

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ramona Quimby, Age 8
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Now in third grade, Ramona rides the school bus alone and helps around the house while her mother works and her father attends college.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Newbery Honor; State Award

Topics: Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Series, Ramona

Main Characters

Beezus (Beatrice) Quimby Ramona's older sister, who is starting junior high school

Danny (Yard Ape) a classmate of Ramona who likes to tease her

Howie Kemp Ramona's neighborhood friend

Mr. Quimby Ramona's father, who goes to college while working part-time at a supermarket warehouse

Mr. Wittman the school principal

Mrs. Kemp Howie's grandmother, who supervises Ramona after school

Mrs. Larson the school secretary

Mrs. Quimby Ramona's mother, who works as a receptionist and cares for her daughters

Mrs. Whaley Ramona's third grade teacher

Ramona Quimby an eight-year-old girl starting third grade in a new school; she tries to be grown up to meet the changes in family and school

the old man at the Whopperburger a lonely old man who thinks the Quimbys are a nice family

Willa Jean a pesty four-year-old whom Ramona is supposed to play with after school

Vocabulary

conspiratorial of, or relating to, a secret plan

cursive writing in which the letters are joined together

exasperation the condition of being extremely irritated

unrelenting not yielding; not letting up

Synopsis

Ramona Quimby is full of excitement on her first day of school. The thought of riding the school bus to her new school makes her feel very grown-up. Her older sister, Beezus, is beginning junior high. Mr. Quimby, Ramona's father, is also starting school. He is going back to college to become an art teacher, while working part-time at the supermarket warehouse to help the family "squeak by." He gives his daughters new pink erasers for good luck as they start their day.

On the bus ride to school, Ramona is pestered by a boy named Danny who kicks her seat and steals her eraser. Upon arriving at school, she nicknames him Yard Ape and finds out he is in her class. He labels her "Bigfoot," which leads Ramona to nickname herself "Superfoot." As the days pass, Ramona adapts. She enjoys the bus ride and keeps Danny from getting the best of her. She especially likes Sustained Silent Reading. However, Ramona is still uncertain about her feelings for Mrs. Whaley, her teacher.

After school Ramona must spend each afternoon at the Kemp house where she is supervised until her parents get home. She dreads having to play with and entertain the Kemp's four-year-old daughter, Willa Jean. She devises a plan in which she tells Willa Jean she cannot play with her because she has to do Sustained Silent Reading.

New routines come with the changes in the Quimby house. With Ramona being the third to leave each morning, she enjoys spending the few minutes alone with her mother, who is the last to leave. One morning, Ramona reminds her mother she needs a hard-boiled egg in her cold lunch, as it is the new lunch fad. When she cracks it on her head at lunchtime, Ramona is horrified to discover her egg is

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raw. She goes to the office where Mrs. Larson, the school secretary, cleans her up. While in the office, Ramona overhears Mrs. Whaley refer to her as a show-off, and Ramona also hears her teacher use the word "nuisance." She is hurt by Mrs. Whaley's words, but is somewhat comforted when Danny tells her Mrs. Whaley likes her.

A big argument ensues during dinner the next night when Ramona and Beezus discover they were eating tongue. Mr. Quimby declares the girls can cook dinner the next day. Sunday arrives, and the Quimby sisters hope their parents will forget about dinner as they try to be extra good during the day. However, Mr. Quimby reminds them of their cooking task, and both girls attempt to make dinner. They mix and match ingredients and manage to produce a meal complete with candlelight.

Because of Ramona's concern that she is a nuisance to Mrs. Whaley, school is not always enjoyable for her. She is especially upset the day she becomes ill and throws up at school. Her mother comes to get her from school and takes the next day off from work to stay home with Ramona. Her classmates send cards, and Mrs. Whaley sends a book for her to read along with an assignment to "sell" the book to the class. When Ramona returns to class, she sells her book by doing a commercial. Mrs. Whaley likes her idea, and Ramona feels confident enough to ask Mrs. Whaley about the words she overheard her use earlier. Mrs. Whaley admits that she indicated Ramona is a bit of a show-off, and Ramona acknowledges the statement is basically true. But Mrs. Whaley did not think Ramona was a nuisance; she had only been referring to the nuisance involved in cleaning up the egg from Ramona's hair. Ramona feels better.

Later that fall on a rainy Sunday, the Quimbys are especially grumpy, so Mr. Quimby announces they are all going to eat out at the Whopperburger as a special treat. At the restaurant, an old man takes a liking to the family and discreetly pays for their meal. The waitress tells the Quimbys he is a lonely man who misses his children and grandchildren and thinks the Quimbys seem like a nice family. The

family agrees they are a nice family who manage to get along and stick together despite the ups and downs.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

On Ramona's first day of school, her stomach feels "quivery with excitement." What are some of the reasons she is excited? Try to remember how you felt on the first days of a new school year. What were you anticipating? How did you feel? Recall other times and your feelings about an upcoming event in your life.

Ramona is looking forward to her first school bus ride; she is wearing new sandals; Beezus is going to a different school; and the teachers would not know she is Beezus's sister. Students should recall and share feelings of anticipation (good and bad) on their first school days. They should also share their feelings concerning other important events in their lives.

Literary Analysis

Ramona is very clear on what she thinks about having to spend time with Willa Jean and be nice to her. What does she think? Why do you think she does not enjoy playing with Willa Jean?

She is tired of being nice to Willa Jean and believes that no matter what kind of trouble erupts, Mrs. Kemp always blames Ramona because she is older. Mrs. Kemp tends to dote on Willa Jean, probably causing a feeling of further injustice. Ramona most likely does not enjoy playing with Willa Jean because the younger girl is rather bossy and tends to make Ramona do silly things. Also, Ramona probably believes she is too "grown up" to be playing with Willa Jean.

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Inferential Comprehension

In the story, Mr. Quimby is going back to college to be an art teacher. Money is still tight for the Quimbys, as he is only working part-time. What parts of the story might be different if Mr. Quimby were working full-time and not going to school?

Students may suggest some of the following would have been different: the tongue-dinner argument would not have happened because the Quimbys could have afforded a different meat; the trip to the Whopperburger would not have been such a special occasion; the scenes in which the family is tense and cross might not have happened as often since Mr. and Mrs. Quimby might not have been so worried about money; there might have been less concern over having to fix the transmission on the car; and Ramona might have felt less pressured to be well behaved.

Constructing Meaning

What are some parts of Ramona's life you can identify with?

Students can possibly identify with Ramona's difficulty dealing with many things: expectations regarding Willa, her relationship with Beezus, having a parent going to school while one parent is working full-time, her confusion over whether or not she likes her teacher, her illness, and her school day activities.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Ramona is very hurt when she overhears Mrs. Whaley call her a show-off. She also believes her teacher thinks she is a nuisance. Have students reread that part of the story and write a short scene in which Ramona confronts Mrs. Whaley immediately after she overhears her words. They can use the scene from the story to begin and follow up with their own dialogue. Create the scene together, writing the two characters' dialogue on the blackboard. Work on the scene until the class is satisfied a suitable scene has been created, based upon what they know of Ramona's personality.

Extending Meaning Ramona is stunned and embarrassed when the old man at the Whopperburger asks her if she has been good to her mother. Ramona knows she is not always nice to her mother or to other family members. Have students write a letter from Ramona to her family or a family member. The letter should begin with an apology for her behavior and then reasons why she feels she behaved the way she did. Example: Dear Mom and Dad, I am sorry that I made such a terrible fuss at dinner over eating the tongue. I know it was wrong because.... but I think you should not always make me eat things I don't like....

Identifying Reasons Ramona especially likes the part of the school day when they have Sustained Silent Reading. Every day after lunch, the students are allowed to sit quietly and read any book they choose from the library. Have students write or tell about their favorite part of the school day and provide reasons for their preferences. Students may also suggest something they would like to do in class and support it with reasons.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The names of Ramona's reading program, SSR or DEAR, are acronyms, which means the shortened form is created from the beginning of other words. Explain to students what acronyms are and then have them brainstorm a list of words that are considered acronyms. If that is too challenging, have them create their own acronyms. (Examples: PC -- personal computer; MADD -- Mothers Against Drunk Driving).