

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Muggie Maggie

by

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Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Muggie Maggie

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Maggie resists learning cursive writing in the third grade, until she discovers that knowing how to read and write cursive promises to open up an entirely new world of knowledge for her.

Topics: Community Life, School; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Jo Ann Maggie's third grade friend

Kirby a boy in Maggie's third grade class who teases her

Kisser the Schultzes' adopted cockapoo dog

Maggie Schultz the main character of the story; her third grade class is learning to write in cursive, but she refuses at first

Mr. Galloway the principal at Maggie's school

Mrs. Leeper Maggie's third grade teacher; she devises a scheme to persuade Maggie to learn cursive

Mrs. Schultz Maggie's mother; her cursive slants backward and she dots her i's with small circles

Ms. Madden Maggie's father's secretary; she sends a note that makes Maggie feel ashamed

Sydney Schultz (Daddy) Maggie's father; he is certain Maggie will someday want to learn cursive

Vocabulary

contrary stubborn

distinguished being distinct or clearly different

indignant angry

reluctant unwilling

virtuous honest, pure

Synopsis

Maggie Schultz is starting third grade. On the first day of school her teacher, Mrs. Leeper, tells the class that they will be learning how to write in cursive. At home, Maggie tries to impress her parents with the hard work she will have to do to learn cursive. She becomes annoyed when they laugh about it instead of taking it seriously. Maggie then becomes contrary and soon announces that she will not learn cursive. Her parents remain cheerful, saying that they are sure she will enjoy it once she learns it. This makes Maggie even more indignant. The following day, she notices that her father does not make his cursive letters correctly and her mother, who is left-handed, writes with a backward slant.

At school, Maggie begins to enjoy cursive time, but she ignores the cursive rules. When Mrs. Leeper finds Maggie's writing untidy, she asks for a conference with Maggie's mother. After Maggie continues to refuse to learn cursive, Maggie is sent to the principal, Mr. Galloway, and even to the school psychologist.

Maggie soon begins to grow bored with not writing cursive. However, when the other students offer to help her learn, she refuses. When Mrs. Leeper asks the students to write their names, Maggie relents and writes her name similar to her parents' writing. Her name ends up looking like "Muggie." Maggie's classmate, Kirby, teases her and calls her "Muggie Maggie." Soon the other students are calling her Muggie Maggie.

One morning the teacher devises a plan to help Maggie become motivated to learn cursive. She appoints Maggie the message monitor and begins sending messages in cursive to the other teachers and the principal. Maggie peeks at the messages as she delivers them back and forth. Although she cannot read the cursive, she makes out her name and realizes that they are writing about her! Suddenly, Maggie finds cursive interesting; she wants to learn it so she can read the letters. She thinks that since she is "Gifted and Talented," she

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can learn cursive by herself. She spends a weekend studying every bit of cursive writing that she can find and practices writing her name and even the most difficult capital letters.

The following Monday, she is able to read the cursive. When she delivers a note from Mrs. Leeper to the principal that morning, she realizes that Mrs. Leeper knows she can read and write. The principal sends a note back to Mrs. Leeper, which Maggie also reads. His note ends with "Congratulations, Maggie!" Realizing that they all know she has been peeking at the notes, Maggie dreads returning to the classroom. When she gets there, she is surprised that Mrs. Leeper gives her a big hug. Maggie feels better. When Kirby teases her again, she scolds him with a note written in cursive.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does Maggie refuse to learn cursive?

When Maggie announces that she will soon be learning cursive, she expects her parents to appreciate the hard work she will be doing. Instead of taking it seriously, they laugh. When Maggie says she thinks cursive is dumb, her parents remain cheerful and say that she will enjoy it once she starts. The attitude of her parents makes Maggie feel contrary and rebellious. She then decides she will refuse to learn cursive, just to be contrary. The more they tell her she will enjoy it, the more determined she becomes not to learn it.

Literary Analysis

Why does Maggie finally decide to learn cursive?

When Mrs. Leeper writes "mouth of September" and "mice day" on the blackboard, the other students laugh. Maggie realizes that she cannot discern the errors, while the other students are eager to point them out. This makes her feel ashamed because she has thought of herself as being very intelligent. After Mrs. Leeper appoints Maggie the message monitor, Maggie notices the notes she is delivering are about her. She is curious about what they say, but cannot understand the cursive writing. Maggie then determines that she can and will learn cursive.

Inferential Comprehension

At the end of the story, Maggie writes a note to Kirby instead of pushing the table into his stomach. Why does she do this?

Maggie now knows cursive, and her learning has made her teacher happy. She knows Mrs. Leeper does not like the students pushing the desks and Maggie wants to keep her happy. Maggie also is proud of her new ability to write in cursive and wants to make her point to her classmate using that new skill. She clearly signs her name "Maggie." Now Kirby cannot tease her by calling her "Muggie."

Constructing Meaning

Mrs. Leeper tells the class they will have a happy third grade, and she frequently tells them they will have a happy day. Explain why eventually no one pays any attention to that phrase.

Mrs. Leeper is trying to set a tone that will promote a positive attitude and good behavior. By saying the phrase so often, it becomes rather meaningless, and the students no longer believe that one day will be happier than another.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The Schultzes obtained their young dog from the S.P.C.A. Explain to the students that the initials represent the Society for the Prevention of

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Cruelty to Animals. Invite someone from the local S.P.C.A. or other humane society to visit the class to explain how the society is structured and how the organization is run. The students can ask questions of the speaker. If a speaker is not available, have students research the S.P.C.A. and write a short report about it.

Comparing and Contrasting Handwriting analysis is used by law enforcement to detect personality traits from handwriting samples. Find a book about handwriting analysis and have students use it to analyze their own handwriting. They should then compare the book's evaluation of their personalities with what they believe to be true about themselves.

Recognizing Feelings The children tease Maggie by calling her "Muggie Maggie." Have the students work in groups of three or four to identify how Maggie felt and why the children were teasing her. Have them think about how the teasing impacted her struggle to learn cursive. Each group should think of two or three ways that Maggie could have responded in a positive way to the teasing. Each group should prepare a short presentation to the class summarizing their discussion.

Responding to Literature Maggie refuses to learn cursive because she is being contrary with her parents. Have the students think of a similar situation in which they refused to do something just because they knew their parents or someone else wanted them to do it. Have them write a short paper on the situation, what they did, how they felt about it, and how it was resolved. Ask for volunteers to share stories with the rest of the class.