

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Ginger Pye

by

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Book Information

Eleanor Estes, Ginger Pye
Quiz Number: 31
Harcourt, Inc., 2000
ISBN 0-15-202505-7; LCCN
306 Pages
Book Level: 6.0
Interest Level: MG

The disappearance of a new puppy named Ginger and the appearance of a mysterious man in a mustard yellow hat bring excitement into the lives of the Pye children.

Award: Misc./Other; Newbery Medal

Topics: Animals, Dogs; Family Life, Pets; Holidays, Thanksgiving Day; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, Reading Rockets

Main Characters

Addie Egan Rachel's best friend
Chief Larrimer the inexperienced chief of police in Cranbury
Dick Badger Jerry's best friend
Ginger Pye a spunky, intelligent puppy who belongs to Jerry Pye
Gracie-the-cat the Pye family's cat
Gramma Mrs. Pye's and Uncle Bennie's mother
Grampa Mrs. Pye's and Uncle Bennie's father
Jared (Jerry) Pye the young boy who owns Ginger, the dog who has been kidnapped
Mr. Edgar Pye the absentminded father of Rachel and Jerry Pye; he is renowned for his work with birds
Mr. Tuttle a local do-gooder who is not interested in helping Rachel find Ginger
Mrs. Lucy Pye the kind and open-minded mother of Rachel and Jerry Pye
Mrs. Speedy the farmer's wife from whom Jerry buys Ginger
Mrs. Stokes a neighbor of the Pyes
Rachel Pye Jerry's imaginative younger sister who helps him search for Ginger

Sam Doody a helpful, local teenage boy who is kind to Rachel and Jerry

Uncle Bennie Jerry and Rachel's three-year-old uncle who vows to find Ginger for them

Wally Bullwinkle Jerry's unpleasant classmate who kidnaps Ginger

Vocabulary

congregation a group of people who belong to or attend a church

decoy a thing that lures away or misleads others

ferocious extremely mean and eager to attack

hullabaloo a great noise or state of excitement

perpendicular forming a right angle with another line or surface

quartz a hard, clear, usually colorless mineral

ruefully in a way that expresses regret and grief

unsavory crooked, shady, and suspicious

vaudeville a stage show made up of a series of different acts

veranda a porch that is usually covered by a roof

Synopsis

Jerry Pye has some obstacles to overcome when he wishes to buy a puppy from Mrs. Speedy. His sister, Rachel, helps him address the first problem by reassuring him that she does not think their mother's cat will be jealous of the dog. Next he asks his mother's permission to buy the dog, and she agrees. Finally, he needs to earn money to buy the dog. This problem is solved when Sam Doody, a friendly teenage neighbor, asks him to dust the church pews for him. Rachel and three-year-old Uncle Bennie help with the work, and Jerry is able to purchase the dog before another interested buyer arrives. There, strange things begin to happen.

As the children are leaving Mrs. Speedy's with the dog, they notice a strange person with a yellow hat racing across the fields to Mrs. Speedy's house. That same night, they take Uncle Bennie home to their grandmother's house. On their way home from Gramma's, they hear footsteps behind them that stop when they stop and start again when they start.

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A few days later, Uncle Bennie notices a yellow hat by the fence. Someone wearing a yellow hat is peering through a hole in the fence. Jerry and Rachel are unable to catch the spy, but they assume the person is looking at the puppy, which they have named Ginger.

On Labor Day, Jerry, Rachel, and Ginger go to the reservoir with Jerry's best friend Dick Badger and Dick's dog, Duke. While the boys are swimming, Rachel is sitting on the shore with Ginger. Suddenly, Rachel hears rustling in the woods. She is alerting the boys when a yellow hat blows into the water. Dick decides to mark the hat with a red crayon and leave it on a rock. He does this to help identify the spy if the children should happen to see the person again.

Several weeks pass without any further strange incidents. It is now October and Jerry and Rachel are in school. Ginger, who can't understand why the children leave him alone every day, decides to track Jerry to school. He manages not only to track Jerry's scent across town, but he also finds a pencil Jerry lost along the way and takes it to him, climbing the fire escape and going into the classroom's open window. All Jerry's classmates are impressed with this feat, and Ginger's picture is printed in the newspaper. No one notices that a student named Wally is watching Ginger with a sly and furtive look.

On Thanksgiving Day, Ginger is put in the yard while the family eats. After the meal, Jerry discovers the dog is missing. The children scour the neighborhood, but they are unable to find Ginger. When they arrive at the house of Wally Bullwinkle, one of Jerry's classmates, Wally is unfriendly to the point of being hostile. He informs Jerry and Rachel that he has a ferocious dog that will attack them if they come to his house again. For the next few days, the whole community helps search for the dog. Rachel and Jerry take a drawing of their vision of the villain in the yellow hat to Chief Larrimer so he can watch for the suspected kidnapper. They have never actually seen the person, whom they call the unsavory character, but draw his picture based on what they think a villain would look like.

Months pass, and Ginger does not return. Once the children think they briefly sight Wally wearing a yellow hat. However, Wally quickly whips off the hat so they cannot be sure of the color. Moreover, they are so certain the kidnapper is an adult man that they do only a superficial investigation of Wally. Soon after Easter, Sam Doody takes the children to East Rock, a local landmark. Jerry hopes to find Ginger there. The children try climbing the rock, but Rachel is frightened. The group climbs back down, but they still have an enjoyable day. Unfortunately, they do not find Ginger.

The search for Ginger continues when Mr. Pye takes his family on a picnic at West Rock. On the trolley trip, Mr. Tuttle, one of the passengers, realizes the trolley is on fire. The family has to disembark and take another trolley. After lunch, the children climb to Judges Cave, where Jerry hopes to find Ginger. Unfortunately, the cave is barricaded, and they are unable to investigate. On the way home, the family sees Mr. Tuttle on the trolley again. Rachel asks Mr. Tuttle for his help in finding Ginger, but he is uninterested in her problem.

Spring comes, and Jerry's birthday arrives. That day, Rachel and Jerry go strawberry picking. They are watching a passing train when they see Wally standing on the rear platform. As the train moves off, Wally dons a yellow hat. The hat blows off, and the children catch it. They are stunned to find Dick's red crayon mark in it. Jerry remembers Wally saying something on the playground at school about Wally and his father leaving town to join a vaudeville act. Wally told the other children that his father used to train animals for vaudeville shows and he was going to start doing that again. The children had not really believed Wally, but now, seeing him leave on the train, Jerry realizes that he was probably telling the truth. In a panic, they head to Wally's house to see if Ginger has been left behind. Chief Larrimer joins them along the way. At the house, they find an empty dog pen with several of Ginger's hairs, but Ginger is not there. Chief Larrimer vows to track Wally and his father down, and the children go home.

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When the children arrive home, they are greeted by an excited Ginger, now grown and no longer a puppy. Gramma explains that she and Uncle Bennie encountered the dog on the way to the Pyes' house. Uncle Bennie insisted that the dog was Ginger, though Gramma was not sure since Ginger looked so different. Wally and his father, who were passing in the trolley going the other way, shouted that that was their dog. The dog ran away at the sight of Wally, so Gramma determined to bring the dog to the Pyes' home. There, Jerry's parents confirmed that the dog was Ginger. The family deduces that Ginger was stolen to be part of Wally's family's circus act. He managed to get loose that day and recognized Gramma and Uncle Bennie on the street--otherwise, the Bullwinkles would no doubt have taken him with them to be in their circus act. They believe this because Ginger seems to know a whole lot of new and interesting tricks. The family believes Ginger was probably mistreated by the Bullwinkles since he has a gash on his forehead and shies away in fear from the yellow hat that Jerry is still holding.

The whole family feels sad that Ginger was so close to them for so long, and yet they were not able to figure it out and rescue him. That night, Jerry and Rachel try to make up for Ginger's suffering by loving him all the more, and Ginger settles back down in his home, safe and happy at long last.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does the family feel when they realize Ginger has been listening to them come and go for months?

The family is astonished that Ginger was so close for so long. They also feel sad to think of Ginger calling out to them without them coming to help him. Gramma and the children particularly feel guilty that they were not able to figure out where Ginger was. They also feel angry that Ginger was forced to suffer so greatly.

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Literary Analysis

There are many instances of flashbacks in the story. A flashback is a detour from the story that tells about things that have happened in the past. Flashbacks can be presented by the author as dreams, memories, or stories of the past told by a character or the narrator. What are some of the flashbacks in this story?

Examples of flashbacks may include the following: the story of how Mama and Papa met when Papa was running up the down escalator in a New York subway station, the story of Rachel and Papa going to visit Auntie Hoyt in Boston when Rachel could not get warm at night, the story of the birthday party at the Stokes's house when Uncle Bennie got a steamboat-shaped ice cream, the story of the sledding party when Rachel became lost and wandered into Mrs. Speedy's barn and saw Mrs. Speedy milking the cows under the light of a red lantern, the story of Rachel telling Jerry that tomatoes were poisonous and convincing him not to eat any but to bury them, the story of Rachel calling Jerry's piano teacher "Detestable" because she thought it was a word that meant "awfully nice," the story of Rachel, Dick Badger, and Jerry jumping off Dick's barn into a pile of hay and Rachel suddenly developing a fear of heights, the story of Mr. Tuttle putting out the fire when one of the angel's wings caught fire during the Christmas pageant, the time Rachel missed seeing the Aurora Borealis because she had decided to go to Brownie Scouts with her friend Addie Egan, and the story Mama told about her girlhood in New York City when Mama and her mother saw an old tramp pick up and eat a pork chop Mama had carefully placed on top of the ash can. Many other possible flashbacks could be mentioned.

Inferential Comprehension

What are some likely reasons Mr. and Mrs. Pye do not take Ginger's disappearance seriously when it first happens?

Most of the family is preoccupied with the activities of the holiday. Also, Ginger has gone wandering around the neighborhood in the past, and he has a habit of chasing cats. In addition, the neighbors tend to consider a visit from Ginger an honor, so Jerry's parents may think that Ginger is simply inside someone else's house. Finally, living in Cranbury has lulled the parents, particularly Mr. Pye, into a false sense of security: they simply do not tend to think of criminals when something unusual happens.

Constructing Meaning

Jerry and Rachel draw a picture of the Unsavory Character and take it to Chief Larrimer so that he will know who to look for as he searches for Ginger Pye. Chief Larrimer accepts this as a true picture of the thief, but is it a fact or just Jerry and Rachel's opinion? What is their idea of his looks based on?

The picture they draw is not factual--that is, it is not really an accurate depiction of the thief. Their picture is based on their opinion of how a person who would steal a dog must look. They have never actually seen the thief. The only thing they know about him is that he wears a yellow hat. They guess that the thief is male only because they think the yellow hat is a man's hat. Their opinion of a dog thief (particularly one who would steal Ginger) is that he would be a horrid person, and so they drew him to look like the villains they have seen in the movies, with slick, dark hair and a black mustache. Since they have never seen the thief, they could not give the chief a factual description--what color his hair and eyes are, how tall he is, etc. They could only guess, based on their low opinion of someone who would steal a child's dog.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Ginger becomes known in Cranbury as "the intellectual dog" because he tracks Jerry from the Pye home across town to

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the school and into Jerry's classroom. In the process, the author describes much of the town of Cranbury as Ginger encounters different places, people, and other animals. Divide students into groups and have each group make a map of Ginger's journey from the Pyes' house to the school. They should use the text as a reference for drawing streets, houses, empty lots or fields, etc. The story of Ginger's journey is found in chapter 6, "Ginger on the Fire Escape" (pp. 128-139 in the Odyssey Classics Edition). Tell students that it would be helpful to go through the text together as a group and make a list of each place Ginger passes by, where he stops, and what happens when he stops. Explain to students that in places where the text is unclear (Did Ginger turn left or right out of the yard? How far is it from the field to the crab apple tree?), they can make their best guess but should include all the elements that are mentioned in the text. They should depict and label where each incident on the journey occurred. They should then mark Ginger's journey from the Pyes' to the school with a line, including where Ginger backtracks or gets distracted. Students can display their maps on the wall and/or they can share them verbally with the class and explain why they made the decisions they did in depicting Cranbury and Ginger's quest to find Jerry.

Comparing and Contrasting Each character in the book has a different reaction to the theft of Ginger Pye and Rachel and Jerry's efforts to find him. Some are sympathetic, some are indifferent, and some are even hostile. Some make efforts to help; others do not. As a class, list all the characters who have some reaction to the loss of Ginger. On a chalkboard or whiteboard, make headings of several possible reactions such as "sad, frightened, angry, hostile, indifferent" or any other reactions that the class can think of. Then go through the list of characters and discuss how each reacted to Ginger Pye's disappearance. Put each character in the appropriate reaction list. As a group, discuss the characters' different reactions. Then have students individually choose characters from two or more lists and write a brief comparison and contrast of their reactions,

including why each character may have reacted in the way he or she did.

Extending Meaning Before Ginger was stolen, Rachel and Jerry had an imaginary character named Martin Boombornickles about whom they made up adventures. After Ginger was stolen, they started drawing comics about the Unsavory Character and what he might have done to steal Ginger and where he might have taken him. Discuss with students the fact that we don't really know what happened to Ginger other than a few very broad details. The specifics of the theft and his captivity are not included directly in the book. Like Jerry and Rachel, the reader must imagine them. For example, did Ginger get the wound on his head when he escaped through the barbed wire, or did Mr. Bullwinkle or Wally mistreat Ginger while they were training him? Have students, individually or in small groups, make their own comic strips or comic books depicting what they think happened to Ginger--how Wally managed to steal Ginger; how Wally got Ginger to the Bullwinkles' home and kept him hidden; how Ginger survived; how he tried to escape; what new tricks he learned while he was in captivity, etc. They can tell the story from the point of view of Ginger, Wally, or Mr. Bullwinkle. Demonstrate to students that they need to use clues and implications in the actual text to guide their imaginations. For example, they can depict what Ginger did and felt when he heard Gramma and Uncle Bennie going past the Bullwinkles' house every week or what Wally thought when he got to Mrs. Speedy's and found that Ginger had been sold, etc. They are not making up new events for the story (such as Jerry catching Wally in the act of stealing Ginger and saving him--which did NOT happen in the story), but rather they are imagining events that may have happened "offstage." Students can share their comics with the group and explain the choices they made in writing this offstage version of events, using the text to justify their choices.

Understanding Literary Features One of the repeated themes in *Ginger Pye* is facing and overcoming fears. Rachel, in particular, works

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hard to face and overcome her fears. Jerry and Rachel also work to face their fears together as they become aware that someone is out to get their dog from them. For example, Rachel and Jerry realize that someone is following them home. They sit down in a place that is relatively safe and make a plan for what they will do if they are threatened. They also look for someone to help them (Sam Doody, Judge Ball). Rachel repeatedly tries to talk herself out of her fear of heights--sometimes with success, sometimes not. Choose a couple of examples from the book to discuss with the group. If time allows and the discussion would profit from it, read the examples aloud from the text. Then discuss with the class how Jerry and Rachel (or other characters such as Dick Badger, who felt safer with "perpendicular" swimming when he was first learning to swim) faced their fears. What were their strategies? How did their strategies work for them? Did they have to keep going back and trying again? Make a list on the board of a possible process of steps and strategies that people could or do use to face and overcome their fears. After the discussion, have students think of a time when they or someone they know faced a fear and overcame it. They should explain what the fear was, how it affected the person, and what steps were taken to overcome that fear. Alternatively, students could choose to write about a fear they currently have and how it affects them. Then they can write out a strategy for overcoming that fear. Students can read aloud their stories to the group if they feel comfortable doing so.