

The Sub
by
P.J. Petersen

Book Information

P.J. Petersen, The Sub
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Two friends switch seats when their class has a substitute teacher and find that it isn't so easy to be someone else.

Topics: Community Life, School; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 9, 90%; Humor/Funny, Funny; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, See All Sides; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice

Main Characters

James a student in Mr. Hart's class who tries to fool the substitute teacher by switching places with Ray

Mr. Hart James and Ray's regular classroom teacher

Mrs. Walters the substitute teacher

Ray one of Mr. Hart's students who switches places with James

Vocabulary

sprain an injury caused by twisting or wrenching a joint

sub a shortened and commonly accepted form of the word substitute

tetherball a game played with a ball that is attached to a tall pole

Synopsis

Their regular teacher is absent for the day, so James and Ray decide to play a trick on the substitute teacher by switching desks and identities.

This seems like a fun prank, but both boys decide it isn't as much fun as they thought. James doesn't like sitting at Ray's desk because Mark kicks his chair, Sara insists he pass notes for her, Ray's desk is full of old food, and Ray keeps getting him in trouble.

The friends become angry with each other when they each purposely try to get the other one in trouble. The next day, however, they apologize to each other and agree to tell Mr. Hart what they had done while he was gone. The only problem is that Mr. Hart is absent again. Since James and Ray are afraid the substitute will send them to the principal for their trick, they don't tell her the truth.

Only after Ray is hurt while playing and needs help, does James finally admit to Mrs. Walters that they switched identities. Mrs. Walters says she knew since the first day and that Mr. Hart told her to play along with it to teach the boys a lesson. As punishment, James picks up litter during the lunch hour and writes a paper telling what he did wrong.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Based on James's and Ray's behaviors and comments, we can see that students have certain expectations of substitute teachers. What were some of their expectations?

*The sub wouldn't know their names or class rules.
He/She wouldn't be as good as their own teacher.
He/She might show movies all day long.*

Literary Analysis

What clue did James give early in the story indicating that he liked Mr. Hart?

He said Mr. Hart played baseball with him sometimes and that he told jokes.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

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Inferential Comprehension

substitute.

What do you think James would do the next time he had a substitute teacher? What about Ray?

James would probably behave because he found out it isn't worth it to misbehave. Ray is a joker; he might pull another prank.

Constructing Meaning

What would you have done if two of your classmates had misbehaved by switching places on a substitute teacher?

Answers will vary but will generally reflect James's attitude (it's not worth it) or Ray's enjoyment of playing a joke.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features The author used humor to teach a small lesson and relate a common childhood experience. Have the class write a humorous short story about some common childhood experience, such as visiting relatives, buying a new bike, learning a new game, riding the bus, etc.

Comparing and Contrasting Switching identities didn't seem to bother Ray as much as it bothered James. Have the class make a list of similarities and differences between Ray and James that help clarify why the prank bothered James more.

Recognizing Details The substitute teacher realized very quickly that James and Ray were involved in some kind of prank. By checking the files, she discovered they had switched identities. Have the class list some of the signs that gave James and Ray away and what other things the teacher might have noticed that were not quite right.

Responding to Literature James and Ray played a trick on the substitute teacher, but they were caught. They were lucky that their teacher was understanding with them. Have the students discuss what they feel would have been a fair punishment. Ask the students what punishments they have received for misbehaving with a