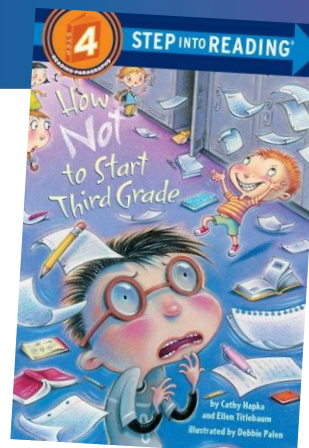


How Not to Start Third Grade Discussion Guide

Author: Cathy Hapka & Ellen Titlebaum

Illustrator: Debbie Palen

Themes: First-Day Jitters, Friendship, Problem Solving, Responsibility, Perseverance



Before Reading: to activate schema, build background knowledge, and set a purpose.

- Ask, “Have you ever worried about the first day of school? What made you feel nervous or excited?”
- Use RIF’s [Titles Can Be Telling Graphic Organizer](#) before, during, and after reading to help students think critically about how the title connects to the story.
- **Purpose for reading:** “As we read, think about how Will handles the challenges of his first day of third grade. Notice how both his and others’ choices affect what happens throughout the day.”

During Reading: to engage students, check for understanding, and make connections.

Chapter One: First-Day Jitters

- Why is Will nervous about starting third grade?
- What are your first impressions of Will? How would you describe him?
- Have you ever had a day where things started off badly? What happened?

Chapter Two: Off to a Bad Start

- What mistakes does Will make early in the day?
- Do you think Will’s problems are completely his fault? Why or why not?
- What advice would you give Will if you were his friend?

Chapter Three: From Bad to Worse

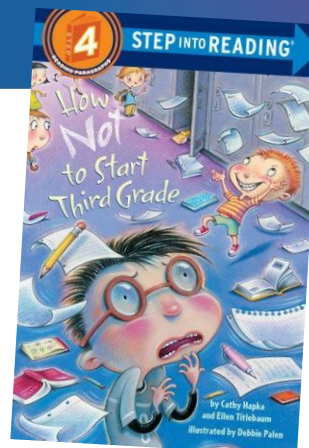
- How do Will’s problems keep getting bigger?
- How does Will react when things don’t go as planned?
- What does this chapter teach us about making good choices when we’re frustrated?

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During Reading: to engage students, check for understanding, and make connections.

Chapter Four: From Worse to Horrible

- Which event in this chapter surprised you the most?
- How do Will's classmates respond to everything that's happening?
- If you were Will's teacher, how would you help him?

Chapter Five: Food Fight!

- How does the lunchroom situation make Will's day even more challenging?
- Have you ever seen a misunderstanding grow into a bigger problem?
- What could Will have done differently during this part of the story?

Chapter Six: A First Day to Remember

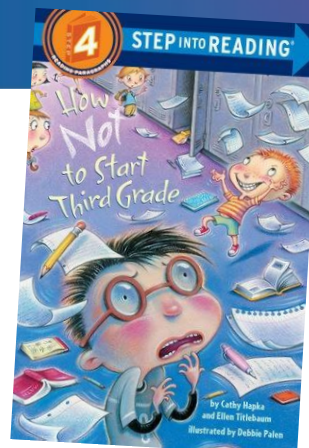
- How does Will's day finally begin to improve?
- What lessons does Will learn by the end of the story?
- Why do you think the author chose the title How Not to Start Third Grade?

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After Reading: to summarize, question, and reflect.

- Ask, “What did Will learn about handling mistakes and difficult situations? How can we remember these lessons during our own school year?”

Extend Our Thinking:

- **My Best First Day Plan:** Have students imagine they are about to begin a new school year. Create a checklist or [comic strip](#) showing five things they can do to help their first day go smoothly. Encourage students to include ways to stay organized, solve problems, and show kindness to classmates. Share ideas and discuss how planning ahead can build confidence.
- **One Choice Changes Everything:** Choose one important moment in the story where Will made a decision. Rewrite that scene by changing his choice. Then write or discuss how that one change might have affected the rest of the day. Compare different versions and talk about how small decisions can lead to big outcomes.

If your students enjoyed this book...

- Encourage them to continue discussing the story and making connections to their own school experiences.
- Invite students to read other books about friendship, starting school, overcoming challenges, or solving everyday problems. [Compare](#) how different characters respond to difficult situations and what lessons they learn along the way.