

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Man in the Ceiling

by  
Jules Feiffer

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### Book Information

Jules Feiffer, The Man in the Ceiling  
Quiz Number: 9952  
HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1993  
ISBN 0-06-205036-2; LCCN  
185 Pages  
Book Level: 5.3  
Interest Level: MG

This story is of a boy cartoonist who dreams of becoming a professional artist doing what he likes best.

**Topics:** Careers, Artist; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Mothers; Family Life, Sisters; Family Life, Uncles; Fantasy/Imagination, Dreams; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+

### Main Characters

Charley Beemer a classmate of Jimmy's who seems to be good at everything except drawing  
Father Jimmy's father, a man who is overworked and admits he doesn't understand artistic people  
Jimmy Jibbett the principal character in the story, a ten-year-old boy who loves to draw cartoons and wants to be accepted by others  
Lisi Jimmy's older sister, who admires his artistic talent and has a wicked temper  
Mother a fashion designer who works at home and often seems to be in a world of her own  
Susu Jimmy's five-year-old sister, who loves to have Jimmy tell her stories  
Uncle Lester Jimmy's uncle, an artistic man who for years has been writing Broadway musicals that flop

### Vocabulary

**charisma** power that inspires loyalty and devotion in others  
**intimidate** to make afraid  
**milliner** a designer, maker, and/or seller of women's hats  
**retain** to engage beforehand by a fee

### Synopsis

The main thing going for Jimmy Jibbett is that he can draw, and he draws all the time. His big dream is to be a great cartoonist someday. However, his father thinks he is wasting his time. He can't seem to understand artistic talent in his son. Jimmy's mother can relate to Jimmy, but she is always thinking about other things. She spends a lot of time working in her attic studio as a fashion designer. Jimmy's older sister, Lisi, is the greatest admirer of his talent. He offends her when he won't allow her to view his work. Jimmy's younger sister, Susu, just wants to play with him; she often requests him to tell her made-up stories of Tricky Bear.

Jimmy isn't overly popular at school, and so he is flattered when Charley Beemer, the most popular boy in his class, takes an interest in his drawings. Charley even suggests they create comics together as a team. This turns out to be a chore for Jimmy, who finds drawing Charley's violent ideas difficult. He is disappointed in Charley's response to his efforts.

Uncle Lester helps Jimmy through the tough time he has drawing Charley's ideas. Jimmy has a lot in common with his Uncle Lester, who has been writing flop Broadway musicals for years before suddenly coming up with a hit. When Lester's musical turns into a flop because of the words of one critic, Jimmy helps Lester remember his own words about success--that failure is just one step along the way.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

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#### Initial Understanding

Why does Jimmy draw a picture of Mini-Man squashed under a foot?

*It most likely represents Jimmy's feelings of failure after having Charley reject his work. However, it may also represent his own attitude toward how he allowed himself to care so much about other's opinions, indicating a transition or need to move on to something new.*

#### Literary Analysis

How does Jimmy change during the course of the story?

*He seems to understand his family better, especially Uncle Lester, as he learns more about failure. His drawing matures, and so does he.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Why do you think Uncle Lester names his dog Vernon?

*He could pretend the dog was the critic who ruined his musical and act as his master.*

#### Constructing Meaning

What does the Ceiling Man comic strip that Jimmy gave Uncle Lester mean?

*Jimmy understands what Uncle Lester meant in his talk about failure. Jimmy also wants to encourage Lester to overcome his failure and try again.*

him at the beginning and end of the book. What would his facial expression, stature, and clothing be in each picture? Discuss this with other students.

**Understanding Literary Features** Have the students list the names of the characters in the story by alphabetical order, by order of appearance, or by order of importance. Explain how each character contributes to the main idea of the story. (This list should look similar to the list of main characters.) What do the characters have in common with each other? Does this have a bearing on the theme?

**Making Predictions** There are several times in the story in which a person can predict what will happen in the story. Two examples are when Charley asks Jimmy to draw his ideas and when Uncle Lester thinks *Robotica* will be a smash hit. Tell the students to try to find other instances in the book that are predictable. Break into discussion groups and talk about what leads them to assume something will be happening. Is it what the characters say, how they act, or something else?

**Recognizing Feelings** Allow the students to review the synopsis for *The Man in the Ceiling*, and record how many different emotions they encounter. What is the dominant emotion? What do the characters feel at the climax of the story? How does Jimmy feel at the end of

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Feelings** Allow the students to review the synopsis for *The Man in the Ceiling*, and record how many different emotions they encounter. What is the dominant emotion? What do the characters feel at the climax of the story? How does Jimmy feel at the end of the book? Do Jimmy's emotions influence anyone else?

**Understanding Characterization** Have the students think about how Jimmy has changed during the course of the book. They should draw before and after pictures of Jimmy that represent