper for her initial threats to destroy the bush.

Hugh Collier comes to visit Georgie while he is recuperating and brings along Mrs. Harper's retarded son, Robin. Hugh brings some books to read to Georgie, and both he and Georgie are surprised to discover that Georgie really can read. They agree to meet again so that Georgie can learn more. Georgie is drawn to Robin and wishes for a chance to play with him. Hugh is unsuccessful in convincing Georgie that his daughter is a good lady. Sister Mary Angela also tries to point out Mrs.

Harper's goodness, but again, Georgie is unwilling to change his mind about her.

The boys' school is a good place for Georgie. The safety and consistency it offers slowly helps him to become more trusting. His friendship with Robin grows. Robin, who has missed playing with his older brother since his death, welcomes Georgie into his life. He waits anxiously at the gate of the garden until Georgie gets out of school and can come to play with him. Robin loves to feed the ducks on the lake, and Georgie happily accompanies him and supervises him. Hugh Collier continues reading with Georgie. It becomes obvious that Georgie had been tragically mislabeled.

Sister Mary Angela brings him to the choir loft one day, and Georgie is enchanted with the music he hears. He joins the choir shortly thereafter. Another breakthrough occurs when Georgie is finally able to show his wounded and scarred back to his friend Timothy.

Georgie never forgets his rosebush and visits it daily. He sits in the garden and talks to it, and it seems to respond to him. Mrs. Harper often works in the garden, but Georgie still ignores her. She realizes she also needs to heal from the past and the loss of her son. In an attempt to heal, she asks if she can become involved at the school. Sister Mary Angela suggests putting on a play, since Mrs. Harper is an actress. Georgie refuses to become involved but faithfully attends every rehearsal and memorizes every line. He then practices them when he is alone or playing with Robin. Hugh witnesses this, and when one of the other boys cannot play his part in a skit, Georgie is finally willing to forgive Mrs. Harper and participate in the play. He does a wonderful job and tells his bush afterward that he wishes Mrs. Harper were his mother.

The next day while Robin awaits Georgie's arrival, he unexpectedly discovers a way out of the garden. He goes to the lake to feed the ducks by himself and drowns. Georgie is devastated and, in the night, digs up his rosebush and takes it to the cemetery to replant it on Robin's grave. Mrs. Harper finds him

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there, helps him plant it, and lets Georgie know how precious Georgie is to her.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why does Mrs. Harper's name come up so often in conversations with Georgie?

*Sister Mary Angela wants Georgie to forgive Mrs. Harper for her angry words and have Mrs. Harper redeem herself in Georgie's eyes. Sister realizes quite quickly that Georgie is stubborn, probably because of all his hurts. Therefore, she orchestrates, through Timothy, Hugh Collier, and herself, that Mrs. Harper's good deeds are mentioned to Georgie. At first, Sister expects an instant reversal of Georgie's feelings, but when that does not occur, she patiently continues her strategy until Georgie is ready to forgive.*

#### Literary Analysis

What can the reader learn about Georgie through his friendship with Robin?

*Students can see the tender side of Georgie that he lets no one else see until later. He is affectionate and patient with Robin, wanting to teach him to speak and read. The reader sees that Georgie is still capable of loving, even though he was never given a good example of parental love. He is also able to mourn Robin's death and sacrifice his most prized possession in an attempt to comfort Robin. These signs indicate Georgie is healing emotionally as well as physically.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

How is Hugh Collier an important influence on Georgie?

*Hugh Collier is a wise gentleman. He believes in Georgie and never gives up on him. He does not reject Georgie at the beginning when Georgie swears at him. He shows Georgie that he can read; he trusts him with Robin; and he teaches him that the process of doing is just as important, if not more important, than the result. He encourages Georgie to grow outside of his relationship with Robin and make friends his own age. Georgie thrives at the school in large part because of Hugh Collier's influence.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Do you think the judge makes a wise decision in placing Georgie at a boarding school? Why?

*Most students will feel the judge's decision is a good one. Georgie is given a fresh start with people who are used to working with children from troubled backgrounds. He is removed from his old environment, where people have already labeled him. Mrs. Sims and her husband would probably have been capable of caring for him, but Georgie would have been faced with the same learning environment in which he had already failed. He probably would have been racked with fear that Steve and his mother would find him.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Acting in a play allows Georgie to forget his shyness and self-consciousness for a while and take on a whole new persona. Have the students form groups and choose a favorite scene from a story to dramatize. Assign roles and gather simple props to make the scene come to life. Have the students perform the skits for their classmates.

**Recognizing Details** The book contains a lovely description of the various flowers in Mrs. Harper's garden. A beautiful and thriving garden takes much planning and hard work. The students may like to become "master gardeners." Using a large

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sheet of graph or grid paper, have them design a perennial flower garden. In order for the garden to thrive, plants should be selected for hardiness in the climate in which they are to be planted. Plants should be spaced to accommodate their full-grown size. If possible, plan the garden so that some flowers are blooming in each season of the year. The students can use books or plant catalogs. They also may include paths, fountains, arbors, etc., in their plan to make the garden welcoming and restful.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Although a very difficult topic, child abuse is a prevalent factor in the story. The nurse's comment that she had seen this abuse before and "not only in the slums, either," shows that it is a problem that crosses socio-economic lines. The students can be asked to do some research on the subject to learn about the cycle of abuse and various options for children who find themselves in an abusive situation. A classroom discussion about their findings may help the students vent their feelings both about the book and the information they researched.

**Drawing Conclusions** Georgie's sleep is often troubled by bad dreams. People sometimes dream about things that are bothering them or that are on their mind. The images they find in dreams can be comforting or confusing. Have students record their dreams over a period of time by keeping a small notebook at their bedside and writing down their dreams as soon as they awaken. They should evaluate whether their dreams have any connection with reality in their lives.