The Report Card

by Andrew Clements

Nora Rose Rowley has made it to fifth grade without anyone figuring out she’s not just an ordinary kid. But when she gets fed up with the importance attached to test scores and grades, she purposely brings home a terrible report card—and her secret is out.

THEMES
education, grades, self-esteem, problem-solving, family, friendship, responsibility, courage

I. PRE-TEACHING
A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:
   obsessed, amnesia, analyzing, inevitable, archeology, astronomy, miscalculation, counselor, disability, laboratory, accelerated, execution, ritual, disrespectful, reputation, academic, peripheral, cohesiveness, dynamics, perspective, hybrid, fusion, anomalies, accessed, gigabytes, primate, instinctive, specimen, quotient, cynical, velocity, trajectory, helium, conversion, recalculate, smorgasbord, laser, profoundly, scan, epistemological, heuristic, spectroscopic, tertiary, diatonic, variables, malingering, conspiracy, skirmish, naíve, octave

B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:
1. Do you get good grades? How important do you think grades are?
2. Why do you think teachers give tests?
3. Have you ever gotten a bad grade on a test? How did it make you feel?
4. Which do you think is more important—being smart or being willing to work hard?
5. Is there a gifted and talented program in your school? How do you feel about this program and the kids in it?

II. PRESENTATION
A. Understanding the Story:
1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 6: Why is Nora disappointed in the grade she got for spelling? When had she found out she was different? What does she admire about Stephen? In what ways do Stephen's scores on the CMT change him? What does Mrs. Rosen say about the test scores? Why is fourth grade a miserable year for both Stephen and Nora? Why are fifth-grade grades important? What happens when Nora refuses to read her grades aloud to her family? When they see her report card, what makes her parents mad?

2. Advance to Chapters 7 - 15: How does Nora feel about the meeting in the principal's office? What does Mrs. Hackney suggest they do about Nora from now on? What has Mrs. Byrne discovered? What does she promise Nora? What tests does Dr. Trindler give her? Why does Nora love soccer? What does Nora overhear the boys saying to Stephen? What does she do? Why does Dr. Trindler decide not to give her another test? How do her parents react to the news? Why is Stephen mad at her?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 16 - 22: How does Nora act in her classes that day? Why does Mrs. Hackney take Nora to her office? What plan did Nora and Stephen hatch up? What happens at school while Nora is pretending to be sick? How are the superintendent and the principal planning to handle the situation? Why does Mrs. Byrne defend Stephen and Nora? What does Nora tell the Blue Team? What does she say about being put in the gifted program? What makes her happiest at the end of the day?

B. For Discussion:
1. Why does Nora get Ds on her report card?
2. What does Nora learn the day she tries to do the puzzle with his sister Ann? How does this change her life from then on?
3. In what ways are gifted athletes treated differently from gifted students?
4. Mrs. Hackney says a gift like Nora’s comes with responsibilities. What does she mean? What does Nora take it to mean?
5. When Mrs. Byrne asks Nora why she thinks she has this gift, what does she mean? Why is this a difficult question for Nora to answer?
6. Do you feel Nora accomplished what she set out to do? Why or why not?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON
Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:
A. Language Arts:
1. Nora and Stephen have been best friends for many years, but that seems to be changing. Have students talk about boys and girls as best friends.
2. Have students write down their earliest memories, even if they are only sensations like Nora's.
3. Have students listen to the imagery Nora uses, like feeling her parents and the principal are having “sliced Nora” for lunch, or describing Dr. Trindler’s hands like a “spider doing push-ups in a mirror.” How do these images help the reader visualize the scene? Have students write some comparisons themselves to share with the class.

4. Have students discuss the quote Mrs. Byrne refers to about nothing stopping an idea whose time has come. What ideas from history can they think of that came about when the time was right? Have them research and write a report about one of these ideas.

**B. Art and Music:**

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. Music by John Williams, for example, might capture the way Nora feels, or perhaps some Asian music for when she challenges her teachers.

2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They might draw a giant brain as the central feature of the board and then show the different things Nora does, such as a jigsaw puzzle for when she first learns she is different, a soccer ball for her favorite sport, tests, a report card with all Ds, and pictures from a science book for the things she challenges the teachers about.

3. Have students work in groups to put together a difficult jigsaw puzzle and keep notes about how each student goes about finding the pieces.

**C. Social Studies:**

1. When Nora was in kindergarten, acting like a cat, the school psychologist and others thought she had a learning disability. Have students learn more about learning disabilities. What are they? What causes them?

2. Have students find out about I. Q. tests. What questions are asked? Are the tests reliable? Why or why not?

3. Have students discuss the importance put on grades in their school and in their families. Do grades make students too competitive? Have them work in small groups to come up with other ways to evaluate a student’s progress. A good resource for these ideas is *Punished by Rewards* by Alfie Kohn.

4. Have students find out the federal government’s role in testing in schools. What is meant by the “No Child Left Behind” program? Organize a debate about the success of this program.

**D. Science and Math:**

1. Nora is fascinated by the Latin names of plants and animals. Have students learn the Latin names of some animals and plants and find out why scientists use Latin names.

2. Mrs. Byrne is able to find out what Nora has been looking up on the Internet. Have students find out how this is done.

3. Mrs. Byrne says that Nora’s files are using five gigabytes of storage space on the library computer. Have students find out how much is a gigabyte. How are computer files stored? Where did the word “gigabyte” come from?

4. Have students choose a favorite sport, like soccer or football, and research how math and physics are needed to play a sport like this.

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