

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Ramona and Her Mother

by

Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ramona and Her Mother
Quiz Number: 491
Dell, 1988
ISBN 0-440-47243-1; LCCN
182 Pages
Book Level: 4.8
Interest Level: MG

Now that her daddy has a job, Ramona hopes that her mother will stop working. If Mrs. Quimby stays home again, Ramona won't have to stay with Howie's grandmother after school, and her parents won't be so tired and irritable.

Award: National Book Award/ Honors

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

Main Characters

Beatrice Quimby (Beezus) Ramona's older sister
Davy a boy in Ramona's class with whom she has been friends since kindergarten
Denise a student beautician at the beauty school who washes and cuts Ramona's hair
Howie Kemp a neighbor and classmate of Ramona
Lester the student beautician who does Beezus's hair
Mr. Quimby Ramona's father
Mrs. Kemp Willa Jean and Howie's mother
Mrs. Kemp, the grandmother Ramona, Willa Jean, and Howie's after-school baby-sitter
Mrs. Quimby Ramona's mother
Mrs. Rudge Ramona's substitute teacher
Mrs. Swink an older lady in the neighborhood who comes to the Quimbys' New Year's Day brunch and calls Ramona by the wrong name
Picky-picky the Quimby family's cat
Ramona Quimby the main character; a fun-loving second-grade girl who is prone to mischief and wonders about her importance to her family
Robert the supervisor at the beauty school where Mrs. Quimby takes Beezus and Ramona

Willa Jean Kemp Howie's younger sister, who has not yet started school

Vocabulary

disdainfully scornfully; done in a haughty and arrogant manner
indignant angry with a good reason
perforation a line of holes or weak spots that allows for easy separating, most often in paper or cardboard
pixie an elf or fairy or similar imaginary character

Synopsis

Ramona Quimby is a seven-year old growing up in Portland, Oregon, with her parents and her twelve-year old sister, Beezus. Ramona is going through a difficult period trying to determine her personal value and how much importance she has within her family.

The first challenge for Ramona is to amuse little Willa Jean Kemp, the younger sister of Ramona's friend Howie, on New Year's Day. The Kemps and some other friends and neighbors come to the Quimby house to celebrate Mr. Quimby's new job at the Shop-Rite Market. Ramona does not want to share any of her toys with Willa Jean and thinks that Willa Jean may like a gift of a box of Kleenex. She could pull all 250 sheets of Kleenex from the box, something Ramona would like to do. Unfortunately, Willa Jean annoys the guests with her chatter and the Kleenex, and the party ends early. Ramona continues to get into trouble both at home and at the Kemps' home, where she goes after school to be watched by Howie and Willa Jean's grandmother.

On one particularly bad day, Ramona spills laundry bluing, coloring herself, her clothes, and Howie. Her parents are late picking her up, and when they arrive home, they find the Crock-Pot containing their evening meal had never been turned on. This leads to a quarrel between Ramona's parents. Beezus and Ramona go to bed quite upset, fearing their parents may divorce. In the morning, everything appears to be better, with Ramona's parents

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claiming they were just very tired.

In an effort to save money, Beezus and Ramona usually have their hair cut at home. Now, however, Beezus would like to have her hair cut professionally. Mrs. Quimby relents because Beezus has offered to pay for it herself. While at the salon, Ramona is also able to have a professional wash and cut because of a half-price sale. Ramona is cute in her new pixie haircut. Beezus's hair is cut and styled for a forty-year-old woman, and she is miserable.

The haircut incident improves the relationship between Beezus and her mother. Ramona is disappointed her new haircut no longer makes her the center of attention. But then Mrs. Quimby gives Ramona a pair of new pajamas. Ramona likes them so much she wears them to school under regular clothes. She is uncomfortably warm, but her substitute teacher, Mrs. Rudge, proves to be helpful by suggesting Ramona change into her outer clothing only. Ramona keeps the pajamas hidden in her desk until the end of the day. She feels privileged that she and her teacher have their little secret.

Ramona forgets to take her pajamas home, and when Mrs. Rudge phones during the weekend, Ramona is sure that Mrs. Rudge is betraying her and telling the secret. Actually, Mrs. Rudge's call is only to inquire about a nose twitching habit that Ramona has developed, but Ramona does not know that and decides to run away from home. Her mother helps her pack her suitcase so heavy it is impossible for Ramona to carry. The trick works. Ramona decides not to run away after all and ends up in her mother's arms being reassured she is loved.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When Ramona's project of sewing Ella Funt's pants does not go well, she locks herself in the bathroom and squeezes an entire tube of toothpaste into the sink. Why does she do this, and how does she feel about it?

Ramona is very upset at being a failure at her sewing project even though she would accept no advice or direction from her mother. She is bothered the most that by failing at the project, she cannot spend time with her mother. While sitting in the bathroom she spies the toothpaste tube and remembers that she has always wanted to empty one into the sink. Doing this is something she can easily accomplish. There is no risk of failure. However, when her sister sees what she has done, Ramona does feel guilty.

Literary Analysis

Willa Jean is a problem for Ramona, and Ramona is aware of the potential for trouble even before the Kemps arrive at the house. Why does she not enjoy having to entertain Willa Jean?

Willa Jean is younger than Ramona and has a very short attention span. She also is a cute little girl who likes to be the center of adult attention. Ramona also likes to be noticed and believes that she would have been allowed to eat with the adults if she had not had to watch Willa Jean. Ramona is probably annoyed by watching Willa Jean do things that Ramona has always wanted to do or been tempted to do.

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Inferential Comprehension

Beezus and Ramona each feel the other commands most of their parents' attention. Explain why each feels this way.

Ramona feels that Beezus is the favorite child because she gets to help in the kitchen and eat with the adults. Ramona gets yelled at to stay out of the way during preparations for the brunch and then has to eat in the kitchen with Willa Jean. Beezus is also complimented by a neighbor, and Mrs. Quimby replies that she could not get along without Beezus. Ramona wishes her mother would speak that way about her. However, Beezus feels that Ramona gets preferential treatment because so much of Ramona's schoolwork gets taped to the refrigerator door, and Ramona gets out of doing many jobs because she is young.

Constructing Meaning

The morning after Mr. and Mrs. Quimby quarrel, Beezus and Ramona find that everything has returned to normal and that their parents are even willing to joke about the quarrel. Ramona comments that parents should never fight, saying that they should be perfect. Do you think that there is potential for some good to come out of homes where children witness parents disagreeing?

Students answers will vary. Some may say that a quarrel shows that parents are not perfect. The lesson might well be that children should not grow up believing that adulthood means perfection or that the nerves of adults do not get frayed by a tiring day. Others may add that children who grow up thinking that adulthood should mean perfection put unnecessary pressure on themselves to achieve that perfection. Also, quarrels can serve as effective problem-defining and problem-solving devices. Children may also learn that it is possible for two people to disagree, quarrel, and then resolve their differences.

believes in practicing being friendly with the environment. She says, "Kleenex is made of trees. We shouldn't waste it." Invite students to delve into what she means. Divide the class into groups with three or four students in each to research the paper-making process. The class can also discuss the increase in recycling of paper products in recent years.

Understanding Literary Features Ramona sometimes uses words that the author says make her feel "grown-up," such as "scrimping and pinching." Have the class identify scenes in the book that have childish language. They should then consider changes in the dialogue that would be more "grown up."

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The author refers to both a gelatin salad and a drop of water "refusing" to do something. This is personification because both water and gelatin are non-living things, yet they are being described as having a personality, or human quality. The author also describes old lettuce as being "tired." Have students write some personifications of their own. They may share them with the class.

Extending Meaning A pie chart can be used to show the distribution of certain concepts or time consumed related to a certain topic. Hand out pie charts for students to make slices in the proportions they feel are representative of Ramona's states of mind. Tell them that there really cannot be any wrong answers in doing this, but that you are interested in their identifying Ramona's moods, anxieties, hopes, interests, and daydreams. Have the hub of the chart already labeled with "Ramona and Her Feelings." Provide a sample pie chart to help students get started. The sizes of the slices students "cut" tell how much of that feeling the student believes preoccupied Ramona. The number of slices will vary, as will their sizes.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Sequence After Willa Jean wastes all the Kleenex, Beezus shows that she