

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Kid in the Red Jacket

by
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Book Information

Barbara Park, The Kid in the Red Jacket
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When ten-year-old Howard has to move with his family to a distant state, he is forced to live on a street named Chester Pewe, adjust to a new school, and get used to being shadowed by the little girl in a nearby house.

Topics: Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Humor/Funny, Funny; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Onward and Upward: Change; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3

Main Characters

Dad (Clifford Jeeter) Howard's father, who takes a new job in Massachusetts

Gaylord Jeeter Howard's baby brother; he becomes Howard's confidant after the move

Howard Jeeter (Howard Jeeper) the main character; a ten-year-old boy who faces the challenges of being the new kid in school

Molly Vera Thompson a first-grade neighbor girl who wants to be friends with Howard; she lives with her grandmother

Mom Howard's mother; she treats Molly kindly and encourages Howard to do likewise

Ollie Perkins an obnoxious boy in Howard's class; Howard finds him alternately entertaining and tiresome

Pete Jones a nice boy with whom Howard hopes to make friends; he reminds Howard of his good friend, Thornsberry

Roger Grimsley and Barry Thornsberry Howard's friends from Arizona

Ronald Dumont a boy at Howard's former school who plays with younger children at recess; Howard thinks he is weird

Vocabulary

dreading looking ahead with fear

reputation the public's general opinion about a person's character

sarcastically in a bitter, cutting way

sympathetically in a caring, concerned way

Synopsis

Howard Jeeter is unhappy about moving to Massachusetts. Though his parents are promoting the move, Howard is sad to leave his best friends and apprehensive about being "the new kid."

After he endures a long car ride with his screaming baby brother and his stinky dog, Howard is unimpressed with his new house and especially with the name of his new street, Chester Pewe. The situation worsens when he meets Molly Vera Thompson, a six-year-old girl who lives across the street and wants to be Howard's friend.

The next day Howard goes to school, and his "new kid" fears come true. None of his classmates talk to him, he eats lunch alone, and he has no one to play with at recess. To make matters worse, Molly insists on talking to him at recess and introduces him as Howard Jeeper to her friend Sally. In frustration, Howard runs onto the soccer field and kicks the ball as hard as he can. When two boys compliment him on the kick, Howard feels slightly better. Howard relates some of his troubles to his parents after school but shares his innermost thoughts with his baby brother, Gaylord.

Howard gradually becomes more comfortable in school. He finds the courage to sit uninvited with the other boys at lunch, and he frequents the soccer field at recess so he can play on a team. A boy named Pete chooses Howard, "the kid in the red jacket," for his team. After several weeks, most of Howard's classmates finally know his real name. Howard is delighted when his classmate Ollie invites him to play football on the following Saturday.

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Meanwhile, Molly regularly appears at the Jeeter home, insisting that Howard is her friend despite Howard's lack of interest. Molly even leaves her favorite doll to protect him while he sleeps. Howard's mother insists that Howard treat Molly with kindness, since Molly's parents divorced and abandoned her to foster care and, eventually, her grandmother.

Saturday arrives. Howard hopes the football game will establish his relationship with the boys in his class. Unfortunately, Molly arrives before Howard, Pete, and Ollie depart, and Howard feels embarrassed as Molly chats about her doll. When Ollie grabs the doll from Molly and tosses it, Howard joins his game of keep-away although he knows how special the doll is to Molly. Pete, however, is disgusted with the boys' behavior and calls them jerks. Feeling guilty that he has upset Pete, Howard knows he must make amends with him.

Howard also regrets being mean to Molly. Three days later he finds her hiding outside, so he invites her into his house. When Molly conveys her hurt, Howard apologizes and attempts to explain his viewpoint. The two come to a better understanding of how they fit into each other's lives.

Howard resolves his other friendship issues by spending less time with Ollie and building a solid friendship with Pete. Howard also writes to his friend Thornsberry in Arizona to tell him about his new life in Massachusetts. At the end of his letter, Howard asks Thornsberry to say hello to the new kid at his school from "the kid in the red jacket."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does Howard often tell his baby brother, Gaylord, about his problems?

Before the move, Howard had his good friends to confide in, but moving to a new town has made him feel alone. Although Gaylord is too young to talk or give Howard advice, Howard takes comfort in being able to express his opinions and share his feelings with someone. His mother and father are not able to provide this comfort because, as adults, they do not always fully understand Howard's perspective. Because Gaylord is his brother, Howard feels a special attachment to him, even if Gaylord is a baby.

Literary Analysis

How does this story convey the theme of acceptance?

This story shows readers that everyone wants to feel accepted by others. For example, Howard tries to fit in with the other boys and make new friends. Similarly, Molly visits her new neighbors and tries to be friends with Howard. Finally, Howard's mother is kind to Molly and teaches Howard to be considerate.

Inferential Comprehension

In his letter to Thornsberry, Howard asks Thornsberry to say hello to "that kid in the Kenneth shirt" from "the kid in the red jacket." What is Howard suggesting to Thornsberry?

Howard knows that Thornsberry is a sensitive person. When Howard makes this request, he is suggesting that Thornsberry consider Kenneth from a new perspective, as a new kid facing the same kind of challenges that his good friend Howard is facing in his new school. It seems clear that Howard knows Thornsberry will understand the comparison and will make an effort to befriend Kenneth.

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Constructing Meaning

Howard tells Molly that "birds of a feather flock together" to convince her that they cannot be friends. How does Molly use the same expression to try to counter Howard's argument?

Howard uses the expression to explain that people are like birds; they tend to associate with others like themselves. He emphasizes the differences between Molly and himself, such as their gender and age. Molly, however, points out that her Uncle Russell is a male and is much older than she is, yet they enjoy each other's company. Molly sees friendship in a less limited way than Howard does.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Howard knows life as "the new kid" will not be easy even before he goes to school the first day, and it seems that many of his fears come true. Have students work in groups to list the negative things that happen to Howard at school. Next, have the groups develop a list of five specific ideas to help a new student feel more welcome and comfortable in school. As a class, share group ideas and consolidate them into a class guideline to be used if a new student joins the class. Students may enjoy sharing the class list with other classes.

Responding to Literature Howard decides to write a letter to Thornsberry, even though he says writing is hard for him. Have the students write a letter to someone they miss. If students are uncomfortable revealing personal feelings in their letters as Howard did, suggest that they write to a relative about the story instead. Technical aspects of letter writing, envelope addressing, etc. could be incorporated if suitable.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Although Howard resents having to move to Massachusetts, he has moved into an interesting house built in 1768. His mother says, "This house is part of the history of our country!" Have students research houses in eighteenth-century America. Give students the option of writing a report on a famous house from this time period,

drawing a famous house with a brief description attached to the drawing, or drawing Howard's house using their research and details from the book.

Making Predictions In his letter, Howard asks Thornsberry to say hello to the "kid in the Kenneth shirt" for him. Have the students work in groups to plan a skit that shows Thornsberry following Howard's suggestion. When planning their skit, students should consider what is already known about Thornsberry and the new kid. Characters can be added as needed to carry out the brief plot.