



Classroom Guide

Jeannie Houdini, A Hamster's Tale

Guide written by Sandy De Lisle
Provided courtesy of The Gryphon Press

This classroom guide provides language arts activities that will involve other learning areas such as science. The purpose of this guide is to extend the themes of this story into learning activities that help to reinforce the main ideas of the book and to deepen understanding.

Story Summary

Jeannie is a hamster whose twin caregivers, Mateo and Martina, have lost interest in her. The twins' little sister, Sophia, feels left out of her older siblings' lives and longs to make Jeannie her own. When Jeannie repeatedly escapes from her cage, Sophia's mom gives Sophia a chance to care for Jeannie. Sophia decides that Jeannie keeps escaping because he's bored. Sophia sets out to enrich Jeannie's life and, in the process, the two become fast friends.

Lesson One: Jeannie's Five Freedoms

GRADE 3-5

Common Core Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.B

Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.C

Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others.



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D: Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Contribute to a classroom discussion
2. Understand what the 5 Freedoms are and be able to list them
3. Apply the 5 Freedoms to a classroom pet, personal pet – or hypothetical animal – and take responsibility for the animal’s needs (if appropriate).

Materials Needed

- Copies of the Five Freedoms poster
- Poster board (optional)
- Craft supplies (optional)

Lesson Procedure

Opening

Ask students to give you examples of things they need to be happy and healthy (food, water, shelter, love, medical care, exercise, etc.) Write their answers down on a piece of chart paper or on a classroom chalkboard or whiteboard. After students have covered all the basic responses, ask them the following:

- What does a pet need to be happy and healthy? (Circle all the items on the list that they have in common with people.)
- Are pets able to get themselves everything they need to be happy and healthy?
- In what ways do pets need our help?

Body

1. Read aloud *Jeannie Houdini* to the class.



2. Explain to students that there are five things every animal deserves to be happy and healthy, these things are called the 5 Freedoms.

Go over the 5 Freedoms with students, giving them each a copy of the 5 Freedoms poster:

The Five Freedoms

The 5 freedoms are a set of internationally recognized animal welfare standards. They outline what we, as responsible pet owners, must provide. They are not just things we *want* to do for our animals, but things we *must* do in order to keep our animals healthy and happy. The Five Freedoms are listed below with modifications for younger students in parentheses):

1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst (food and water):** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.

Every animal must always have access to clean, fresh water. A sufficient amount of food must be provided to your pet to help keep it in good health and at a healthy weight.

2. **Freedom from discomfort (shelter):** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

Having an appropriate shelter for your pet is very important. If you are caring for an animal that lives outdoors, the shelter you provide must be weather proof, free from drafts, wind, rain and excessive heat from the sun. Dogs must be able to stand up and comfortably be able to turn around in their kennel. Small animals must have enough space to play without feeling confined. Make sure your pet has a warm, comfortable place to live.

3. **Freedom from pain, injury or disease (vet care):** by prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment.

It is very important to know signs of illness in your pet. The number one sign of illness in animals is acting lethargic, tired or sluggish. Another way to help your pet is by keeping their environment clean and free from any hazards that might cause injury. The more time you spend getting to know your pet, the easier it is to determine when they aren't acting quite like themselves.

4. **Freedom to express normal behavior (toys):** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

Knowing your pet's normal behavior comes easy when you give it a lot of attention and spend lots of quality time with it. Just like people, animals can get bored and lonely. Providing things like a cat tree for your cat to climb or access to a window to watch the birds would be a great example of this. Toys are also a great way to keep your pet mentally stimulated!



5. **Freedom from fear and distress (love):** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

All animals deserve to be happy. Ensuring conditions that avoid unnecessary anxiety and stress will help to provide freedom from mental suffering. Remember, you mean the world to your pet, always strive to make them feel as special as they make you feel. Giving them lots of love will ensure that they know that.

Activity

1. Ask students to explain if they think Jeannie's 5 Freedoms were being met before Sophia was in charge of her care. How about after she was in charge of her care?
2. Split students into five groups.
3. Assign each group a different freedom.
4. Ask students to research their freedom and come up with ways to meet it for a specific animal (could be a classroom pet, a personal pet or a hypothetical animal selected by the teacher).
Optional: Ask students to design a poster of their ideas.
5. Each group will present its freedom to the rest of the class.
6. For classrooms with pets, use the students' suggestions to assign specific tasks to ensure the pet's well-being in the classroom. Alternatively, have students come up with a list of duties to care for a pet at home or even an animal at a shelter.

Closure

Explain that a lot of research needs to go into getting a pet. We always want to meet the 5 Freedoms of any animal in our care. To do that, we need to know what makes them happy, healthy and comfortable in their environment.

Extension

- Read books that include themes related to the 5 Freedoms, including Buddy Unchained by Daisy Bix, Call the Horse Lucky by Juanita Havill and Hens for Friends by Sandy De Lisle.



Lesson Two: A Hamster with Chutzpah: Comprehending & Discussing Literature

Grade: 3

Objectives: To practice comprehending and discussing fictional text

Students will be able to:

1. Use text and illustrations to comprehend a fictional story
2. Determine the central message or moral in a story
3. Verbally share their thoughts and opinions about the text

Common Core Standards Addressed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2

Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.B

Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.C

Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D

Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

Materials Needed

- Copy of *Jeannie Houdini* by Mary-Ann Stouck and Rebecca Evans
- White board or chart paper

Lesson Procedure

Opening



Tell the students you are going to read a story where one of the characters has given up trying to do something. Ask them to be thinking about if they have ever given up on something that they used to think was fun or important.

Body

Read aloud Jeannie Houdini to the class.

Activity

1. Have a class discussion about the book using the following ideas & questions:
 - What was Jeannie’s house like? (A tiny house made of a coconut shell with a seed dish, water bottle and a red plastic exercise wheel—a literal text reference. Students may also make other observations about Jeannie’s house based on the illustrations.)
 - When did Jeannie usually sleep? (During the day—a literal text reference). Ask students if they know what term is used to describe an animal who is awake at night (nocturnal). Introduce the concept if they are not familiar with it.
 - What do you think the author was trying to say when she wrote that Jeannie “...almost never used her plastic wheel, because however fast she ran on it, she never got anywhere different.” (She has given up because she doesn’t see a point to running on the wheel since it doesn’t allow her to see and do new things—inferential answer based on text.)
 - Have you ever given up on an activity because it seemed like there was no point in doing it anymore? If students are having a hard time coming up with answers you can prompt them with things to consider: sports, school, musical instruments, foreign language. Write all the answers on the board or chart paper.
 - What do you think the central message or moral of this story is and why? (Both human and non-human animals need basic care, enrichment and friendship to be happy and healthy—inferential & literal answer based on text from the story and For Parents and Adults section.)
2. Turn the students’ attention to the list of activities they said they have given up on and lead a discussion on the following:
 - Jeannie may have given up using her wheel, but she found another way to get exercise and have adventures—what was it? (She escaped from her cage and explored the big house, including the hallway and doll house—inferential based on text).
 - Sometimes we give up activities for good reasons. Maybe we don’t have enough time to do them or we learn we really don’t enjoy an activity. But sometimes we give up on activities because we get frustrated or can’t figure out a way to be successful doing the activity. Let’s look at the list of things we’ve given up on and brainstorm ways we could be like Jeannie and not give up on having an adventurous life. Allow the students to come up with possible solutions such as: ask a friend, parent or teacher for help, watch a YouTube video, read a book, practice the activity with someone else or with music playing for inspiration. Record all the answers on the white board or chart paper.



Closure

Ask students to choose an activity they have given up on and write an [action plan](#) or [mantra](#) to help them stick with a challenging activity they enjoy or are required to do. If they can't come up with one, ask them to develop a plan or mantra for a friend who is struggling.

Extension

1. Teach the meaning of the Yiddish term “chutzpah” and ask students to come up with examples of chutzpah being used for good and bad purposes.
2. Read other fables or stories where main characters showed resilience, including Aesop’s The Oak Tree and the Reeds and The Ant and the Grasshopper.
3. Utilize any of the plans in [Lesson Plans for Teaching Resilience to Children](#).

Lesson Three: Aha-tical Illusions

Grades 3-5

Objectives: To understand the limits of our visual perception

Students will be able to:

1. Understand how the human eye works
2. Understand how optical illusions work
3. Understand that there are limits to our vision

Next Generation Science Standards Addressed

4-PS4-2

Develop a model to describe that light reflecting from objects and entering the eye allows objects to be seen.

Materials Needed

- Copy of [Jeannie Houdini](#) by Mary-Ann Stouck and Rebecca Evans
- Computer and large screen to display optical illusions, including the following:
 1. [Lilac Chaser](#)
 2. [Snake Illusion](#)
 3. [Flash-Lag Effect](#)
- [Human Eye](#) video from Smart Learning for All
- Copies of [paper eye model](#) printed on card stock for all students
- Colored pencils or markers
- Scissors
- Glue



- Tape
- Transparency film or other clear film
- [3-D model of an eye](#) (consider borrowing one from an ophthalmologist)

Preparations

- Have the above electronic resources saved on a computer or a stable internet connection to access them online

Lesson Procedure

Opening

Remind students that in Jeannie Houdini, they read about a famous magician named Houdini. Houdini was a master of illusion, convincing people he had done things that were physically impossible.

Ask students if they've ever seen a magician perform a trick. Were they surprised by how the magician made something impossible look possible?

Body

1. Tell the students you are going to show them some optical illusions.
2. Show the students the optical illusions videos noted above.
3. Ask students how they think it's possible to trick our eyes into seeing things that aren't there. Allow all reasonable answers but be sure to mention that our eyes have limitations for what they can process, and our brains fill in the gaps with information that may not be there.

Activity

1. Have students watch How the Human Eye Works
2. Have students create a [human eye model](#) using the instructions.

Closure

Perform a [simple magic trick](#) for the students and ask them to try to figure out how you did it.

Extension

- Have an ophthalmologist visit your classroom and share information about the humane eye.
- Have students learn a magic trick and demonstrate it for the class.



Lesson Four: Who Was Houdini?

Grades 3-6

Objectives: To understand a historical figure and how that person can be portrayed differently in various biographical accounts

Students will:

1. Understand the significance of an important historical figure
2. Compare and contrast different biographical versions of a historical figure
3. Evaluate different non-fiction sources

Common Core Standards Addressed

CCS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened any why, based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.9

Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.9

Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).

Materials Needed

- Copy of Jeannie Houdini by Mary-Ann Stouck and Rebecca Evans
- A Picture Book of Harry Houdini by David A. Adler and Michael S. Adler
- Multiple copies of Who Was Harry Houdini by Tui Sutherland
- Worksheet “Comparing Two Biographies”

Preparations

- Be familiar with all books.
- Make copies of “Comparing Two Biographies” worksheets for every student in the class (or make them available online to be completed electronically).

Lesson Procedure

Opening

Remind students that in Jeannie Houdini, they heard about a famous magician and escape artist named Houdini. Explain to students that they are now going to learn more about this fascinating



man by reading some biographies about him. Explain that a biography is the history of a specific person's life. Tell students you will be reading two different biographies and you want them to be thinking about how they are alike and how they are different.

Body

Read aloud A Picture Book of Harry Houdini.

Activity

1. Have students individually or in pairs read Who Was Harry Houdini.
2. Have students fill out the worksheet "Comparing Two Biographies." For the "other" row, ask them to choose one comparison of their own.
3. Bring the students back together for a group discussion and sharing of their findings.

Closure

1. Have students vote (with a showing of hands or online) for which book they found more **entertaining**. Record the results on a whiteboard or chart paper.
2. Have students vote (with a showing of hands or online) for which story they thought had **more accurate information**. Record the results on a whiteboard or chart paper.
3. Compare the results and discuss any differences.
4. Ask students how they decided which book had more accurate information. Make sure you mention that looking at the sources for each book would be an important way to determine which information might be more accurate and if it may be biased (i.e. websites ending in .edu are usually more credible than other online sites).

Extensions

1. Have students watch the History Channel's miniseries [Houdini](#) and compare and contrast it to the two books they read.
2. Have students write a biography of a historical figure they admire.



	A Picture Book of Harry Houdini	Who Was Harry Houdini
Early Life		
Most Exciting Escape		
Marriage and Family		
What People Thought About Him		



Other		
Sources Used by Authors (check bibliography)		

