

The Janitor's Boy



By

Andrew Clements

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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Table of Contents

Suggestions and Expectations	3
List of Skills	4
Synopsis / Author Biography	5
Student Checklist	6
Reproducible Student Booklet	7
Answer Key	72

About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of *The Janitor's Boy* and is comprised of five activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language Activities
5. Extension Activities

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, as well as in reasoning and critical thinking. It is important, too, that students be encouraged to relate their own feelings and experiences in certain contexts, and describe their own interpretations of particular passages.

- Students can work on the activities at their own pace.
- Every activity need not be completed by all students.
- A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) to keep a record of completed work.

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include family relationships, peer pressure and bullying, career choices, loyalty, personal growth, accepting responsibilities, coming of age and forgiveness.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

It was the perfect crime. Unfortunately, it also led to the perfect punishment. When Jack Rankin gets busted for defacing a school desk with a huge wad of disgusting, watermelon bubble gum, the principal sentences him to three weeks of after-school gum cleanup for the chief custodian. The problem is, Jack's anger at the chief custodian was the reason for his gum project in the first place. The chief custodian happens to be Jack's dad.

But doing time in the school basement after hours reveals some pretty surprising things: about the school, about Jack's father, and about Jack himself. [The Publisher.]

"A memorable novel." - *Publisher's Weekly*.

Author Biography

Andrew Clements

I was born in Camden, New Jersey in 1949 and lived in Oaklyn and Cherry Hill until the middle of sixth grade. Then we moved to Springfield, Illinois. My parents were avid readers and they gave that love of books and reading to me and to all my brothers and sisters. I didn't think about being a writer at all back then, but I did love to read. I'm certain there's a link between reading good books and becoming a writer. I don't know a single writer who wasn't a reader first.



This was an excerpt from Andrew Clement's bio on his official website. For more information please go to <http://www.andrewclements.com>

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Name:

The Janitor's Boy

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Chapters 1-2



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *The Janitor's Boy* is Jack, an enterprising grade five student faced with the greatest crisis of his life. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an interesting **protagonist**? (One that is difficult to forget.)



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

distinctive	caper	vandalize	calculation
accomplishment	processed	transition	acquainted

1. No one suspected that Jack would _____ the music room.
2. I was able to get _____ with Matilda during recess.
3. My cousin has a very _____ laugh.
4. In order to do a _____ of the cost, we will need all of the figures available.
5. You need a good imagination to pull off a successful _____ like that.
6. She _____ the number of visitors during the past hour in no time at all.
7. Collecting that many medals at the Olympics is quite the _____.
8. We hope for a smooth _____ into our brand new school this September.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?

2. Describe the project that Jack was working on.

3. What does it mean by *Jack had half a crush on Kerry*?

4. Jack determined that Bazooka was three times stickier than Bubblicious.

True or False

5. What purpose did Jack have in vandalizing the desks?

6. The author states: *Jack was proud of his dad, and he loved him very much. But laughter from kids is more powerful than words from teachers.* As a result of this, Jack was embarrassed by the fact that his dad was a school janitor. Why do you think the opinion of one's friends and classmates can have such a powerful influence on the way we feel about someone?

7. Where had Jack and all of the other students in the middle grades been *parked* for the school year?

8. Match each character from these chapters with the most accurate description.

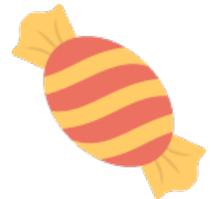
a	Jack Rankin		1	Grade two teacher.
b	Raymond Hollis		2	Teacher of physical education.
c	Mrs. Rankin		3	Likes the words <i>dum-dum</i> .
d	John Rankin		4	Enjoyed a good song or two.
e	Mr. Sargent		5	Adding and subtracting were her forte.
f	Kerry Loomis		6	A custodian.
g	Mr. Pike		7	A giant of a student.
h	Miss Patton		8	Enjoyed attending Huntington High.
i	Mrs. Lambert		9	The novel's protagonist.
j	Jed Ellis		10	Caught up on homework in math class.

Language Activities



A. Bubble Gum

Using resources in your school library or on the Internet research three fascinating facts about bubble gum. Your facts could pertain to the history of bubble gum; popular ingredients; famous brands; different flavors, etc.



1.	
2.	
3.	

B. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first two chapters of *The Janitor's Boy*.

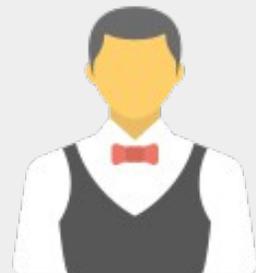
Word	Anagram	Clue
caper		Summarize.
spat		They go right along with the kitchen sink.
seat		Beverages.
crime		A big <i>thank you</i> in France (or Quebec).
shape		Stage; period.
broad		Plank; beam.
words		An ancient weapon.

Now find two additional words from the first two chapters which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

Word	Anagram	Clue

Good to Know ~ The Janitor

A **janitor** or **janitress** (female), **custodian**, **porter**, **cleaner** or **caretaker** is a person who cleans and maintains buildings such as hospitals, schools and residential accommodation. Janitors' primary responsibility is as a cleaner. In some cases, they will also carry out maintenance and security duties. A similar position, but usually with more managerial duties and not including cleaning, is occupied by building superintendents in the United States. [Wikipedia]



C. A Gummy Quatrain Poem.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain was written by the famous poet, Atrocious Halitosis. It is called, **My Gum**.

*I like to chew on a piece of gum,
The softer the better, it's loads of fun.
But after a day, or maybe two,
It hardens right up 'til I cannot chew.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - A - B - B** Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first two chapters of our novel.

<p>The Quatrain Poem</p> <p>Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).</p> <p>Title: _____</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
--

D. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter Two is: ... *his head bobbing like a madman*...

What is being compared in this example?

--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) a piece of gum sticking to the bottom of a desk

b) a janitor washing the floor

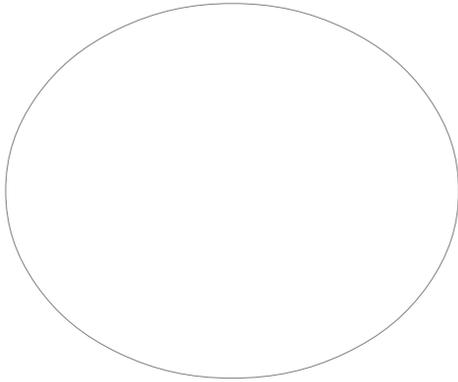
c) your choice

E. Chapter One contains an example of an important literary device called **foreshadowing**. Foreshadowing is defined as *a warning or indication of a future event*. The concluding paragraph in Chapter One introduces us to the fact that the janitor of the school is, in fact, Jack's dad. Considering the definition of foreshadowing, how might this be an example of this literary device?

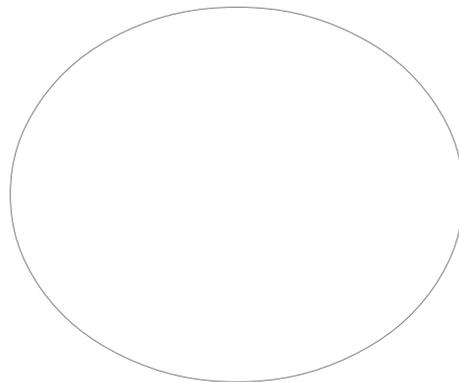


F. 5 Ws and an H.

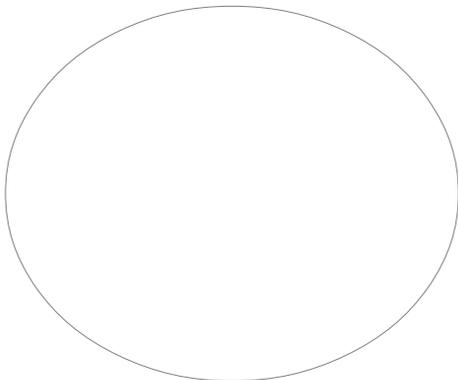
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



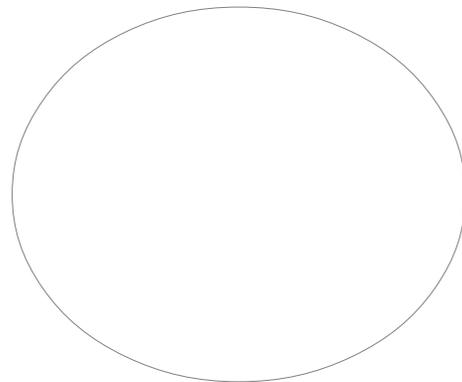
WHO?



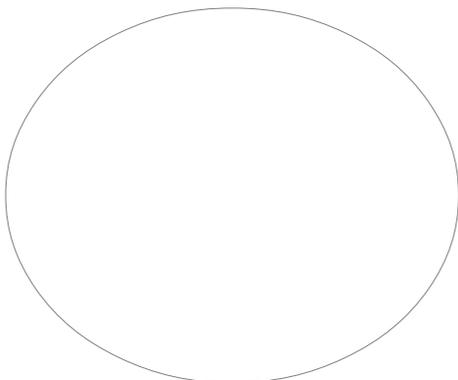
WHAT?



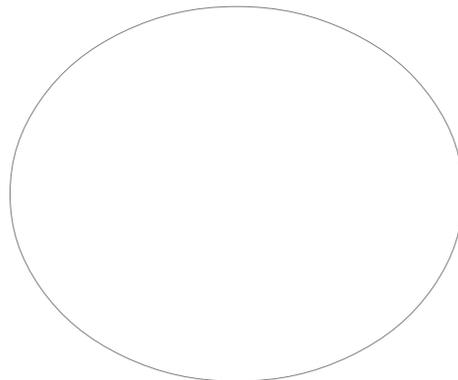
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene - or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first two chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6