Ramona the Brave

by Beverly Cleary

Now she’s started first grade, Ramona feels she’s not a baby anymore, but she finds it’s not easy to be grown-up with ghostly, boneless gorillas oozing under the door to her new room at night, a copycat girl getting her in trouble, a teacher who isn’t fair, and even a big mean, dog stealing her shoe. Through it all, she finds that being brave is a full-time job.

THEMES
fears, siblings, family, school, teachers, fairness

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:
  responsible, defended, triumphant, explanation, impatient, slack, baffled, amused, chagrined, embarrassed, subdued, inherited, confidence, lingered, jaunty, exasperating, indignant, virtuous, astonishing, bickering, stress, enthusiasm, astound, smithereens, dingy, emerged, modestly, jostled, outraged, humiliation, infuriated, asphalt, monitor, seize, conscience, despained, descent, sidled, carefree, unyielding, plod, Dawdling, wring, rigid, pediatrician, conscientious, defiant, aghast, gnawing, ventured

B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:
  1. Do you enjoy summer vacation? Are you glad to get back to school? Why or why not?
  2. Do you share a room with a brother or sister? Do you sometimes quarrel because of this? Would you like to have your own room? Why or why not?
  3. Do you have a favorite teacher? What do you like about this teacher?
  4. Do you feel teachers are always fair? Why or why not?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:
  1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 3: What happens to Beezus on the playground? How does their mother react? What do Ramona and Beezus usually fight about? What does their mother announce? What concerns does Ramona have about the new room? Why is Ramona getting to use it first? What game do Ramona and Howie play? What ends the game? What is Howie interested in? What is Ramona interested in?
  2. Advance to Chapters 4 - 6: How does Ramona feel when she gets to school that morning? What spoils Show and Tell for her? Why does she get mad at Howie? What is school like after that? What does Ramona notice Susan doing? What does Ramona do with her owl? Why won’t she tell Mrs. Griggs what happened? What does she do to Susan’s owl? What glorious surprise does her mother have for her?

B. For Discussion:
  1. Why does Susan copy Ramona’s owl? Why does Ramona get angry at her? Why doesn’t Mrs. Griggs realize what had happened?
  2. How does Ramona feel about apologizing to Susan? Do you think it’s fair? Why or why not?
  3. How does being in the new room make help Ramona feel? How will she feel when it’s time to go back to her old room? Is it a good idea to switch rooms? Why or why not?
  4. What do you think Mrs. Griggs does wrong as a teacher? In what ways does Mr. Cardoza seem to be a more understanding teacher?
  5. In what ways is Ramona creative? How does this sometimes get her in trouble?
  6. Discuss the title. In what ways is Ramona brave? How is it different to call her “Ramona the Brave” rather than something like “Brave Ramona”?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:
  1. Have students talk about teasing and name-calling. What makes students tease other students and call them names? When is name calling in fun? When is it mean? How should we respond to name calling?
  2. Have students describe a fear they had when they were younger, such as being afraid of the dark, monsters...
rs in their room, or other fears. How can we overcome these fears?
3. Have students compare dreams they have had. Why do we all have common dreams? Where do dreams come from?
4. Have students write about their place in the family. Are they the oldest, the youngest, or in between? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
5. Have students try going a different way to or from school and write about what they see and learn by taking a different route.

B. Art and Music:
1. Assign a group to select records, tapes, or CDs from the library to serve as appropriate background music to some of the scenes. They could use some of the songs Ramona sings, songs sung in school, or the tunes from TV commercials that Ramona enjoys.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could cover the board with green for the playground and the school yard, use red construction paper for the school, show Ramona facing the dog, add Lego bricks, a picture of a gorilla and other African animals, owls made out of paper bags, paper dolls for how Ramona tries to hide from her fears, spelling papers, coloring books, slippers made out of construction paper, and other items mentioned in the story.
3. Have students make animals out of the letters of the alphabet the way Ramona does with the "Q."
4. Mrs. Quimby won't let the girls have coloring books. Have students talk about the reasons why some adults don't think kids should have coloring books. Do they agree? Why or why not?

C. Social Studies:
1. Ramona struggles with self-confidence. Have students talk about ways to boost ours and others' self-confidence.
2. When her mother says she's taking a job, Beezus says she's "so liberated." Have students find out what Queenie means by this, especially since the book was written in 1975. Would this term be used today?
3. Mrs. Gribbs announces on the first day that school is a place to work, not play. Have students debate this. What is the difference between work and play? Can we learn just as well through playing and having fun as through working? Why or why not?
4. Ramona tries to help Davy because he sees "saw" as "was" and "dog" as "god." Have students find out what kind of reading disability this might be. How can students with this problem be helped?

D. Science and Math:
1. Have students learn more about African animals like the gorilla. Should Ramona really be afraid of gorillas? What animals should she be afraid of? Why?
2. Have students find out how bricks are made.
3. Have students find out how an addition would be added to a home. What is the first step? What tools are needed? How is concrete made? What is it for? What is sheetrock? What are the walls made of? When are they finished?
4. When Ramona falls down and hurts herself, her mother applies antiseptic to the wound. Have students find out what this is and why it's necessary.

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