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Our Teacher Is a Vampire and Other (Not) True Stories

by Mary Amato
Grades 3–7

Common
Core State
Standards

About the Book

Award-winning author Mary Amato has created another funny and engaging novel set in an elementary school.

It all begins when Alexander H. Gory Jr. passes around a notebook in which he reveals a tantalizing secret: he has proof that their teacher, Mrs. Penrose, is a vampire. Soon the entire class is speculating and adding their opinions to the notebook until . . . it lands in Mrs. Penrose's hands. It turns out that Mrs. Penrose has been keeping a secret: she is expecting a baby. But since the notebook is encouraging her students to write and improving their spelling and grammar, Mrs. Penrose allows it to continue circulating as long as some basic rules are followed.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature/Language Arts

Realistic Fiction—This story is a work of fiction, meaning that it came from the author's imagination. It is realistic fiction, since it could have happened in a real classroom among a group of real students. Make students aware of this genre of writing. Ask them to cite other stories they've read and to decide whether or not they are realistic fiction, and why. Explain to students how realistic fiction differs from fantasy, in which the events and sometimes the characters in a story could never really exist or happen. **CCSS RL.4-5.5, 5.9**

Characters—This is a character-driven story, where each character is completely unique. Ask students to make a list of the characters and come up with one word to describe each one. Or, have students choose one character from the story and write a complete description of that person, including their appearance, their attitude, what they wear, how they act, what's important to them, the influence they have on others, etc. Creative students might want to draw a picture of their character. The students' descriptions and illustrations can be shared with the class. **CCSS RL.4-5.3; W.4-5.9**

Humor—There are many humorous incidents in this story. Have students pick out some favorites and explain why they are funny. **CCSS W.4-5.9**

Point of View—Discuss with students the differences in point of view between the kids in the story and the different adults: their teacher, their substitute teacher, their librarian. How do these different points of view make the story interesting? **CCSS RL.4-5.6**

Writing Letters—Letters play a big role in the story. There are a variety of activities that students can do related to letters. They can choose a favorite character and write that person a letter discussing his/her actions in the story and how the reader reacted to them. They can look up a favorite author online and write that person a letter regarding where they get their ideas, what their writing process is and why they chose to become a writer. They could use the example on p.87 as a prompt. **CCSS W.4-5.7**

Suspense—Alexander wanted the class’s group story to be scary and have a great deal of suspense. Ask students to discuss or write about the idea of suspense and horror stories, and why they think so many kids love that type of story (or movie!). They can present their own opinions with supporting statements delineating why they feel that way. **CCSS W.4-5.1**

The Book—The Book, which Alexander created so that all could participate, is the thread that runs through the entire story. It might be fun to start such a book in the classroom, giving each student a chance to contribute and giving the teacher a chance to also add his/her comments. Students can write, edit and revise a group story. When it is finished, it can be illustrated and duplicated for each student, or perhaps bound in some way and given to the school library. They may want to use graphic organizers (like Omar always did). See Online Resources below for examples. **CCSS L.4-5.1-5; W.4-5.3, 4**

Write a WOW Story—Using the guidelines on p. 126, have students each write their own short story. These can be shared with the class, and after a first reading they can be edited, embellished and revised to make them more interesting and fun to read. **CCSS L.4-5.1-5; W.4-5.3**

Geography—Many specific places are mentioned in the story, some of which are real and others not: Delite, MN; Duluth, MN; Miami, Maryland; and Rasmussen College. Have students do research for each one to determine whether they are real or fictional. Have them locate the real places on a U.S. map. **CSS RI.5.7**

Online Resources

Graphic Organizers—www.edhelper.com/teachers/Storytelling_graphic_organizers.htm presents a variety of graphic organizers, and clicking on each link enlarges each one into a printable entity that students can use as they create their characters and stories.

Vegetarianism—A couple of the characters say they are vegetarians. The site www.vrg.org/nutshell/nutshell.htm explains very clearly what that means, along with lists of foods that can be eaten and a few recipes for vegetarian dishes.

Literary Devices—www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/readingliterature/literary_elements_devices/menu.htm presents multiple links to lessons on a variety of literary elements and devices.

Apfel—dbqp.blogspot.com/2006/01/deadend-of-concrete-poetry.html presents information on this famous concrete poem about an apple and a worm mentioned on p.136 along with a graphic of it. Students might want to create their own concrete poems.

Guide prepared by Sandy Schuckett, School Library Consultant

About the Author



Mary Amato inspires her readers to use their imaginations and keeps them laughing with her popular novels. These include the Riot Brothers series, *The Word Eater*, *Please Write in this Book* and *The Naked Mole-Rat Letters*. She lives in the Washington, DC, area.

Visit Mary online at www.maryamato.com or follow her on Twitter and Facebook.