



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **The Janitor's Boy**

Andrew Clements

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Andrew Clements

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Identifying attributes,  
research, compare/contrast,  
pros/cons, brainstorming,  
problem solving,  
creative thinking,  
critical thinking

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
foreshadowing,  
cause and effect, inference,  
anticipating

### Writing

Character journal, memories,  
personal writing, poem  
creative writing, headlines,  
directions, acrostic

### Listening/Speaking

Dramatizing, interviewing,  
discussion, oral reports,  
music

### Vocabulary

Target word charades,  
target word maps, synonyms,  
antonyms, defining,  
parts of speech, context clues

### Literary Elements

Literary analysis,  
story mapping,  
plot development, setting,  
characterization

### Across the Curriculum

Math—graphing;  
Art—drawing, design and  
color, collage, poetry,  
puppet making, mobiles,  
advertisements, comic strips,  
illustrations; Drama—  
reenactments; Music—song  
writing; Law—research;  
Science—experiments

## Summary

*The Janitor's Boy* tells the story of a fifth-grade boy named Jack who must attend the school where his father works as the janitor. Jack is embarrassed by his father's occupation and lashes out in anger when the other children tease him. Jack soon realizes that there is more to his father than meets the eye.

## About the Author

Andrew Clements is a talented writer who earned an M.A. from National-Louis University in Evanston, Illinois. He was a teacher for several years before starting a career in the publishing business and later became a full-time writer. In addition to *The Janitor's Boy*, Andrew Clements has written other entertaining books including *Frindle*, *The Landry News*, and *The School Story*.

## Initiating Activities

1. **Previewing the book:** Have students look at the cover and answer questions about what they see: Who? What? Where? Why? Based on their answers, have students predict the plot of the book.
2. **Predictions:** Given the following clues, students should write a paragraph predicting what they think will happen in the story: keys, teasing, adventure, punishment, bubble gum, humiliation.
3. **Character Journal:** List the main characters from *The Janitor's Boy* and have students choose one. As they read the book, have students write journal entries from that character's point of view. Students should write about their own reactions to events in the story. At various points in their reading, have students share their journals with classmates.
4. **Attribute Web:** Create an attribute web (see page 5 of this guide) with students for each of the following ideas: adventure, crime and punishment, rumors, obstacles, vandalism, caring, lending a hand, empathy.
5. **Prediction Chart:** Have students set up a prediction chart (see page 7 of this guide) to use as they read the book.

## Vocabulary Activities

1. Roll a Word: Cut a pattern for two cubes from construction paper (see page 8 for pattern). The first cube is the vocabulary cube, and the second cube is the prompt cube. On the vocabulary cube, place one vocabulary word on each face. On the prompt cube, write one of these words on each face: definition, synonym, antonym, sentence, part of speech, root word. Then create each cube so that you have dice to roll. Each student should roll the cubes, read each cube, and respond to the prompt. Multiple vocabulary and prompt cubes should be made so students can work in small groups. Students should have access to a dictionary and a thesaurus.
2. Rhymes and Chimes: Each child should choose one vocabulary word, then write a riddle, rhyme, poem, or song that describes that word. Students should trade descriptions and determine which vocabulary word matches each description.
3. Target Word Pictures: Have students draw some of the vocabulary words and have classmates guess the target word. Some suggested words for *The Janitor's Boy* are: caper (2), flailed (4), firestorm (19), stubby (27), infantry (50), shackle (64), reeling (65), spectrum (71), summit (78), pathetic (95), landing (108), verdict (117), twitching (121)
4. Synonym/Antonym Match: Have students select vocabulary words from a chapter and list one synonym and one antonym for each vocabulary word on a small piece of paper. Students should mix the papers and match each synonym/antonym pair to the appropriate vocabulary word.
5. Target Word Maps: Have students complete Vocabulary Word Maps (see page 9 of this guide). Some suggested words for *The Janitor's Boy* are: crimson (2), caper (2), sullen (36), irony (39), outrageous (60), hasp (63), musty (76), instinct (115), rumble (130), chaotic (134)
6. Vocabulary Juggle: Collect 24 ping-pong balls and write a vocabulary word on each ball. Divide the class into two groups. As the students stand in straight lines, throw a ball to the first student in Group A. The student will give the definition of the word and then toss the ball to the second student in Group A. That student will use the word in a sentence. The team gets to keep the ball if both students answer correctly. If one of the students answers incorrectly the next person in Group B will try to answer. The team with the most ping-pong balls wins the game.

## Chapters 1–3, pp. 1–20

In the opening chapters, Jack’s feelings of shame and resentment concerning his father, the school janitor, are revealed. These emotions cause Jack to concoct a devious bubble gum caper.

### Vocabulary

distinctive (2)  
crimson (2)  
caper (2)  
flailed (4)  
transition (9)  
fascination (15)  
sarcasm (18)  
humiliation (19)  
firestorm (19)  
homed (20)

### Discussion Questions

1. Describe what having a sensitive nose means to Jack. Why does the author give Jack this ability? (*Descriptions will vary. Jack is proud of his ability to smell things from far away: the food in the cafeteria, bubble gum for his project, etc. The author can describe things through Jack’s sense of smell, which helps advance the plot of the story.*)
2. **Prediction:** What is Jack’s bubble gum project? (*Responses will vary.*)
3. Why is Jack opposed to attending classes at the old high school? (*The high school is old and out-dated. Also, his father is the janitor for that building.*)
4. How does Jack feel about going to school in the building his father cleans? How will Jack handle this? (*He is embarrassed and ashamed; Responses will vary.*)
5. Why does Kirk make fun of Jack for being the janitor’s son? (*Responses will vary.*)
6. What are some constructive ways Jack can deal with the anger he feels toward his father and the boys who make fun of him? (*Responses will vary.*)
7. How does Jack respond to the humiliating event in the school hallway? (*He focuses all of his anger on his father.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: **Simile**—“like he was trapped in a bad dream” (p. 12).
2. Character Attributes: Have the students use the Character Attribute Web on page 11 of this guide to characterize Jack, Kirk, and John. Students should update their entries as they read.
3. Story Map: Have the students begin a Story Map (see page 12 of this guide) to use as they read the story.
4. Science/Math: Jack thought that watermelon-flavored Bubblicious was the smelliest gum. See if your students agree. Have each student bring one piece of gum to school to use in a “smell test.” For this experiment, you will need a small container for each piece of gum (a paper bag, a small cup, or an empty film container). Remove each wrapper then label each container with the name of the gum. Line the containers up on a table. Students can then conduct a smell test to determine which gum has the strongest smell. Have the students graph the results.

## Chapters 4–6, pp. 21–38

Jack’s bubble gum caper is revealed. He makes a sticky mess of one of the school desks when he sticks bubble gum all over it. Much to his dismay, the escapade does not turn out as Jack had hoped it would.