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RAMONA QUIMBY

Study Guide

Introduction

Beverly Cleary (1916--) got the idea to write children's books when she was just a child herself. As she struggled with reading in school (suffering the indignity of being in the "slowest" reading group when she was in the first grade), young Beverly found many books for young readers were boring and predictable. "I wanted to read funny stories about the sort of children I knew, and I decided that someday when I grew up I would write them," she later recalled.¹

Despite her early difficulties with reading, Beverly learned to appreciate books under the influence of her mother, who established the first library in their small town of Yamhill, Oregon. When the family later moved to Portland, she spent much of her childhood in that city's public library. This love of books led her to study to become a children's librarian, a position she held in Yakima (Washington) before achieving success as a children's author. Her initial publication was *Henry Huggins* (1950), the first of many books about the children that live on Klickitat Street, whose ranks later included Beezus and her younger sister, Ramona. Mrs. Cleary's repertoire (which includes the popular Ramona series as well as numerous other stories) now includes over thirty books. Beverly Cleary's books appear on virtually every list of "Recommended reading" for children (as suggested by professional librarians and young readers themselves!). Among many other awards, Cleary's *Ramona* series has been recognized with Newbery Honors for *Ramona and Her Father* (1978) and *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* (1981).

About the Play

BEEZUS: *Being a grownup is hard work.*

RAMONA: *Being a kid and trying to become a grownup is even harder.*

This exchange between Beezus and her younger sister Ramona illustrates one of Beverly Cleary's favorite themes: grownups should never forget how hard growing up can be! The play, *Ramona Quimby*, brings to life stories from several of Cleary's books, including *Ramona the Pest* (Ramona thinks her teacher hates her so she "drops out" of school for a few days); *Ramona and Her Father* (Dad loses his job, and his daughters try to help him quit smoking); and *Ramona Forever* (Aunt Bea meets Howie's Uncle Hobart and the two get married and move to Alaska). As Ramona is faced with problems beyond her control (Why does her teacher unfairly accuse her of copying another student's work? Why does Beezus get to do everything first, and boss her around? What will happen if her father doesn't find another job? How will she manage if her mother goes to work instead of staying home to take care of her?), she learns that although her life is not "perfect," it is full of people that care about her... which is wonderful. By working together, and remembering how lucky they are, somehow the Quimbys will be able to cope with life's daily trials and tribulations.

¹Quoted by Karen Pederson in her *Beverly Cleary Homepage* (see *For More Information*).

BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

1. **FAMILY.** Ask students to describe their **families** -- either in a drawing, an essay, or a class discussion. Older students can explore more advanced questions, such as:

What does each member of the family mean to you? Does anyone in your family ever annoy you? If you have an argument with someone in your family, what do you do to resolve it? Watch closely for examples in the play and keep them in mind for a post-performance discussion. [Note: In conjunction with your discussion about families, younger children may benefit from an introduction to the characters they will see in the play... see *Who's Who in Ramona Quimby*, below.]

2. **SCHOOL.** What do students like and dislike about **school**? How do they get along with classmates and teachers? If they don't always get along with someone at school, what can they do to make the situation better? (Again, have students watch the play for examples.)
3. **GROWNUPS.** Do students ever wish that they were already **grownups**? What are the advantages of being an adult? What are the disadvantages? Compare these to the advantages and disadvantages of being a child. Do they think that grown-ups ever wish that they were still children?

Who's Who in Ramona Quimby

Ramona Quimby -- an energetic third grader with her own unique way of looking at things; Beezus' younger sister, who has a knack for getting into trouble and, according to Beezus, being a "pest" (someone who bothers everyone)

Beezus Quimby -- in junior high school, her real name is Beatrice, but she has been nicknamed Beezus after the way her younger sister, Ramona, used to pronounce her name when she was younger; plays her role as older sister well (although she can be bossy) and tries to be responsible

Mr. (Bob) Quimby -- the father of Beezus and Ramona, he still has a sense of fun (for a grownup); would like to go back to college and become a teacher; for now, he works in a frozen food warehouse

Mrs. (Dorothy) Quimby -- the mother of Beezus and Ramona, she is the practical type (in contrast to her more fun-loving sister Bea) who is good at taking care of everyone

(Aunt) Bea -- Mrs. Quimby's younger sister, a third grade teacher, and the aunt of Beezus and Ramona (who thinks her aunt is "the coolest person in the entire world")

Howie Kemp -- Ramona's best friend and neighbor, also in the third grade

Mrs. Kemp -- the grandmother of Ramona's friend and neighbor, Howie (and his Uncle Hobart's mother). Mrs. Kemp watches Ramona after school (in between soap operas)

(Uncle) Hobart -- Howie's uncle (Mrs. Kemp's son), likes children and has an offbeat sense of humor; he has made a lot of money working in the oil business in Saudi Arabia (a country where there is a lot of oil, and deserts, and camels); soon he'll be moving to take another job in Alaska, the northernmost state in the U.S. (another oil-rich place)

Mrs. Griggs -- Ramona's third grade teacher

Susan -- one of Ramona's classmates (who always tries to show how perfect she is)

AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What did Ramona do to “cause trouble”? Could she have prevented any of the problems she encountered? In what ways does she “grow up” during the course of the play (what does she learn?) ?
2. Keeping in mind the pre-performance discussion on **families** (if applicable), have students describe the Quimbys. Are the Quimbys a “perfect” family? Why or why not? What kinds of things did Beezus and Ramona argue about? What did they learn by talking to their mother and Aunt Bea (their mother’s sister)? Can you love someone but still “hate” them sometimes? How do students’ own experiences with their brothers and sisters (or other family members) compare to the relationship between Beezus and Ramona?
3. Why does Ramona think her Aunt Bea is “the coolest person in the whole world”? How is an aunt or uncle different from a parent? How does Ramona feel when she learns that Aunt Bea is getting married and moving away? Have you ever had someone close to you move far away? If so, how were you able to cope with their leaving?
4. What do Beezus and Ramona do to help their father quit smoking? What other methods could they have used? Why is it so hard for Mr. Quimby to quit his bad habit? Do grownups always do the smartest things?
5. When Ramona’s classmate, Susan, copies her Halloween mask, how does Ramona react? Was there a different way that she could have handled the situation? How could she have made her teacher understand that Susan was the one who copied Ramona’s work? Are grownups always fair?
6. Why does Ramona dislike Howie’s Uncle Hobart when she first meets him? Are first impressions always reliable? Have you ever met someone and later changed your opinion about them?
7. Why does the “Old Man” pay for the Quimbys’ dinner at Whopperburger? What does his act of kindness remind the Quimby family of?
8. How does the Quimby family adjust when Mr. Quimby loses his job and Mrs. Quimby has to go back to work? How must each person (including Beezus and Ramona) change to help out the whole family? What other things can change a family? (Examples: new baby, divorce, illness, etc.) Has your family ever had to go through these kinds of changes? How did you handle them?
9. Recall the discussion about grownups that you had before seeing the play. Using examples from the play, talk about what is difficult about being a grownup. (Example - Mr. Quimby loses his job; both parents worry about paying the monthly bills.) Mrs. Quimby says, being a grownup is about “doing things you need to do, but maybe you don’t want to do.” What does she mean by this?

10. Suggested Activity. Start a **Ramona** Reading Club. Each person (or divide the class into groups) can read a different Ramona book and report on it to the class (see listing below). Compare the different books (for example, how does Ramona change as she gets older?). Alternate Activity: Have each group take a different scene from a Ramona book and write a scene *dramatizing* it (as they saw in the play), then act it out for the class!

For More Information

READ more about Ramona in these other Beverly Cleary books (most are available in both hardcover and paperback versions):

Beezus and Ramona (1955)
Ramona the Pest (1968)
Ramona the Brave (1975)
Ramona and Her Father (1978)

Ramona and Her Mother (1979)
Ramona Quimby, Age 8 (1981)
Ramona Forever (1984)
Ramona's World (1999)

SEE more about Ramona:

There is also a 10-part series of **Ramona** films which was originally shown on public television (PBS) and is now available on VHS video (produced by Atlantis Films, Ltd./Lancit Media Productions, Ltd.). Available at your local library or video store.

FIND OUT more about Beverly Cleary:

A Girl from Yamhill, A Memoir (1988), Beverly Cleary's autobiography aimed at young readers, tells about her childhood and what inspired her to become a children's writer.

The (Unofficial) Beverly Cleary Homepage contains a lot of information about the author and her work (plus links to other sites, including a description of the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden in Portland, Oregon, which includes a life-like sculpture of Ramona herself!). The website address is:
<http://www.teleport.com/~krp/cleary.html>

LEARN more about how to lead "a smoke-free life":

Check out the American Cancer Society's **Great American Smokeout** campaign, by logging on to their website at **<http://www.cancer.org/smokeout/>** or contacting: The American Cancer Society, 1599 Clifton Road, NE, Atlanta GA 30329-4251 1-800-ACS-2345

We'd love to hear from you! Please let us know what you thought of RAMONA QUIMBY. Were your students familiar with Beverly Cleary's books before seeing the play? Did seeing the play inspire them to read more about Ramona? Send comments and suggestions to:

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