Ramona and Her Mother

by Beverly Cleary

All Ramona wants to do is twitch her nose and be her mother’s little rabbit, warm and snug like the bears and bunnies in the books her mother used to read to her. But she’s seven-and-a-half, learning to write her name in cursive, and that there’s no such word as “can’t,” and wondering why she isn’t her mother’s girl anymore.

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:
- staggered, possessions, rarely, shimmering, embarrassed, corduroy, betrayed, balky, scowled, thrust, scheme, spre, indignation, pinking shears, impatient, instructions, zigzag, confidence, virtuously, paunch, glowered, hurled, seized, coiled, swirled, exasperation, intruder, profoundly, sarcasm, deftly, droned, teetered, consoled, bicker, dignified, luxury, flounced, shrunk, reluctantly, dawdle, crocus, flushed (adj.), unbearably, cubicile, vacuum, astonished, stifle, bewildered, despair, bureau

B. Before beginning the story, discuss with the class the following questions:
1. Do you have an older brother or sister? Do you feel your parents, especially your mother, give them more attention than you get?
2. Do you sometimes wish you were little again? What was nice about being little? What did your mother do for you when you were little?
3. Do you like school? What do you like about it? What worries you at school?
4. Did your parents read to you when you were younger? What were your favorite stories?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:
1. Begin with Chapters 1-2: Why are Ramona’s parents holding a brunch? What does Ramona decide to give Willa Jean for a present? What does Ramona like about Woger, Willa Jean’s bear? How does Willa Jean feel about her present? What does she do with it? How does this spoil the party? What does Ramona’s mother say about Beezus that upsets Ramona? How does life change when Mr. Quimby goes back to work? What does Ramona decide to sew? What happens? Why does Ramona feel she’s at a difficult age? What does she do that she’s always wanted to do? How does she feel afterward?

2. Advance to Chapters 3-5: What starts off Ramona’s bad day? Why does she decide Mrs. Rudge doesn’t like her? What’s wrong with her lunch? What’s it like to play checkers with Willa Jean? What idea does Ramona get? What happens? How does Mrs. Kemp handle it? What does Willa Jean do while Mrs. Kemp is busy? Why does Ramona feel like crying? How does Ramona feel while the Kemps eat? What does Ramona’s parents quarrel about? Why can’t she sleep that night? Why is Ramona angry the next morning? What does Beezus want? What happens at the hair cutting school?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 6-7: How does Ramona feel about her new pajamas? Why is she so hot the next day? What does Mrs. Rudge suggest she do? What does Ramona make Mrs. Rudge promise? What happens to her pajamas? How does Ramona feel when she thinks her teacher told on her? What does Ramona threaten to do? What does her mother do to help? What does Ramona think as she watches her mother pack? What decision have her parents made? Why? What has Mrs. Rudge called Ramona? How does she feel about it?

B. For Discussion:
1. Why does Ramona get mad when her mother tells her life is full of disappointments? What are some of the disappointments Ramona already knows about?
2. What does Mrs. Rudge mean when she says there is no such word as “can’t”? Why does this confuse Ramona?
3. Ramona is caught between wanting to stay a baby and growing up. Why does she feel she’s at a “difficult age”? Find examples where she wants to return to the baby role. Do you feel her mother understands this? Why or why not?
4. Why does Ramona think about the books her mother read her? Why is she so taken with Willa Jean’s teddy bear? Why does she like her new pajamas so much? Why does she twitch her nose?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give wide leeway in working with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:
1. Have students write about a stuffed toy they have loved. Is it true, as Ramona says, that no one could love a stuffed snake? Why or why not?
2. Have students listen for the effective verbs the author uses like glowered, hurled, coiled, swirled, mounded, and seized. How do these verbs make the scene more vivid? Have students write sentences with strong, active verbs.
3. Have students come up with clever ways that someone like Ramona can learn to spell.
4. Have students write about a time when they were not “sensible.” Or they might write about something they'd love to do if they felt like not being sensible.
5. Have students select books from the library to read to a young child. They might arrange to read to a child or a group of children at a hospital.

B. Art and Music:
1. Have students select background music that might be appropriate to some of the scenes. They might use music for a toothpaste commercial for when Ramona is squeezing it out of the tube, soft music for when she thinks about being a little rabbit, and music that reflects anger, such as works by Stravinsky.
2. Have students plan the menu for a special brunch. What would they serve? How would they decorate the table?
3. Have students make clothes for a stuffed animal.
4. Have students make up a signature like Ramona does that reflects their names or something about themselves.
5. The cover of the book shows the scene where Ramona squeezes all the toothpaste out of the tube. Have students think of another scene that might capture the story and draw a new cover.

C. Social Studies:
1. At the end of the quarrel, Ramona's parents and eventually Ramona herself are able to laugh. Have students talk about the power of laughter to lighten a tense situation.
2. The Ramona stories take place in and around Portland, Oregon. Have students learn more about this state.

Why do they make jokes about rain being “Oregon sunshine”? What are some of the attractions of this part of the country?
3. Have students find out about unemployment insurance. Who qualifies for it? How long can someone collect it?

D. Science and Math:
1. Beezus is upset over the wasted Kleenex because paper comes from trees. Have students find out how paper is made. How many trees are destroyed to meet our paper needs? What can we do to conserve our natural resources?
2. Have students learn what causes motion sickness. Why are some people more prone to it than others?
3. Have students find out how a thermometer works. What causes the mercury to rise? What is normal temperature? How high must the temperature be to become dangerous?
4. When Ramona is angry, Mr. Quimby refers to the “Richter scale.” Have students find out what the Richter scale is and how it measures the force of earthquakes.
5. Have students find out why and how hair grows.

USING AUDIOBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

When it comes to teaching today's students, sometimes books are just not enough. In an increasingly technological and information-savvy world, the ability to read will be critical to every child's success. The value of audiobooks as a learning tool in the education of children is widely recognized by experts. Audiobooks bring written text to life, adding an interactive quality that can ignite a child's imagination. They encourage reading by broadening vocabularies, stretching attention spans, and fostering critical-thinking skills. Listening to audiobooks in the classroom can effectively enrich the reading experience and aid your students in understanding and appreciating literature, history, theatre arts, and more!