

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for What's the Matter with Herbie Jones? by Suzy Kline

Book Information

Suzy Kline, What's the Matter with Herbie Jones?

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When Herbie Jones gets the dreaded "girl disease" and becomes lovesick for Annabelle Hodgekiss, it threatens his friendship with his good pal Ray.

Topics: Emotions, Love; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Series, Herbie Jones

Main Characters

Annabelle Louisa Hodgekiss a bossy girl in Herbie's class who decides that Herbie is her boyfriend

Herbert D. Jones (Herbie) the main character in the story; a third grade boy who regrets starting a relationship with Annabelle

John Greenweed an asthmatic boy in Herbie's class who wants Herbie to cheat in the spelling bee

Margie Sherman the first of Herbie's classmates to be eliminated from the spelling bee; she makes trophies for the dance contest

Miss Pinkham Herbie's third grade teacher, who makes Herbie bring Annabelle the Get Well cards from the third grade class

Mr. Hodgekiss Annabelle's wealthy father, who has a good sense of humor

Mr. Jones Herbie's father, who gives Herbie advice about rejecting a girlfriend

Mrs. Hodgekiss Annabelle's mother, who is upset when Herbie pulls a hair out of his food at the restaurant

Mrs. Jones Herbie's mother, who likes the poetry Herbie writes

Olivia Jones Herbie's thirteen-year-old sister, who alternates between supporting Herbie and teasing him

Phillip McDoogle (Phil) Herbie's classmate who thinks he has found Miss Pinkham's spelling list

Raymond Martin (Ray) Herbie's best friend, who does not like girls and is determined to save Herbie from Annabelle

Vocabulary

card catalogue a set of cards containing important information about the books in a library

cellophane a thin, clear wrapping material similar to plastic

dire extreme

disco a free-form dance usually done to music that has four bass beats

halibut a large ocean flatfish often served in restaurants

herb a plant used to flavor foods

Synopsis

When third-grader Herbie Jones delivers his class's Get Well cards to Annabelle Hodgekiss, Annabelle mistakes him for John Greenweed because she hides her chicken-pox spotted face under a sheet. Not realizing she is speaking to Herbie, Annabelle admits that she likes the poems Herbie writes. Herbie leaves before Annabelle realizes her error.

That Thursday Herbie is sharing his poems with his sister Olivia when his best friend Ray phones to remind him to come to Ray's house. At Ray's house the two boys discuss a plan to avoid participating in the school dance contest on Friday. Herbie's solution is to delay choosing a partner until all of the girls have been chosen. Before Herbie leaves, he uses the tweezers that he always carries to extract cotton from an aspirin bottle for Ray's mother.

On Friday Annabelle ruins Herbie's plan by asking the teacher, Miss Pinkham, to let girls choose their partners instead of using the customary boy-ask-girl method. When Annabelle chooses John, Herbie is afraid that Annabelle will discover that Herbie delivered the Get Well cards. Herbie quickly persuades Annabelle to dance with him by promising her that he is a good dancer. Herbie

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enjoys dancing with Annabelle, and by the end of the contest they have "a crush" on each other.

That afternoon Herbie leaves for the library to work on a poetry project with Annabelle. Despite Annabelle's objections, Ray and his dog also join the trip to the library; in the library the three children have a good time reading until Ray has to let his dog out. While he is outside, Ray looks through a window and sees Herbie laughing with Annabelle. Ray fears Herbie has the dreaded "girl disease."

On Saturday morning Herbie proudly reads Olivia his new unrhymed poem. When Ray calls, Herbie reveals that he is using money he has been saving to pay for his lunch with Annabelle's family. Herbie meets Annabelle at the library, but he is hurt when Annabelle refuses to use his poem for their project because it does not rhyme. Herbie worries about paying for his lunch at the expensive Fish Grotto until Annabelle's father reassures him that he will pay the bill. The meal ends abruptly when Herbie uses his tweezers to remove a hair from his fish. As they leave Annabelle insists that Herbie throw his pennies into the restaurant fountain so she can make wishes.

On Monday Ray and Herbie are walking to school when Ray announces that he knows Herbie likes Annabelle. Offended, Herbie throws his lunch down to fight Ray, but the fight is averted when Herbie explains that he only liked Annabelle for a day and a half. Herbie is in the classroom before he remembers his lunch bag, which also contains the potato he needs to contribute to the soup the class is making that day. Herbie discovers that Annabelle has placed some dried seaweed in his desk for him to eat with his lunch. Herbie contributes the seaweed to the soup, but he is horrified when Annabelle publicly reveals their relationship by announcing to the class that she gave the seaweed to him.

By the time Herbie arrives home, he is determined to end his relationship with Annabelle. Herbie's father recommends that Herbie use a businesslike but polite way to reject Annabelle. The next day

Herbie hands Annabelle a letter telling her that the position of girlfriend has already been filled by another applicant. When Annabelle demands to know who the girl is, Herbie makes up the name Pepper Roni. Competitive Annabelle resolves to hold Herbie's interest.

That day John and a classmate named Phillip tell Herbie and Ray that they can preview the list for the girls-versus-boys spelling bee the next day. Herbie balks at cheating, but Ray points out that Annabelle will no longer like Herbie if he beats her in the spelling contest. Herbie agrees but later tells Ray that he feels guilty about cheating. Ray eventually concedes, and the following day, before the contest, the four boys admit to Miss Pinkham that they memorized the spelling list she had on her desk. She laughs because the list was actually her grocery list. In the fifth round of the spelling bee, Herbie triumphs over Annabelle by correctly spelling "tweezers." Herbie's problems are resolved when Annabelle furiously swears she will never be Herbie's girlfriend again.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Herbie feel when Annabelle tells the class the seaweed is a gift from her?

Herbie is embarrassed that the class knows Annabelle has given him a gift because he does not want them to think she is his girlfriend. He is angry that Annabelle suggests this and upset that most of the class seems to believe her. The event makes Herbie determined to convince Annabelle that she is not his girlfriend.

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Literary Analysis

Why does the author sometimes shift to Ray's point of view?

The author uses Ray to give a different perspective on Herbie's brief crush on Annabelle. Since Ray's attitude toward girls seems to be more typical of other third grade boys in the story, the reader is able to understand more easily why Herbie's infatuation is so brief. In addition, Ray's viewpoint strengthens the reader's understanding of the strong bond that exists between the two friends. The conflicts that arise in the boys' friendship as a result of Herbie's "crush" add to the tension that leads Herbie to end his relationship with Annabelle.

Inferential Comprehension

Olivia often teases Herbie, but she does try to be a good sister to him. How is Olivia helpful to Herbie?

Olivia seems to be responsible for taking care of Herbie after school. She listens to his poems and offers constructive criticism. She also recommends a poem for Herbie to read for his school project. When Herbie uses the poem as a model for his own poem, Olivia praises his work and recommends that he include it in his school project. Olivia also begrudgingly lets Herbie use her typewriter. Finally, when Herbie wants to be businesslike with Annabelle, Olivia shows him what a businessman wears.

Constructing Meaning

Does Ray have good reason to be upset when Herbie spends time with Annabelle? Use details from the book to support your answer.

Student answers will vary. Some students will agree that Herbie has "girl disease." These students may agree with John and Phillip, who think that Herbie should be embarrassed about his relationship with Annabelle. Other students may add that Ray has a right to be upset because Herbie's friendship with Annabelle sometimes excludes Ray. The friendship also encourages Herbie to do things he normally would not do, such as taking his life savings to pay for his lunch with Annabelle's family. On the other hand, many students may believe that Ray's aversion to girls is harsh and immature. Ray spends a great deal of time either avoiding girls (the dance contest) or finding ways to show male superiority (the spelling bee). These students may feel that Ray does not make an effort to get to know or appreciate the girls in his class. They may also feel that a person should not try to control another's choices.

Teachable Skills

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Acting on Olivia's recommendation, Herbie, Annabelle, and Ray read "Fog" by Carl Sandburg. They are fascinated with the image of the cat's haunches in the poem. Reread this poem with the class. Discuss how writers often use imagery to convey information about their topics. Ask students to write a short rhymed or unrhymed poem using imagery. Have students read their poems in class. Or have the students read several other well-known poems and explain how imagery is used in them.

Responding to Literature Herbie is not sure how to act when Annabelle's family takes him to a fancy restaurant. Have the students write about a time when they were taken to a place where they were not sure how to act. Have them include how they felt about the situation and describe any mistakes they may have made because they did not know what was expected of them.

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Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Herbie's parents both work to support the family. Have the students consider how his parents' jobs affect the action in this story. Have the students include details from the book to support their conclusions.

Recognizing Details Miss Pinkham holds a spelling bee so her students can demonstrate their spelling skills. Compile a list of words from this book and organize a spelling bee in class.