

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Sideways Stories from Wayside School

by
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Book Information

Louis Sachar, Sideways Stories from Wayside School
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Humorous episodes take place in the classroom on the thirtieth floor of Wayside School, which was accidentally built sideways with one classroom on each story.

Topics: Community Life, School; Holidays, Halloween; Humor/Funny, Funny; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family)

Main Characters

Louis the yard teacher, who supervises the students on the playground; the last chapter reveals that he is the author of the stories

Miss Mush the lunch teacher; her food is both undercooked and overcooked

Miss Zarves the non-existent teacher of the class on the non-existent nineteenth story of Wayside School

Mrs. Gorf the meanest teacher in Wayside School; she teaches the class on the thirtieth story until she is turned into an apple and eaten

Mrs. Jewls the nice teacher on the thirtieth story of Wayside School; she replaces Mrs. Gorf
the children in the class on the thirtieth story of Wayside School the other characters in the story; each student has an unusual characteristic and an interesting incident

Vocabulary

attaché a briefcase usually used for carrying papers

discipline punishment designed to teach and correct

filching stealing

lulu something extraordinary; one-of-a-kind

runt the smallest or weakest one of a group

Synopsis

Sideways Stories from Wayside School opens with an explanation that Wayside School was accidentally built sideways. It is thirty stories high with only one classroom on each story instead of one story high with thirty classrooms next to each other. Each of the thirty chapters focuses on one of the unusual characters on the thirtieth floor of the school.

Mrs. Gorf is the meanest teacher in Wayside School. When the children are bad, she turns them into apples by wiggling her ears and sticking out her tongue. After three days, twenty-four children have been turned into apples and are sitting on top of Mrs. Gorf's desk. Louis, the yard teacher, hears that Mrs. Gorf is a mean teacher. When he investigates, he sees all the apples on her desk and thinks she must be a fine teacher if so many students bring her apples. By the end of the week, she has turned all of the students into apples on her desk. Since there are no more children to teach, Mrs. Gorf prepares to go home. Suddenly, all the apples jump all over her, demanding to be turned back into children. Mrs. Gorf has no choice; she turns the apples back into children. When the students want to find Louis so he can tell them what to do next, Mrs. Gorf threatens to turn them back into apples. As Mrs. Gorf wiggles her ears and sticks out her tongue, one student holds up a mirror to her and she turns herself into an apple. Louis then enters the room and eats the apple that is really Mrs. Gorf.

The children never tell anyone what happened to Mrs. Gorf. After three days with no teacher, a replacement teacher, Mrs. Jewls, comes to teach them. She is nice, but she is afraid of the children because they are so cute. She thinks they are too cute to be children and says that they must be monkeys. Although the children protest that they are

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not monkeys, she says she will bring them all bananas the next week. The children keep insisting they are children until they finally convince Mrs. Jewls. She then announces that since they are children, they will all have a test.

When the children in the class misbehave, Mrs. Jewls follows a procedure. The first time someone misbehaves, she writes the word DISCIPLINE on the blackboard with the student's name underneath. The second time the student misbehaves, she puts a check mark next to the student's name. The third time, she puts a circle around the student's name, which means the student must go home at twelve o'clock on the kindergarten bus. This procedure is repeated several times as various students misbehave.

Louis seems to have all the answers for the students. They see him at lunch and at recess, and he always gives out balls for the children to play with. It is his job to see that the children do not have too much fun when they are outside in the schoolyard. The book ends with the revelation that Louis is actually the author. He tells the students of Wayside School a story about a school that is built one story high with thirty classrooms next to each other, which they think is ridiculous.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

In chapter seven, Mrs. Jewls asks Calvin to take a note to Miss Zarves on the nineteenth story. However, there is no Miss Zarves, no nineteenth story, and no note. Explain why Calvin has such a difficult time, yet ends up being rewarded for being such a good messenger.

Although Calvin tries to deliver the note to Miss Zarves, it is an impossible task because neither she nor the note actually exists. In the end, it does not matter because allegedly the note tells Miss Zarves not to meet Mrs. Jewls for lunch. Of course, if she does not exist, she certainly will not meet Mrs. Jewls for lunch, thus enabling Calvin to fulfill Mrs. Jewls's request. Calvin responds to Mrs. Jewls's praise with the comment, "Thanks, ... but really, it was nothing," reinforcing the futility of his task.

Literary Analysis

The tone of the book is very humorous. The stories of the students and the adults in the Wayside School are often preposterous and absurd. Explain what the author's purpose might be in writing this type of book. Give a specific example to support your answer.

The author is gently making fun of human weaknesses. By writing things that are so outlandish, the writer is calling the reader's attention to the frailties and deficiencies of people. For example, in the story of the three Erics, everyone assumes that Eric Bacon is fat because the other Erics are fat and his name also happens to be Eric. Nobody notices that he is skinny and a good athlete for his size. This incident illustrates that people often are guilty of making inaccurate assumptions about others.

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Inferential Comprehension

At the end of the book, Louis reveals that he is the author. Explain why he waits until the end to tell the reader.

If the reader knows at the outset that Louis is the author, the reader's perception of Louis's role as yard teacher may change. The reader might begin to pay more attention to Louis's activities and interventions than to what is happening with the characters. The reader may also begin to doubt Louis's view of the students. By saving the revelation for the end, the author provides an element of surprise and is demonstrating yet another backwards way of doing things.

Constructing Meaning

In chapter twenty, the reader is told that Kathy does not like the reader or the students in Mrs. Jewls's class. Her negative attitude becomes self-fulfilling as she interacts with other students. The chapter ends with the statement, "It's funny how a person can be right all the time and still be wrong." Explain the meaning of this sentence, and describe how it applies to Kathy.

The narrator indicates that Kathy's negative attitude toward others is wrong. For example, Kathy thinks the reader is stupid and ugly, without even knowing the reader. She also says that her cat will run away despite Mrs. Jewls's assurances that it will not. Because of Kathy's poor treatment of the cat, however, the cat does indeed run away, thus proving Mrs. Jewls wrong and Kathy right. When playing catch with Dameon, Kathy predicts that she will get hurt. Although Dameon tries to help her catch the ball, her lack of trust causes her to get hurt and proves him wrong. Kathy is always correct in her negative predictions because she causes them to occur. According to the author, Kathy is wrong to do that even though her predictions are always right.

Teachable Skills

Responding to Literature In chapter thirteen, the students and Mrs. Jewls compliment Rondi on her looks. However, Rondi gets upset when

nobody laughs at her joke. Distribute index cards such that each student has one card for each other student in the class. Have the students put the names of each student on the cards, one to a card. On the back of each card, have the students write one nice thing about the student named on the front. After all the cards have been completed, the cards should be given to the person whose name is on the front. The students should silently read the compliments. Class discussion should follow focusing on how compliments can lift a person's feelings.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Several games are played at Wayside School, such as hopscotch, spud, and kickball. Divide the class into three groups. Assign one of the above games to each group and have them research the rules and tactics of each game. Each group should write a clear and concise description of the rules and scoring of the game and then give a demonstration to the rest of the class.

Understanding Characterization Each of the students in the class on the thirtieth story is unique. Have each student select one character from the story and prepare a written introduction of that character. Encourage the students to create new anecdotes about the character based upon what they know from the book. For example, John can only read words written upside down. He is very easygoing and trusts the others to help him keep his balance when standing on his head. The student's introduction could include comments describing John's life at home while eating, watching TV, or brushing his teeth. Encourage them to be creative and to use humor in their descriptions. Then have each student introduce himself as the character to the class.

Comparing and Contrasting The characters in the story are strange, and their behavior is unexpected. Have each student create and write about an additional character that could be included in the book. The character should have a name and should do something that reflects the spirit of the book. An illustration should be included. Have the students share their

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completed character. Ask them to compare and contrast the newly created characters with the characters in the book.