

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Ramona and Her Father

by

Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ramona and Her Father
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In this adventure with Beezus and Ramona, two of the best-loved characters in children's literature, Mr. Quimby loses his job, and the entire family learns to cope with hardship.

Award: Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Newbery Honor; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Family Life, Misc./Other; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Series, Ramona

Main Characters

Beezus Quimby Ramona's older sister, who, as a seventh grader, has "reached a difficult age"

Howie Ramona's friend

Mr. Quimby Ramona's father, who has lost his job; he spends more time with Ramona when Mrs. Quimby begins to work full-time

Mrs. Quimby Ramona's mother, who finds a full-time job to help the family

Mrs. Swink a widow who lives in the neighborhood

Picky-picky the Quimbys' cat

Ramona Quimby a second-grade girl who tries to understand the changes in her family after her father loses his job

Vocabulary

burs rough, prickly seed coverings of various plants

calamity a disaster

chagrined embarrassed or humiliated by failure or disappointment

conspicuous easy to notice

subdued made less intense; toned down

Synopsis

One of Ramona Quimby's favorite days is her father's payday. This means a special treat for the family, such as dinner at the Whopperburger. This changes, however, the day Mr. Quimby comes home and the house is filled with hushed whispers between Ramona's parents. Ramona and her big sister, Beezus, find out their father has lost his job. He had worked for a little company that was bought by a big company, and many of the workers had been let go. Mr. Quimby is given two weeks pay, but Ramona worries about Christmas, another of her favorite days. Her mother tells her Christmas is the least of their worries and Ramona crosses all the items off the Christmas list she had been making. Now, her only wish on the list is "one happy family."

The following days bring many changes in the Quimby household. Mrs. Quimby finds a full-time job. Ramona sees a lot of her father and, at first, thinks it is fun. However, Mr. Quimby is often busy doing chores around the house while waiting for the phone to ring with another job offer. His preoccupation worries Ramona, who wonders if he does not love her anymore. She thinks she can help earn money by being in television commercials, and she begins to practice commercials at every opportunity.

On the day of parent-teacher conferences, Mr. Quimby comes to school to meet Ramona's second grade teacher, Mrs. Rogers. While the two adults are talking, Ramona goes outside and discovers some burs. Making a crown of burs, she places it on her head and pretends to be rich and famous. When her father returns from the conference, he tells his daughter the nice things her teacher had to say. He adds that Mrs. Rogers also thinks Ramona is inclined to show off and forget her manners sometimes. This makes Ramona upset, but she soon realizes her teacher is right. Eager to get the crown of burs off her head before her father realizes what she has been doing, Ramona is sullen when the crown will not come off. Later, Mr. Quimby removes the crown by cutting each bur from her

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head.

Ramona continues to worry about her family. Mr. Quimby smiles less and less, Mrs. Quimby always seems to be anxious, and Beezus is a grouch. Her worry subsides when her family seems to return to normal the night they carve a jack-o'-lantern for Halloween. However, Picky-picky, the Quimbys' cat, decides to eat from it late one night. Beezus is furious. She feels Picky-picky is hungry because he will not eat the cheap food Mrs. Quimby has been buying. Beezus and Mr. Quimby get into an argument when Beezus suggests he should not be wasting money on cigarettes. Ramona is horrified by her sister's daring.

In the days that follow, though, Ramona and Beezus strike up a campaign to get their father to quit smoking. They make signs and leave them all around the house. They replace his cigarettes with little messages inside. It is not until the afternoon Ramona is left outside in the rain waiting for her father that Mr. Quimby tells her he will try to quit smoking.

Meanwhile, Beezus is unhappy because she is now in a creative writing class. She has to interview an old person, so she calls their neighbor, Mrs. Swink. She is immediately invited over and takes Ramona with her. Mrs. Swink tells the girls about the time from her childhood when she made tin-can stilts. Ramona cannot wait to tell her friend, Howie, who is enthusiastic about making them. The two friends find tin cans, make their stilts, and spend the next few afternoons clanking around the neighborhood singing. Ramona is at her happiest during these afternoons.

Mr. Quimby remains without a job as Christmas draws near. Ramona is surprised by Beezus's agreement to play Mary in the Sunday school Christmas program. She wants to have a part, too, and volunteers her mother to make her a sheep costume so she can be one of the sheep in the program. Mrs. Quimby, on the other hand, is not happy about being volunteered and explains to Ramona she does not have the time to make the

costume. Ramona sulks and her mother gives in, which does not please Mr. Quimby. Ramona overhears him calling her a "spoiled brat" so, in the days that follow, Ramona is very cross with her father. When Ramona comes home and smells smoke in the house she tells her father he cheated on his promise to stop smoking. He looks tired and explains to her that he is trying. She cannot stay angry at him.

A few days before Christmas, Mr. Quimby is offered a new job with a supermarket chain. After that, he stops reaching for his cigarettes and begins to whistle more often. The night of the Christmas program, Ramona is sulking because she does not like her sheep costume. Mrs. Quimby explains she did not have time for complicated sewing, but Ramona tells her father she will not be a sheep at all if she cannot be a good sheep. When she spots the other children who are sheep, she longs to join them but decides she cannot back down after claiming she will not be a sheep. She finds a way to disguise herself when a girl playing one of the Three Wise Persons uses some mascara to make a black sheep's nose for Ramona. On stage, Ramona wants her parents to be proud of her and is delighted when Mr. Quimby winks at her. She then realizes how much her parents love her and how much she loves them and Beezus.

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

Ramona becomes very cross with her father when she overhears him calling her a "spoiled brat." She thinks he is mean to be talking about her behind her back. What else might Ramona be feeling? Have you ever overheard a conversation that was not meant for you to hear? How did it make you feel? Has someone overheard you talking about him or her? How did you feel upon learning you had been overheard?

Ramona most likely feels hurt and betrayed to hear her father talking about her. She might also recognize that what he says is true to some extent. Student responses will vary in their admissions about overhearing conversations. Feelings might include guilt, embarrassment, anger, or hurt.

Literary Analysis

In chapter six, Ramona makes a fuss when her mother tells her there is not time to sew a sheep costume for the Christmas program. Later, though, Mrs. Quimby gives in and tells her daughter she will see what she can do. Mr. Quimby is bothered that his wife gave in to Ramona, and Mrs. Quimby explains that Ramona is little and these things are important to her, and that there will be less at Christmas this year. What might be another reason Mrs. Quimby makes the effort to sew the costume?

Mrs. Quimby is working full-time and is not spending as much time with Ramona as she once had. It is very likely she is feeling guilty about this situation and wants to make up for this by trying to sew the costume.

Inferential Comprehension

How do Ramona and Beezus differ in their responses to the changes in the household after Mr. Quimby loses his job?

Ramona, being younger than Beezus, does not fully understand the emotional turmoil her parents are going through with Mr. Quimby's job loss. She only knows her parents seem to smile less and are more anxious about things. She is aware that there is less money, but that does not stop her from worrying about Christmas presents. She simply wants everyone to be happy and does not quite understand why they are not. She also tends to worry that everyone's unhappiness impacts his or her love for her. Beezus, on the other hand, has a keener idea of the financial trouble, which becomes apparent when she confronts her father about how he continues to buy cigarettes, but cannot afford to buy more expensive cat food for Picky-picky. She also makes Ramona aware of the difficulty she has caused their mother by volunteering her to sew a sheep costume. Beezus knows her mother is very busy and has more responsibilities since starting her full-time job.

Constructing Meaning

What part of the story did you enjoy the most and why? What part did you enjoy the least and why?

The following examples are parts that students may find enjoyable: Ramona's tin-can stilt experience, the times she pretends to be in commercials, and her experience with the crown of burs. Students may find unenjoyable parts to include the moments when Ramona and her father are disagreeing or when Ramona behaves selfishly concerning the sheep's costume.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors When Beezus interviews Mrs. Swink, Mrs. Swink tells her about tin-can stilts. Have students interview a grandparent or older person in their neighborhood. Brainstorm with students to prepare a possible list of interview questions

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before the interviews take place. After interviews are completed, students can create a newspaper featuring the people in their interviews. Have an open house in which the children can invite the people they interviewed into the classroom. The newspapers can be given out. If an open house cannot be arranged, prepare a classroom bulletin board with the pictures and interviews of those who were interviewed for all the students to see.

be short and to the point and must highlight the book's (movie's) main idea.

Comparing and Contrasting Ramona and Beezus begin an all-out campaign to get their father to stop smoking. Mr. Quimby admits it is a very hard habit to break. Have students compile a list of their own bad habits, such as chewing their fingernails. After they have compiled their lists, discuss with them their feelings on how easy or difficult it would be to stop doing these things. Ask them to try to give up their bad habits for one week. Chart the students' progress on a wall chart in the classroom. When the week is over, discuss their thoughts on the activity. Were they able to give up their bad habits for a week? Could they give them up permanently? Is it possible Ramona and Beezus do not fully understand how difficult it is for their father to quit smoking?

Recognizing Details Ramona and her family spend an evening carving a jack-o'-lantern for Halloween. Begin this activity by having students work in groups to write detailed descriptions of a jack-o'-lantern. Tell them they must list everything they can think of to describe the jack-o'-lantern. Have students exchange their descriptions with another group and distribute paper to each group. Each group must use the descriptions they were given to draw a jack-o'-lantern. Students will see how careful detail and description is necessary in performing certain tasks. Identify which groups were successful in following written directions and which groups wrote the best directions.

Understanding the Main Idea Bring in several old issues of TV Guide. Have students read some of the entries for television programs. Discuss how the magazine highlights the main idea of the episode to be aired on TV. Tell students they must create a TV Guide entry for a movie based upon *Ramona and Her Father*. The entry should