

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Rules of the Road

by
Joan Bauer

Book Information

Joan Bauer, Rules of the Road
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Sixteen-year-old Jenna takes a job driving the elderly owner of a chain of successful shoe stores from Chicago to Texas to confront the son who is trying to force her to retire.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; American Bookseller Pick of the List; BCCB Blue Ribbon Book; Golden Kite Award/Honor Book; SLJ Best Book; Society of School Libr. International Best/Honor; State Award; YALSA Top Ten

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Main Characters

Alice Lovett a long-time friend of Mrs. Gladstone
Carol Boller Jenna's mother
Elden Gladstone Mrs. Gladstone's son, who wants to sell the shoe stores
Faith Boller Jenna's sister
Harry Bender a long-time friend and employee of Mrs. Gladstone

Jenna Boller a sixteen-year-old girl who sells shoes for Gladstone's Shoe Store
Ken Woldman the owner of a chain of discount shoe stores
Madeline Gladstone the elderly owner and co-founder of Gladstone Shoes

Vocabulary

atrocious terrible
behemoth very large
co-dependent a term used to describe a person who helps an alcoholic or other addict continue a dependence on drugs
diffuse to alleviate or ease a situation
fumigating exterminating something by using chemical fumes
magnanimous generous in forgiving insults or injuries

Synopsis

Jenna Boller loves working at Gladstone's Shoe Store in Chicago. She feels good about herself when she is working and making her customers happy. Jenna has learned from her boss the intricacies of setting up good displays and teaching her customers about their shoes. One day Jenna's father comes into the store to see her. He is drunk and disruptive. As she has done many times before, Jenna hails a cab for her alcoholic father and makes sure he gets to where he is staying. She returns to work convinced that the owner, Mrs. Madeline Gladstone, would fire her on the spot. Instead Mrs. Gladstone calls Jenna at home that night and asks her to come to her home in the morning to be her driver. Confused but obedient, Jenna drives Mrs. Gladstone to the store. That evening Mrs. Gladstone asks Jenna if she is willing to drive her to Texas in summer. Shocked, Jenna says she must talk to her mother first.

Jenna's mother does not want Jenna to go on the trip. However, when Jenna's father continues to bother Jenna and her mother, she realizes Jenna could use a break and agrees to let her go. Before Jenna leaves she arranges for her younger sister,

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Faith, to make weekly visits to see their grandmother, who has Alzheimer's disease.

On the trip Jenna serves not only as driver, but also as companion and spy for Mrs. Gladstone. Since Jenna has a keen business sense, Mrs. Gladstone sends her into the shoe stores to evaluate all that she sees. Mrs. Gladstone reveals to Jenna that she is headed to Texas to announce her retirement and hand over the business to her son, Elden. She tells Jenna that she fears Elden will sell the company to a discount shoe store chain after she retires. This thought makes Mrs. Gladstone very unhappy since she and her husband built the business on the ideals of good customer service and quality merchandise. Her fear is that the new shoe store will use the Gladstone name to sell inferior shoes and thus ruin all she has worked for.

The stress of the trip and her impending retirement makes Mrs. Gladstone weak with pain from her sore hip. She needs hip surgery but is putting it off until after the trip. The farther they drive the worse she seems to get. One day she is so weak she cannot get out of bed, and Jenna finally calls a doctor for her. Mrs. Gladstone's friend, Alice, arrives and helps Jenna persuade Mrs. Gladstone to use a wheelchair and to keep up the fight against Elden.

A long-time employee and friend of Mrs. Gladstone, Harry Bender, calls to warn her that Elden is on his way to meet with her. Jenna keeps Elden away from his mother by telling him she is too weak to see him. This tactic works for a while, and Mrs. Gladstone eventually regains her strength. When they arrive in Dallas, they begin to prepare for the upcoming stockholders meeting.

In the days before the stockholders meeting, Jenna has the privilege of learning from Gladstone's top salesman, Harry Bender. She comes to admire the man immensely and wishes her father could overcome his alcoholism the way Harry did. Nine days before the stockholders meeting, however, Harry is killed by a drunk driver. Harry is buried and Mrs. Gladstone seems to lose her will to fight Elden.

Days later Jenna drives Mrs. Gladstone to the stockholders meeting. After parking the car, Jenna is met by Elden, who fires her from the company and orders her to return to Chicago. Briefly stunned by the turn of events, Jenna gets in a taxi and heads for the airport. On the way she becomes determined not to let Elden beat her. She returns to the meeting and goes inside with another stockholder. Elden attempts to have someone throw Jenna out of the meeting, but he is unaware that Mrs. Gladstone had given her fifty shares of stock and thus, as a stockholder, she has a right to be at the meeting. Jenna listens as Mrs. Gladstone announces her retirement. Jenna then takes the opportunity to speak at the meeting. She tells the group how proud she is to work for Mrs. Gladstone and says she will vote for Mrs. Gladstone to stay with the company. When the votes are counted, Jenna learns that the majority of stockholders voted to sell the company to the discount chain, but she is surprised to discover that they also voted to keep Mrs. Gladstone involved in the company. An agreement is then reached whereby Mrs. Gladstone is put in charge of quality control of the new company, thus satisfying her and her supporters but upsetting her son.

Jenna then drives Mrs. Gladstone back to Chicago. Mrs. Gladstone offers to keep Jenna as her assistant and driver. Jenna has found a new sense of strength on the trip and is at last able to confront her father. Jenna tells him that she loves him but that she cannot be near him unless he gets help for his drinking. A great weight is lifted off Jenna's shoulders as she realizes she does not need to be responsible for her father anymore.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Jenna understands some of the basics of being a good salesperson and running a successful business. What are some of the things she notices that make a successful salesperson and business?

Jenna knows she must teach the customers about their shoes. She understands that the set up of a display can maximize the sales of certain items and knows that every customer is important and deserves the proper attention. She also realizes that sacrificing quality for low prices is not necessarily what the customer always wants.

Literary Analysis

Mrs. Gladstone seems to quickly recognize that Jenna is a responsible teenager. Jenna continually proves this throughout the story. What are some of the things she does that show she is responsible and mature?

She visits her grandmother. She takes care of her drunk father and protects her younger sister. She drives carefully on the trip. She calls the doctor for Mrs. Gladstone. She deals with Elden when Mrs. Gladstone is too weak. She researches Ken Woldman and she speaks at Harry's funeral and the stockholders meeting.

Inferential Comprehension

Mrs. Gladstone says that Jenna reminds her of herself. She notices that Jenna has a good understanding of the shoe business. How else are Jenna and Mrs. Gladstone alike?

They are both strong women, but are both being emotionally hurt by a person they loved: Jenna is hurt by her father and Mrs. Gladstone is hurt by her son. Also, both Jenna and Mrs. Gladstone are very focused and committed to their work and values.

Constructing Meaning

While on the trip Jenna tries to imagine what Mrs. Gladstone is going through and remembers that her mother once said that to get to know people one must first "walk around in their shoes." Explain what is meant by this phrase.

A person must learn to empathize with other people in order to better understand why they behave or think the way they do. One should not judge other people before spending some time getting to know them and understanding their lives.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Jenna understands that things like customer service, store and display arrangement, and the quality of a store's products all have an effect on sales. She can quickly recognize the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful store by observing the store's layout and salespeople. Have the students visit a store and evaluate its displays, service, and quality of products. The students can use this information to create their own consumer shopping guide as a class. They may also explain how they would run a business if they owned one.

Extending Meaning Jenna's life is greatly impacted by her grandmother's Alzheimer's disease. Discuss what happens when a person gets Alzheimer's. Ask students to share personal experiences they may have had with a person who has Alzheimer's. Have the students write a paper describing what it would be like to have a family member with Alzheimer's disease.

Recognizing Details Elden's motivation for selling the company to Ken Woldman is centered on making money. He manages to show the stockholders that the move would increase the value of their stocks. The value of stocks can be a complicated subject. Invite a stock broker, investment manager, or economics teacher to the class to teach the students how the stock market works and what factors affect the value of a company's stock.

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Responding to Literature At one point Jenna says that her motto is "Cope or Die." She demonstrates throughout the story how she manages to cope with the things happening in her life. Ask the students to choose a motto they would like to live by and then to explain what made them choose their mottos and how they would live by them.