

GUIDED READING LESSON for *Snake in My Toilet*

One of the great features of HIP novels is their carefully controlled reading difficulty. If your students can read one chapter of a HIP book, you can be confident that they will be able to read the whole book. But that doesn't mean that these novels are simplistic. They still offer plenty of scope for drawing inferences, noting character development, making predictions and analyzing figurative language, as you'll see by the guided reading lesson that follows.



Snake in My Toilet

Your students will either cringe or crack up over the idea of a snake in the plumbing. Either way, students in Grades 3-6 are sure to be engaged by this HIP JR novel by Gisela Sherman.

1. Text Introduction: *Preview:* Tell students that Cameron has discovered a snake in his toilet, but it's disappeared into the plumbing of his apartment building. In this short excerpt, Cameron is home with Pat, the guy from the animal shelter, who has an idea about how to get the snake out. *Prior Knowledge:* Have students talk to a partner about how a snake might have gotten into Cam's toilet and how they might get it out. *Purpose for Reading:* Ask students to think (or "talk to your brain") about the ideas in the text and predict whether they will work to get rid of the snake.

2. First Reading: Introduce the text and have students read this section *independently* and *silently*. Ask them to mark places they wondered something (?), places they thought were interesting (□) and places that were confusing (□). (If a photocopy of the text is used, students can write notes directly on the page; otherwise, use sticky notes.) After reading, ask students to work in pairs to retell what has happened in the text and share their thoughts about the reading.

3. Second Reading: Have students reread the first page to see what inferences they can draw about three other characters: Ella, DK and Zoom. (Ella is the sister, DK is a bully

and Zoom Zess is the building custodian. You might have to explain the word “super” in this context.)

Have students reread the second page to analyze Pat’s “new plan”. Invite students to TTYN (Talk To Your Neighbor) about how Pat’s plan would work and whether it is a good idea. Discuss: Does Cam think it will work? What evidence from the text gives a clue?

Have students reread the last page. What is happening in this section? What does the last sentence mean: “The circus had begun.” Tell students that this is an author’s technique known as a metaphor: comparing what was happening in Cameron’s apartment to a circus. Have students skim to find another comparison (this one a simile) on the same page.

4. After Reading: Have students sketch and label the scene in Cameron’s house. They should be sure to include all the key elements, from Pat and the rat to the television reporters. (Remember that a visualization exercise like this is about comprehension and communicating ideas, not beautiful art. Give students a chance to share their sketches with partners at another lesson time.)

After reading, some of your students may be interested in reading the rest of the novel – and checking out illustrator Charlie Hnatiuk’s interpretation of the scene they just read about. The book may be ordered online or using the print order form. The teacher’s guide for this novel also includes a complementary nonfiction piece, a note from the author, and discussion points and graphic organizers for the rest of the novel.

The following excerpt is from Chapter 5 of *Snake in My Toilet*. It is 481 words long and has a low grade 2 reading level, but is appropriate for students in grades 4-6.

That night I had another nightmare. The boa was after me. DK chased both of us with a can of Drain Blaster. I was glad when Mom woke me up for breakfast. I went across the hallway to the Watts's, and used their bathroom. Neither Ella nor I wanted to risk ours.

At eight o'clock Pat Piper knocked on the door. This day, he wore a brown sweater covered with dog hairs, and he carried a cage.

Pat was followed by Zoom, the super, holding a yellow poster. "Who hung this in the lobby?"

The poster said a deadly snake was loose in the building.

"We want to keep this quiet," said Zoom.

Two more people came to our door. Quiet? Fat chance.

Mom left for work, and Ella went to school.

I stayed home with a bunch of rules. No TV. No Internet. No nothing except a ton of schoolwork my mom made up for me. And a giant snake in the bathroom.

But Pat had a new idea: a rat. A white rat.

I'm not joking. Pat held a white rat, frozen in a plastic bag. A red \$2.99 price tag was stuck to it.

"You can buy them at Noah's Pet Shop," Pat said. "People feed them to their pet snakes."

"A snake snack," I said. I shivered.

"Yeah, kind of. The rat is bait. When the boa comes up to get him, I'll pull the boa out and into the cage. Problem solved. Case closed."

Pat unwrapped the rat, rolled up his sleeves and sat beside the toilet. He put the rat down in the toilet with his left hand.

It sounded too easy to me, but I hung around to watch.

Then I started thinking. Yanking a big snake out of the toilet would take some force. Once it came loose, it would whip around like crazy. And what if the boa bit Pat? I'd have to pull its fangs

out of Pat's bloody hand. Wait a minute – they don't have fangs. But their little teeth are as sharp as pins.

I went off to the kitchen.

An hour later, I checked on Pat. He still sat on the floor. Now his right hand held the rat in the toilet. His left hand rested red and wrinkled in his lap. "He'll come up soon," said Pat. His eyes told me he didn't believe it either.

Someone knocked at the apartment door. When I opened it, I saw a tanned lady with long blond hair. She was holding a microphone. Behind her was a guy with a camera. And behind them was a crowd of neighbors.

"We're from CITY TV," said the blond lady.

A big guy with a small camera barged in beside her. "I'm from Bay City News," he said. "Can we come in?"

Before I could answer, they were all inside our apartment.

The circus had begun.

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