

Ready Readers

10 Lessons in
Comprehension and Analysis

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
<i>Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild!</i>	5
<i>Sam, Bangs & Moonshine</i>	14
<i>Apples to Oregon</i>	22
<i>Brave Irene</i>	30
<i>The Relatives Came</i>	40
<i>The Clown of God</i>	45
<i>Fishing in the Air</i>	55
<i>Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge</i>	64
<i>Letting Swift River Go</i>	72
<i>All the Places to Love</i>	81

Introduction

Parents and teachers love the *Teaching the Classics* approach to reading and literature. It has inspired them to read and discuss books with their students like never before. Still, many parents have asked for a set of example lessons to help them develop meaningful discussions. Having learned the *Teaching the Classics* model, they want to see it applied to a few more stories before they set out on their own.

Ready Readers fills this need with complete discussion notes for 10 classic stories. Each lesson includes a full set of Socratic discussion questions with comprehensive answers keyed to the text. Questions cover Conflict, Plot, Setting, Characters, Theme, Literary Devices and Context. In addition, a completed Story Chart graphically outlines the major structural and thematic elements of each story.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

Ready Readers is designed for TEACHERS. It is not intended as a student workbook, but rather as a guide for discussion leaders. Which questions from the Socratic list are most likely to spark a good discussion? What answers should teachers be looking for? *Ready Readers* answers both of these questions for teachers and parents alike.

Ready Readers is designed for ALL GRADES. It may be used with students of any age, depending on their needs:

READING COMPREHENSION

The *Teaching the Classics* approach helps develop good reading comprehension in the very youngest students. It encourages them to ponder well-designed questions about structure, style, context and theme in every story they read. Students for whom these stories are at or above reading level will benefit from a straightforward “question and answer” session based on the questions in each chapter.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Though the books discussed here were written for children, they provide excellent examples of the structural elements common to all stories. They are therefore useful in discussions with older students who are new to the techniques of literary analysis. In fact, we encourage all teachers to begin each term by discussing at least one children’s story regardless of the age of their students. In addition, many children’s stories are fueled by conflicts that underscore universal themes. While small children may not notice this, older students benefit from these thematic discussions.

Numbers in parentheses after each question refer to the **Socratic List**, which is included in Center for Lit’s flagship seminar *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education*. For more information about *Teaching the Classics*, visit www.centerforlit.com/ttc.htm.

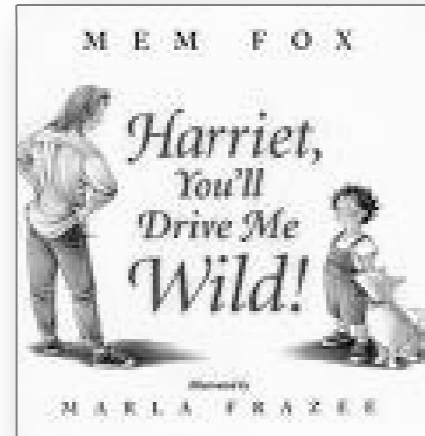
Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild!

By Mem Fox

Sandpiper, 2003

ISBN-10: 0152045988

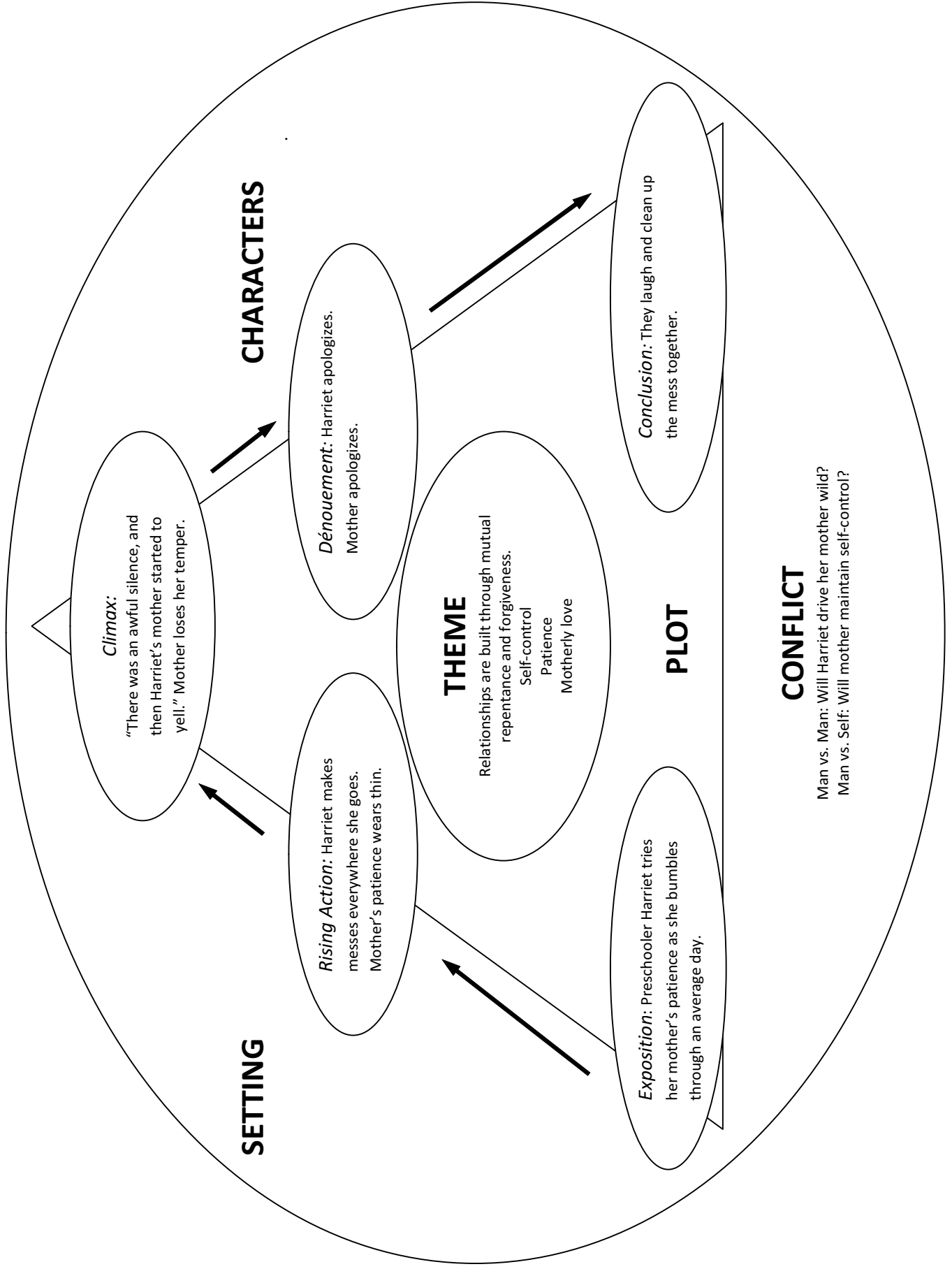
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Summary

- Plot:** When Harriet's antics cause her frazzled mother to lose her temper in spite of her attempts at self control, the two learn to forgive one another.
- Characters:** Harriet, a young girl
Harriet's mother (protagonist)
- Setting:** Harriet's pre-school years.
A family home.
An average day.
- Conflict:** Man vs. Man: Harriet's childish mistakes make life difficult for her mother.
Man vs. Self: Harriet's mother struggles to keep her temper
- Theme:** Harriet and her mother build relationship through repentance and forgiveness.
Universal issues include:
Self-control
Patience
Motherly love
Childishness.
- Lit. Devices:** Repetition
Rhyme
Alliteration

Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild! by Mem Fox: Story Chart



***Harriet, You'll Drive me Wild!* by Mem Fox: Discussion**

Setting:

What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? (1d)

The story takes place in a home. The mood of the story is warm and lighthearted.

Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why? (1h)

The characters are ordinary people – a mother and her little girl. They seem a typical, middle class family.

On what day does the story happen? What time of day? (2a) In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grownups? Does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives make the story better? (2e)

The story transpires over the course of a single day. It happens in Harriet's childhood and the mother's early parenting years. Harriet has the energy of an average 2-4 year old. She is into everything, a very busy child.

Characters

Who is the story about? (3)

The main character is Harriet's mother. She is harried because her young daughter is so very busy. She, like many mothers, wants to gently correct her daughter, who exasperates her with foolish behavior at every turn.

Is the character kind, gentle, stern, emotional, harsh, logical, rational, compassionate or exacting...? Make up a list of adjectives that describe the protagonist. What words or actions on the protagonist's part make you choose the adjectives you do? (3f)

The mother is patient, understanding, calm, gentle, exhausted, exasperated, sinful, angry, sorry, repentant, and good-natured at various points in the story's development.

What does the character do for a living? Is he a professional, or a blue-collar worker? Is he wealthy or impoverished? Is he content with his lot in life, or does he long to improve himself, like Pip in Great Expectations? (3h)

Although this detail is not explicitly mentioned, the context of the story leads readers to believe the mother is a stay-at-home mom.

What do other characters think or say about the protagonist? (3k)

The narrator repeatedly says that Harriet's mother "didn't like to yell." Instead she would sigh when Harriet's behavior caused mayhem and say, "Harriet, you foolish child, Harriet, you'll drive me wild."

What does the protagonist think is the most important thing in life? How do you know this? Does the protagonist say this out loud, or do his thoughts and actions give him away? (3m)

Clearly, the mother thinks it important to raise her child with forbearance and patience. Both her words and actions communicate this. She thinks loving Harriet is most important. However, her second motivation is accomplishing the work of housekeeping, and it is the war between these two desires that creates the majority of the story's conflict.

Do the protagonist's priorities change over the course of the story? In what way? What causes this change? Is it a change for the better, or for the worse? (3n)

Although the mother's priorities never change, her ability to achieve them is challenged as the story progresses. "And then Harriet's mother began to yell..." Certainly this loss of self-control is no merit, except that it gives the mother the chance to repent to her child and communicate love to her in the process. The disaster, in this way, becomes a means to closer relationship with her child.

Is the protagonist a type or archetype? Is he an "Everyman" with whom the reader is meant to identify? Are his struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way? (3p)

Harriet's mother is, indeed, an archetypal mother, beset with the familiar struggles and challenges all moms face and motivated by the same maternal love and compassion. Most mothers would identify with her.

Is the protagonist a sympathetic character? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? Do you pity him? Do you scorn or despise his weakness in some way? Why? (3q)

Since she is easy to understand, she is a sympathetic character. What mother doesn't sigh to find her child has created a new mess for her to clean up? What mother doesn't at some point lose her cool when her child's foolish behavior interrupts her adult priorities one time too many? All she wants to do is get one thing done and keep it so! Poor mommy!

Who else is the story about? (4)

Harriet, the child, is curious and careless. She is not overtly rebellious, just active and heedless. She hasn't yet learned to foresee disaster and avoid it. In short, she is a child! She is an antagonist by definition because she throws up obstacles that keep the mother from her goals.

In what way is he antagonistic? What goal of the protagonist is he opposed to? (4b)

It's not so much that Harriet is even aware of the obstacles she poses. The trials she creates for her mother are not intentional. She is a toddler and a mess maker. When she sees the trouble she has caused, she is truly sorry.