

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Beezus and Ramona

by

Beverly Cleary

Book Information

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Nine-year-old Beezus finds it difficult to love her troublesome younger sister all the time, but her mother explains why that is all right.

Topics: Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Sisters; Humor/Funny, Funny; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Series, Ramona

Main Characters

Aunt Beatrice Ann Haswell Beezus's favorite aunt, who helps Beezus deal with Ramona; Beezus learns that Aunt Beatrice was a lot like Ramona when she was a child

Beatrice Quimby (Beezus) the older sister of Ramona, who is constantly frustrated by Ramona's misbehavior

Dorothy Quimby the patient mother of Beezus and Ramona

Henry Huggins Beezus's friend who plays checkers with her; he is upset when Ramona locks his dog, Ribsby, in the bathroom

Howie Kemp a friend of Ramona who comes to Ramona's party; it is his idea to have a parade

Miss Evans the understanding librarian for the children's section; she gives Beezus the book Ramona wrote in and destroyed

Miss Robbins the art teacher who helps Beezus discover her creative side

Mr. Quimby the father of Ramona and Beezus; he agrees to ignore Ramona when she tries to get attention by biting all the apples

Mrs. Wisser a neighbor of the Quimbys who thinks Ramona is adorable

Ramona Geraldine Quimby the younger sister of Beezus; she often throws temper tantrums and has a knack for getting into trouble

Wayne a student in Miss Robbins's art class who fights with Ramona when Ramona licks his lollipop

Vocabulary

contradict to disagree or deny

crestfallen extremely disappointed

cross angry

linger to walk or act slowly or reluctantly

proceed to start or continue

scowl to frown or make an ugly, angry face

Synopsis

Arguing with her four-year-old sister Ramona does not accomplish anything for Beezus Quimby. When Ramona insists that Beezus repeatedly read the same book, Beezus takes Ramona to the library. On the way, Ramona embarrasses Beezus by wearing a pair of bunny ears and showing her scab to a neighbor. At the library, Ramona chooses another book and unsuccessfully tries to write her name for the librarian so she can have her own library card. Later, Beezus tries to teach Ramona how to spell her name, but Ramona is not interested. When the library books are due, Ramona purposely writes in the book so she can keep it. Mother gives a mortified Beezus money to pay for the book. When the librarian starts to give the ruined book back to Ramona, Beezus objects, because she believes it will only encourage Ramona to write in more books. The librarian gives Beezus the book instead.

On Friday afternoon Beezus drops off Ramona in the park on her way to art class. Ramona brings her imaginary lizard, Ralph, and Beezus envies Ramona's imagination. Beezus has to draw an imaginary animal in art class, but all she can think of is a green Pegasus. When Ramona barges into the class, the art teacher allows Ramona to paint, too. Beezus is angry, and she gets even angrier when Ramona takes someone's lollipop. Beezus makes Ramona leave by threatening to tickle her. Beezus feels better after she paints a wonderful picture of the imaginary Ralph and the art teacher hangs it on the wall.

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One day after school Beezus is playing checkers with her friend, Henry, when Ramona demands to play a game of tiddlywinks. When Beezus refuses, Ramona rams her tricycle into the table holding the checkers game. Mother sends Ramona to her room. After the punishment, Mother gives Ramona a cooky, but soon Ramona is yelling at Henry's dog, Ribsby, who has become locked in the bathroom. Mother is upset because she does not have a key, but she finds out how to open the door with a nail file. Ramona boasts that she shut Ribsby in because Ribsby ate her cooky. When Henry leaves, Beezus feels overwhelmed by her feelings of dislike for her sister.

Ramona soon has another misadventure. Mother leaves Beezus to watch Ramona, but Ramona disappears. Beezus finally finds her in the basement taking one bite out of each of several apples. Beezus is horrified and tells Aunt Beatrice the story over the phone. Aunt Beatrice suggests that Beezus refuse to give Ramona any attention for her bad behavior. Mother makes applesauce from the ruined apples, and Ramona is stymied by the family's refusal to comment on her bad behavior. She responds by behaving properly for the rest of the evening.

On Saturday morning Ramona is singing about a party. Mother and Beezus assume she is playing, but then a mother calls to ask if she can drop off her infant along with Ramona's friend, Howie. Puzzled, Mother agrees and tries to wash everyone's hair before Howie arrives. While she is putting her hair in curlers, several children arrive; Ramona has indeed planned a party. Beezus keeps the children occupied marching in an indoor parade, and Mother serves the applesauce and fig Newtons as refreshment. Ramona disgusts the children by saying the cookies are full of worms, and many children refuse to eat them. When Ramona demands the children eat, Mother sends Ramona to her room. After the party Mother realizes it is pointless to punish her.

On her tenth birthday Beezus comes home to discover that Ramona has ruined her cake. Mother

asks Beezus to watch Ramona while Mother bakes a second cake. Beezus reads "Hänsel and Gretel" to Ramona, and then she reads her own book. When she sees Ramona pretending to be Hänsel by sprinkling crumbs on the carpet, she suggests Ramona pretend to be Gretel instead. Obliging, Ramona puts her doll in the oven and ruins the new cake. Beezus cannot help but think that she does not love her sister. Mother asks Aunt Beatrice to buy a cake at the store before coming over for the birthday dinner.

At dinner Beezus is happier, but then Ramona gets into trouble and has to be sent from the table. Beezus is miserable. When Aunt Beatrice asks why, Beezus admits that she does not always love Ramona. Mother and Aunt Beatrice laugh and tell Beezus about the horrible things they did to each other when they were young. They reassure Beezus that it is normal to occasionally dislike one's own sister. When Mother brings out a beautiful birthday cake, Beezus decides her birthday has been wonderful after all.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What does Mother mean when she says of Ramona, "I'm afraid all we can do is wait for her to grow up"?

Mother realizes that punishing Ramona probably will not make Ramona change her behavior, since Ramona seems to enjoy all the negative attention she receives because of her misbehavior. Ramona does not seem bothered by any punishment she gets, nor does she seem to feel remorse for anything she has done wrong. Mother's only hope is that eventually Ramona will outgrow her misbehavior.

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Literary Analysis

Beezus experiences many troubling emotions regarding her sister Ramona. How is she able to resolve this conflict of her feelings?

Beezus struggles with feelings of guilt and anger because she does not think that her sister's behavior is normal. She also does not think that her resentment toward Ramona's misbehavior is normal. Throughout the story, Beezus finds happy events ruined by these two problems. At the end of the story, Beezus learns that her mother and her aunt had similar problems when they were children. Since Beezus loves her mother and aunt and sees how much they love each other, she realizes that her problems are not abnormal. She is given the hope that someday she will also have a happy relationship with her sister, and she finds herself less aggravated by Ramona's behavior.

Inferential Comprehension

Why does Beezus often feel jealous of Ramona?

Not only does Ramona get a lot of compliments from adults like Mrs. Wisser and Miss Robbins because she is cute and imaginative, but Ramona also keeps Beezus from receiving attention. When Beezus is in art class, Ramona gets attention from Miss Robbins even though it is supposed to be an activity that Beezus does not have to share with Ramona. When it is Beezus's birthday, Ramona again keeps Beezus from having the total attention of the adults by interrupting and misbehaving while Beezus is trying to tell a story. Beezus also feels that Ramona always gets her way but she herself never gets what she wants.

Constructing Meaning

How does Miss Robbins convince Beezus that she has an imagination?

Miss Robbins tells Beezus that everyone has an imagination and that Beezus is not able to access her own imagination because she is working too hard. Miss Robbins suggests that Beezus stop trying to be neat and just have a good time with her paints. When Beezus paints her picture of Ralph, Miss Robbins praises her imagination and puts the picture in an important spot on the wall.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft Ramona has as much difficulty with Beezus as Beezus has with Ramona. Have the students consider what they think might be different about this story if it were told from Ramona's point of view. Have the students choose a specific event and rewrite this event from Ramona's point of view. Have the students share and discuss their changes with the class.

Making Predictions Aunt Beatrice and Mother had a similar childhood relationship to the one that Beezus has with Ramona, but they maintain a close friendship as adults. Have the students consider what kind of relationship Ramona and Beezus will have when they are older. Have them write a short story about Ramona and Beezus as adults.

Recognizing Plot The plot of this story seems to move from one ugly incident to another. Have the students illustrate how the tension mounts in this story by making a graph of Beezus and Ramona's interactions. Have them label the events on the graph. Ask the students to pay attention to how some events only increase Beezus's frustration with Ramona slightly, while other events escalate the tension between the two girls much more rapidly.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Although this story does not have much figurative language, Ramona's behavior and Beezus's feelings could easily be expressed in similes. For example,

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when Ramona wants Beezus to read a book she acts like a whiny puppy that refuses to go away. Explain similes, and give the students some examples of similes. Then ask them to create some of their own examples to enhance the descriptions in this story.