



KNUFFLE BUNNY

Mo Willems

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Leaving the Laundromat with her daddy, toddler Trixie realizes she's forgotten her beloved stuffed animal, Knuffle Bunny. But Daddy can't understand her efforts to communicate with him.

INTERACTING WITH THE BOOK

As you read the story with your usual great verve and drama, pause when you think it's essential, and with enthusiasm, ask a few questions. Be selective. Don't ask every question listed here. If you do, your listeners will lose track of the plot and say, in frustration, "Could you just . . . READ . . . the STORY!" That's when you know for sure you've asked one question too many. Pick and choose the questions that best tap into your children's ability to comprehend, enjoy, and extend the story.

Some of these questions will prove unnecessary because your group will notice details and comment on them before you say anything. Encourage them to tell you what they notice as you read. You will most likely find that they are far more observant than you are.

This is a universal story that you will probably want to read more than once, so you'll have additional opportunities to discuss it and play around with it. Let's take a guided walk through the story with some suggested questions, diversions, ideas, and activities along the way.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

As stories go, this one couldn't be more elemental or child-centric. Trixie and her parents, outlined in scratchy fine-lined black ink, and dressed in solid pastels, are superimposed on large, lovely, black-and-white photos of their city neighborhood and the local Laundromat, set against a background of olive-green paper.

The mostly bald Trixie, cartoon-inspired, with her huge round head, is content and satisfied to head out for an adventure with her bespectacled and bemused dad. Then the all-vital Knuffle Bunny (pronounced with a hard "K") goes missing, and her world crumbles. So you have a comfortable juxtaposition of the graceful, static, silvery-toned photos and the cartoon action drama of a little girl dealing with her first grand life crisis.

And what a crisis it is, presenting themes with which every child can identify: making yourself understood in the adult world, dealing with loss, and relying on your parents to keep your world safe and stress-free.

PRE-READING

Show your group the front cover of the book and then the endpapers. Ask them:

What do you think this story will be about?

What do you think will happen in the story?

The four inset illustrations on the copyright and title pages tell their own pre-story as well. Ask children to examine each one, make inferences, and describe what is happening.

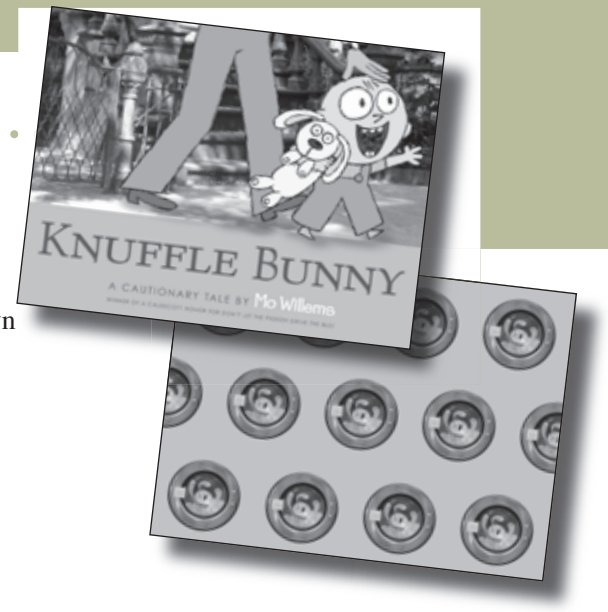
ON THE COPYRIGHT PAGE, YOU'LL SEE:

1. Mommy and Daddy are getting married.
(People are throwing rice at them outside of the church.)
2. Trixie is born in the hospital (and Daddy's growing a beard).
3. Mommy, Daddy, and baby Trixie are living in the city.

ON THE TITLE PAGE, TRIXIE AND KNUFFLE BUNNY ARE AT THE LAUNDROMAT.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

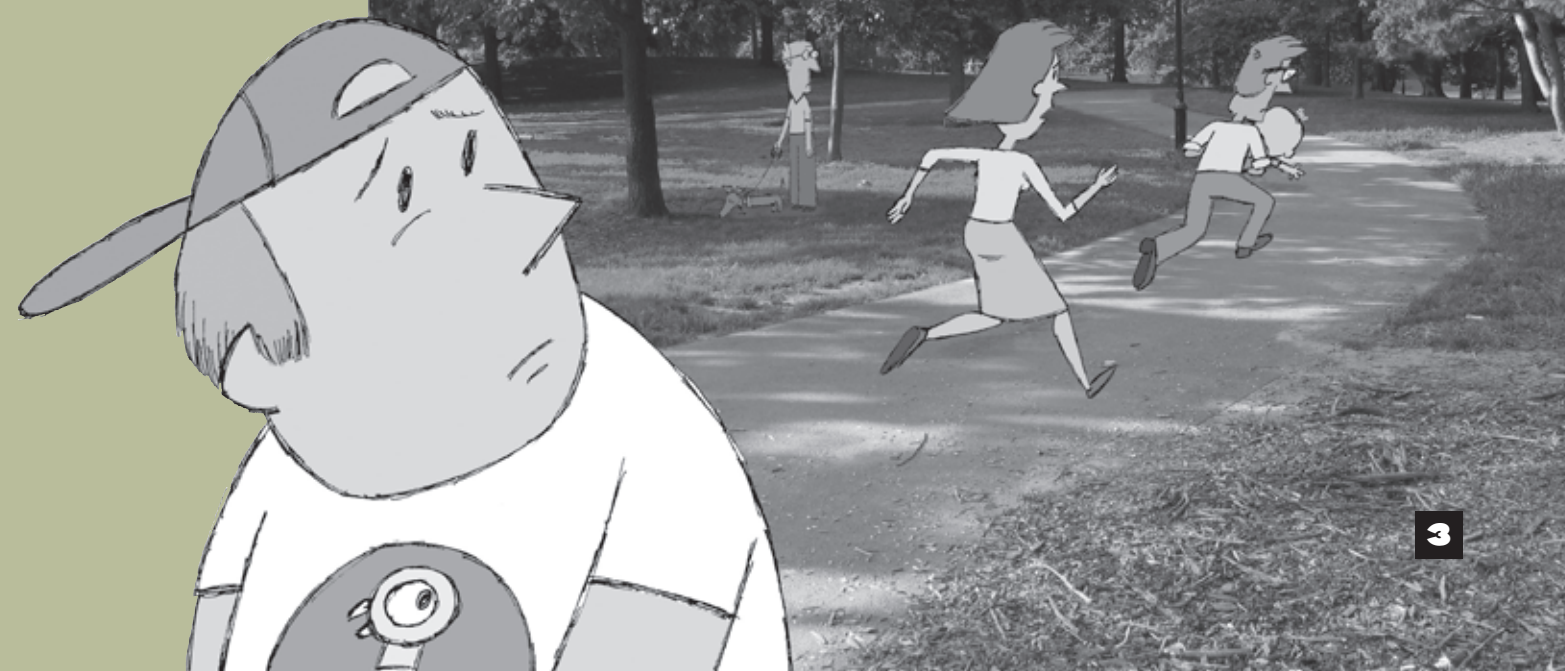
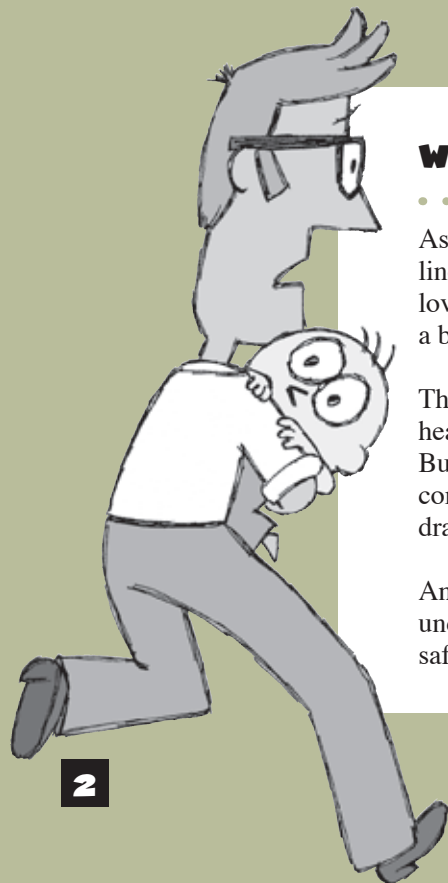
- Who is Knuffle Bunny?
- Where is Trixie?
- What is a Laundromat?
- How do your parents do the laundry?



EXAMINING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

There's a nice description on the copyright page of how Mo Willems created his singular illustrations. Basically, he says they're "a melding of hand-drawn ink sketches and digital photography." Ask your group to look closely and describe what's different about the pictures. See if they recognize the difference between the black-and-white photography and the images he drew. **(How did Mo Willems make his illustrations? What do you notice about them?)**

If you look very carefully, you will notice a guest appearance from our friend Pigeon, the main character of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* and *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!*. See if your audience spots him the first time you read the story. If not, ask them to look for him the second time through.





STARTING THE STORY

Joyful toddler, Trixie, clutching her well-loved stuffed yellow-and-blue bunny (What is Trixie's favorite toy? How can you tell?), sets off with her daddy from their Brooklyn brown-stone to the Laundromat. Her daddy is carrying a green basket filled with clothes. (Where is Trixie going with her daddy? How do you know? What is an errand? What kinds of errands do you go on with your family?)

MAKING INFERENCES AND PREDICTIONS

Daddy places the clothes in one of the front loaders (How does Trixie "help" her daddy? How do you help with the laundry at your house?), Trixie puts money into the coin slot, and then they head for home. (Uh-oh. Did you notice anything unusual in the washing machine?) Children will surely notice that Knuffle Bunny is reposing in the laundry basket as Daddy is loading the washing machine, and then, on the next page, somehow peering out from behind the glass door. (What do you think will happen after Daddy and Trixie leave?)

"But a block or so later... Trixie realized something." (What does she realize? How can you tell? Look at her face. What do you think she's thinking? How is she feeling? What do you think she'll do now?)

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Trixie tries to explain to her daddy: "Aggle flaggle klabble!" (What does he think that means? What do you think it means? If Trixie could talk, what do you think she would say?)

Poor befuddled Daddy is clueless as to the meaning of her particular baby lingo. "That's right," he says, confidently. "We're going home."

Looking at Trixie's distressed face, with her worried eyes and down-curved mouth, your children will see at once that Daddy has it all wrong. Trixie repeats herself, flapping her arms in frustration. Then, "Blaggle plabble!" she explains. "Wumby flappy?" she asks, pointing back. "Snurp," she snuffles, piteously. (What do you think she is trying to say? Let's repeat Trixie's sentences with expression.)

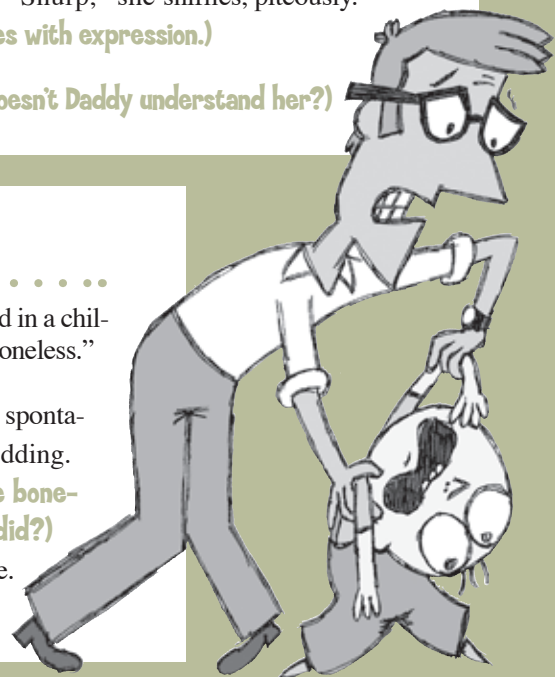
"Now, please don't get fussy," her daddy says, looking puzzled. (Why doesn't Daddy understand her?)

FALLING APART

And then the most spectacular part of all, with the best line and best single word in a children's book this year: "Well, she had no choice. . . . Trixie bawled. She went boneless."

Boneless! A most spectacular and evocative word choice. Your listeners will spontaneously join in the crying, and they will go boneless, too, without any prodding. They know what it's like to be undone and unglued. (When have you gone boneless? Show me how you go boneless. What did your parents do when you did?)

Ask them if they can recall ever having had a meltdown and what it felt like. Trixie wails in vain all the way home. Daddy doesn't look too happy, either.



MOMMY KNOWS ALL, BUT DADDY'S A HERO, TOO

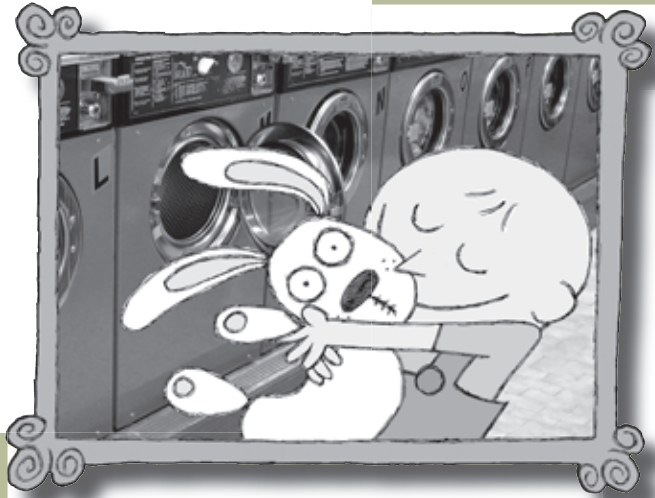
Mommy opens the front door, takes one look at the hapless duo, and immediately gets the picture. "Where's Knuffle Bunny?" she asks.

So they all race down the block, through the park, past the school, and back into the Laundromat. Heroic daddy searches valiantly, but Knuffle Bunny is nowhere to be found. (Ask your children to look at Trixie's weebegone, lip-trembling, anguished face; and, mirroring her expression, show you how she feels.)

Daddy pushes up his sleeves and looks harder. We see him with his head in the machine, tossing out shirts, socks, and a very attractive pair of yellow-and-blue polka-dotted boxers with abandon until . . . he excavates the sodden rabbit from the wash.

"Knuffle Bunny," Trixie shrieks, leaping for joy.

"And those were the first words Trixie ever said." The final illustration, framed and hanging on a nail like a picture, shows Trixie in front of the bank of washing machines, blissfully hugging her hapless toy. (Ask your children if they can recall one other place where that same illustration appeared.)



THE DEDICATION

On the last page, share the dedication: "This book is dedicated to the real Trixie and her mommy. Special thanks to . . . the 358 6th Avenue Laundromat; and my neighbors in Park Slope, Brooklyn." Then show the back flap of the dust jacket and read the bio on Mo Willems. Have everyone examine Mo's white line drawing of himself working at his drawing table, dog at his feet. (What can you tell us about Mo, his family, and this book? What family member did he leave out of his story? Why did he thank his neighbors? Do you think this story is true? Why do you think Mo Willems wrote it? What is a dedication? To whom would you like to dedicate the next story you write?)



THE VERY END

That's still not the end, however. The story concludes on the back cover, where smiling Mommy, carrying the folded laundry, and Daddy, carrying the now-placid Trixie, who is clutching Knuffle Bunny, are strolling up their Brooklyn street, heading home. Aahhh. Just right.





BABY TALK

All babies and toddlers have their own special babble, a baby list of words and ways of saying things. Children can ask their parents to recall their baby vocabularies. (What was your first word? Ask your parents to tell you about the day they heard you say your first word. What is your earliest memory?)

They can then write stories and draw pictures of something they remember from when they were little.

FAVORITE TOYS

Discussion Points: Why did Trixie miss Knuffle Bunny so much? What was your favorite toy when you were little? What was its name? How did it get its name? Did you ever misplace it? What happened to it? What else have you lost and found? Do you have a favorite stuffed animal now? What is its name?

Here's a story starter for children to write and illustrate and then present aloud to the rest of the group:

I lost my _____. I found it _____.

Children can bring in their favorite stuffed animals to introduce for show-and-tell.

SEARCHING FOR DETAILS

SETTING: Discussion Points:

What is the setting of this story?

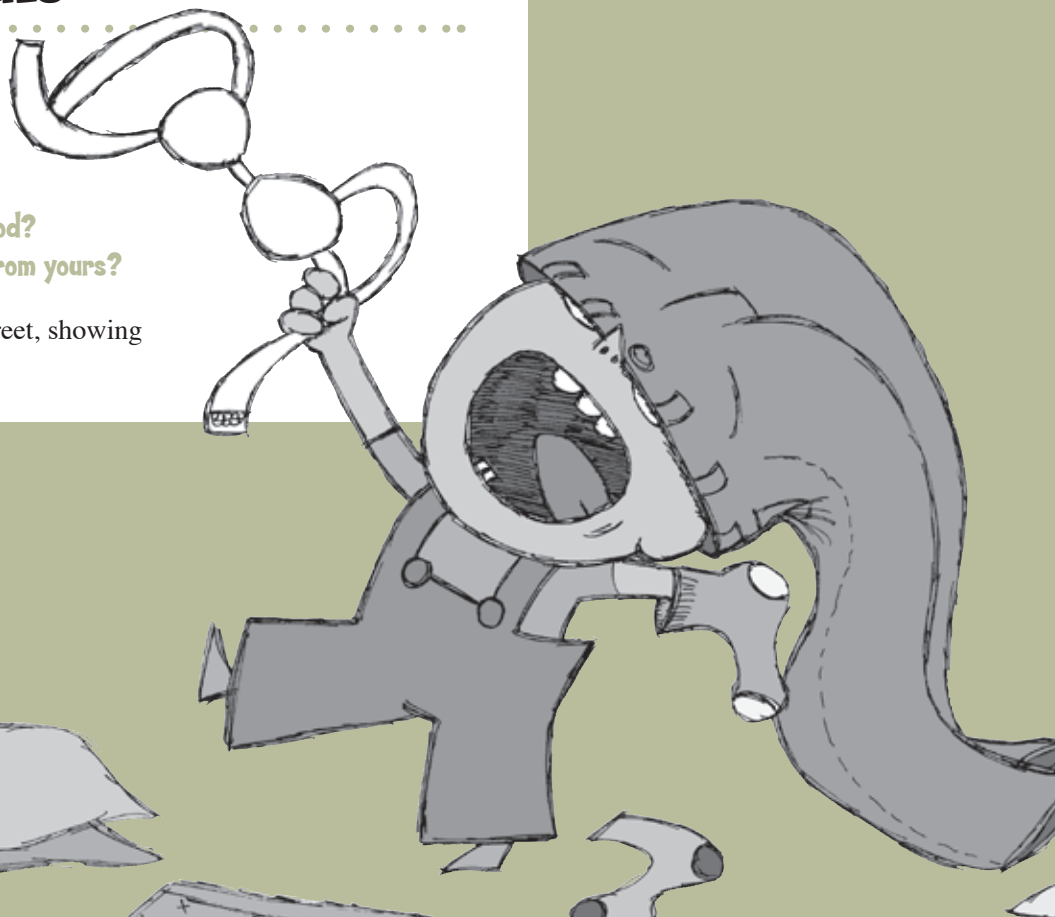
Where does Trixie live?

Look for clues in the pictures.

What can you find in her neighborhood?

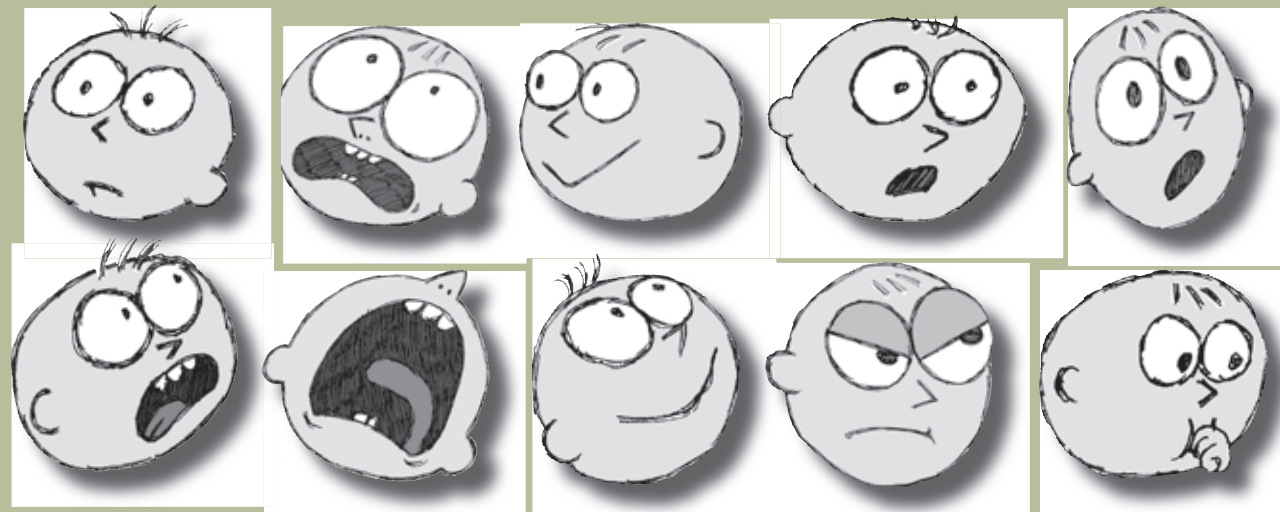
How is her neighborhood different from yours?

Students can draw pictures of their street, showing everything one can find there.



CHARACTERIZATION AND EMOTION

Trixie's mood sure does change in this story. Examining her face in each illustration, your group can compile a list of twenty words that chart her emotions over the course of her adventure. Encourage your children to think of words that go beyond their usual descriptors, happy/sad/mad/glad. (Have you ever been as upset as Trixie? What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?) Have them emulate Trixie's expressive body language at key points in the story.



LOOKING AT THE PLOT

This book exemplifies a perfect plot structure with a story line that follows the classic form. You have the:

Exposition, or setting the stage, where Trixie and Daddy set out on an adventure; **the Rising action**, where they go to the Laundromat and leave Knuffle Bunny behind, with a bit of foreshadowing for the observant reader who sees the rabbit in the washer; the **Climax**, or crisis, when Trixie can't articulate her problem for Daddy; the **Falling action**, where Mommy figures it all out and they head back to the Laundromat; some **Suspense** (and another climax), where Daddy finally finds the toy; and a perfect **Resolution**, or conclusion or denouement, where Trixie says her first words, "Knuffle Bunny!"

Wow! You could use this simple yet profound book to introduce or review components of story structure in picture books, short stories, or novels, to children of all ages and adults, too.

Knuffle Bunny is also a stellar example of what I call the Three S's: a great story must **Surprise**, it must **Startle**, and it must **Satisfy**.

For younger children, you can simplify your discussion about the story sequence. A good story has a beginning (What happens at the beginning of *Knuffle Bunny*?), a middle (in the middle of the story, there is an adventure and a problem. What is the adventure? What is the problem?), and an end. (At the end of the story, the problem is solved. How is it solved? What happens at the end?)



PANTOMIME, PART 1

With you narrating the journey, have your children act out the whole washing machine process. First, children pantomime putting clothes into the washer. They add detergent. They close the door or lid. They insert a coin into the slot. Now they “become” the laundry as you lead them through the wash cycle, the rinse, and yes, even the spin cycle. Then have them pretend to pull out the clothes and throw them in the dryer, or hang them on the line. Finally, they can fold up the clean clothes and exclaim how nice they look, feel, and smell.

PANTOMIME, PART 2

Trixie’s daddy brings the family’s dirty clothes to the Laundromat to wash them. Ask your crew to name other things that need to be washed. Some of their answers might be: the dishes, our bodies, the car, the dog, our hands, the floor, the sheets and towels, our faces, our hair. Compile a list on the board or on chart paper.

Follow up with the Washing Game. Write the name of each item on a card and drop it into a laundry bag or basket. Two at a time, the children can come up, reach in, and pull out a card. Whisper to them what it says on their card. Each pair must then figure out how to pantomime washing that item, and act it out. The rest of the group must guess exactly what the pair is pretending to wash.

SING A SONG

“This is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes, wash our clothes. This is the way we wash our clothes early in the morning.”

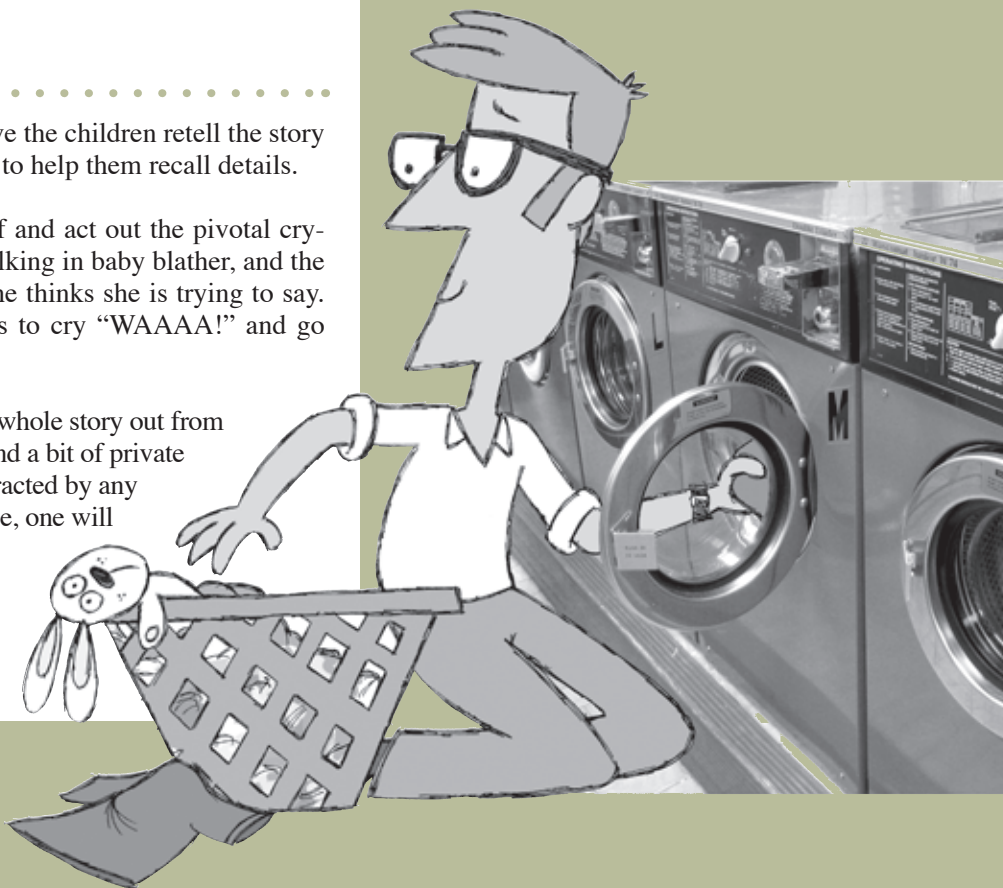
Remember this old song? With your singers, make up new verses about washing things, or about daily activities, and create actions to go with them.

RETELL AND ACT IT OUT

Sit in a circle. Go around the circle and have the children retell the story in sequence, using the pictures in the book to help them recall details.

As a warm-up, have your listeners pair off and act out the pivotal crying scene, with one child playing Trixie, talking in baby blather, and the other as her daddy, saying out loud what he thinks she is trying to say. Then have them switch roles so each gets to cry “WAAAA!” and go boneless again.

Next, have them break into trios and act the whole story out from beginning to end. Each group will need to find a bit of private space so they don’t interfere with or get distracted by any of the other groups. One person will be Trixie, one will be Daddy, and the other can be the narrator and Mommy. Recalling the sequence and the dialogue of the story, and making up new dialogue for Daddy and baby talk for Trixie, they can then act out the entire story.



ON BEING LITTLE

Ask your group: What did you look like when you were a toddler? How have you changed? They can bring in pictures of themselves when they were much, much younger, which you can use to make a “WHO AM I?” bulletin board. Make it a guessing game, where children match the pictures on the bulletin board with their now far more mature classmates.



COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

Children can finish the following pairs of sentences and illustrate them.

This pair compares then and now:

When I was little, I couldn’t _____.

Now I am big, and I can _____.

This pair looks at the past and future:

When I was young, I liked to _____.

When I am older, I would like to _____.

You might want to make a template page of each pair of sentence starters, with the first sentence on the left side of the page and the other on the right, using a nice, big, bold font on your computer. You can also draw a long line or two underneath on which children can write their comparative thoughts. If you are able to run off a large 11” x 17” page on the photocopier for each child to write and draw their responses, great.

AUTHOR STUDY

Celebrate “Mo Willems Day”, where you read aloud and celebrate all of his books: *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!*, and *Time to Pee!*. You’ll find a downloadable guide to his Pigeon books on the Hyperion Web site, www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com.

Bookpage.com, a monthly book review Web site, asked Mo some questions about himself, his writing, and his illustrating. He wrote and drew his amusing and informative response, which you’ll find at: http://www.bookpage.com/0307bp/meet_mo_willems.html

Visit the Mo Willems Web site at www.mowillems.com.

BOOKS BY MO WILLEMS

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!

0-7868-1988-X \$12.99

2004 Caldecott Honor Book
A 2004 ALA Notable Book
A *New York Times* Best Seller
A *Publishers Weekly* Best Seller
CCBC Choices 2004
A *Bank Street* Best Book of the Year 2004
A *Bulletin* Blue Ribbon Book
A *Kirkus Reviews* Editor's Choice Book
A *Child Magazine* Best Book of the Year
A *Nick Jr. Magazine* Best Book of the Year

The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!

0-7868-1869-7 \$12.99

★ A *Publishers Weekly* Editor's Pick and Starred Review
★ *School Library Journal*, Starred Review
★ *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, Starred Review



ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

MO WILLEMS has won six Emmy Awards for his writing and animation on *Sesame Street* and is the head writer for Cartoon Network's *Sheep in the Big City*. His first book for children, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, was awarded a 2004 Caldecott Honor by the American Library Association. His other books include *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!*, *Time to Pee!*, and *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale*, which was a 2004 Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book and a *School Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year. Mo lives with his family in Brooklyn, New York. Check out his wonderful Web site at www.mowillems.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

JUDY FREEMAN, children's literature consultant and workshop presenter, is the "Book Talk" columnist for *Instructor Magazine* and the author of *More Books Kids Will Sit Still For: A Read-Aloud Guide* (Libraries Unlimited, 1995). Visit her Web site at www.JudyReadsBooks.com.

This and other teacher resources are available at www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com. Visit the *Teachers and Librarians* area for a full list of available materials.

PIGEON BOARD BOOKS

The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!

0-7868-3650-4 May 05 \$6.99

The Pigeon Loves Things That Go!

0-7868-3651-2 May 05 \$6.99

AND EVEN MORE BOOKS BY MO!

Time to Pee!

0-7868-1868-9 \$12.99

A *National Parenting Publications* Gold Medalist

★ "Number one in the potty department."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Surely this book will wiz straight to the top and go No. 1."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

Time to Say "Please"!

0-7868-5293-3 June 05 \$15.99

A companion book to the popular *Time to Pee!*

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale

0-7868-1870-0 \$15.99

★ A *New York Times* Best Seller

★ *Booklist*, Starred Review

★ *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, Starred Review

★ *Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

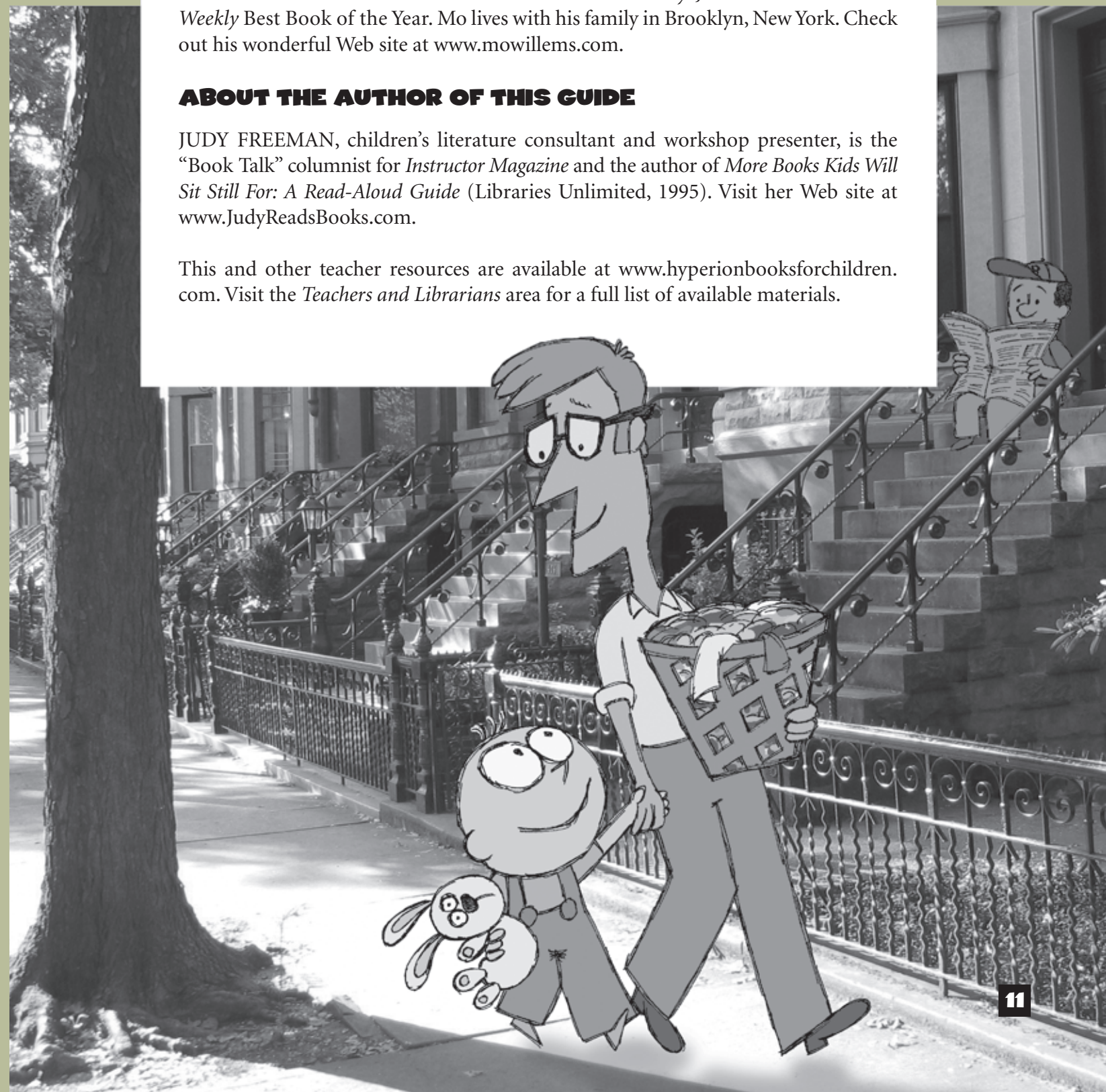
★ *Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

★ *School Library Journal*, Starred Review

New York Public Library 100 Books for Reading and Sharing 2004



10



11



HYPERION
BOOKS FOR CHILDREN