

A Teaching Guide for *The Secret Life of Hubie Hartzel*

(with printable option)

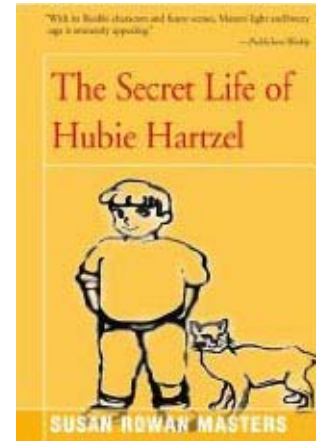
By Susan Rowan Masters

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“*The Secret Life of Hubie Hartzel* is a fast-paced story about the perils of life in the fifth grade. Humor is one of the themes that help lighten the story as Hubie deals with family, school, a class bully, and the eventual loss of the family pet. With its likable characters and funny scenes, Masters’ light and breezy saga is eminently appealing.” – *Publisher’s Weekly*

Materials: *The Secret Life of Hubie Hartzel* by Susan Rowan Masters



PLAN:

THEMATIC LINKS

BULLYING

Ask students to describe Marucci’s behavior toward Hubie and Frank. Then ask them to recount other ways in which an individual or a group can bully someone. Help them recognize the wide range bullying can take: from teasing or leaving an individual out of a social gathering on purpose to serious verbal/physical attacks. What would they do if they found themselves in with a group of kids who were bullying another student? Have them explain the statement: it takes courage to stand up to peer pressure and do what’s right. Ask them to think of a time they might have been bullied. Was it deeply hurtful? Lead students to understand that it is not only the action taken but the effect it has on the victim that counts.

Discuss what they should do if they witness someone being bullied (i.e., talk to a teacher/parent). What if the person they witness doing the bullying is a friend? Should they tell an adult about their friend’s behavior? Is there a point in which they should let an adult know?

Hubie gets back at Marucci with prankish revenge. Ask students if they think he settled his problem in an appropriate way. Could it have been handled differently? What does “being assertive” mean? (i.e., Get what you want by stating it in a normal voice — shouting could make it worse and talking quietly won’t get the bully’s attention. Then stick with your opinion and not let people push you around.) Students should understand that “being assertive” is acceptable. “Being aggressive” is not.

FAMILY

Ask students what is their placement in their family: oldest, youngest, in-between, or only child. Hubie is the “middle child” who gets bossed around by his big sister Brenda. In turn, is he sometimes bossy with Stevie? Ask students how placement affects the relationships with their own brothers/sisters and parents. Have them list the advantages/disadvantages to being an only child.

Hubie is expected to follow a certain code of behavior at home. Ask students if they think Hubie’s parents are too strict or not strict enough? Explain.

HUMOR

Ask students to describe the parts in the book they found humorous. How did the author make the scene, character or situation funny? Bring into the discussion the following elements:

- surprise and the unexpected
- word play and nonsense
- exaggeration

- a ridiculous situation or character
- irony

Ask which element/elements the author used for the humorous selection they chose. (Writing assignment: using one of the elements, write a short humorous piece.)

LOSS OF A PET (refer to section on math)

Ask students what comes to mind when they hear the term “man’s best friend” (i.e., unconditional love, companionship and acceptance.) What are some things you can do with your “best friend?” (i.e., take your pet for a walk, listen to you when you need someone to talk to, and even guard your house.) But a pet can do much more. Research has shown that a pet can change your heart rate, lower your blood pressure, and ease the times you might be feeling lonely. As with any “best friend” you must consider his/her needs too. On page 35 Hubie makes sure there is plenty of fresh water and food for Fred. Along with the basic necessities, what other things can you do in caring for a pet? (i.e., provide time for play and exercise, groom your pet, visit the veterinarian, etc.) Discuss how caring for the pet’s physical as well as emotional needs are ways of showing their love.

The book opens with Fred Ferkle as an elderly, sick cat. On page 14 Dad tells Hubie, “Sometimes it’s best to put a sick animal out of its misery.” Tell students that putting an animal to death painlessly for merciful reasons (i.e., a painful illness that cannot be cured, etc.) is called euthanasia. Ask if any of them have had to help their families make that difficult decision. When the time does come for their own pet to die, they will experience a variety of feelings: sadness over their great loss, confusion, sometimes even guilt. Have the students reread pages 88-89. What are the emotions Hubie is going through?

To help ease a loss, tell students that they can begin by embracing their memories: talk with teachers/friends/family members about their pet, and about the pet’s death. And finally they must give themselves plenty of time to work through their grief. Sometimes, however, they might hear comments from others that are not constructive (i.e., “It was just a cat,” “You can always get another pet,” or “Now you don’t have to take care of him any more.”) Tell the students that these phrases are clichés: overused or trite expressions. Hearing these and other similar clichés only make grieving more difficult.

INTERDISCIPLINARY LINKS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Have the students write a letter of condolence to Hubie using the clichés discussed above. Then have them rewrite the letter, this time avoiding the overused phrases by thinking of fresh ways to express their thoughts. When they are finished, ask which letter took longer (most likely the one without clichés.) Discuss why. Clichés come to mind easily because we hear them all the time. A writer who gives careful attention to finding the right words to express a thought or idea will delight and surprise the reader. And in this case, give solace to the grieving.

SOCIAL SCIENCE*

Teaching styles: Have the students look up pages 2, 4 and 19-20. Ask how Mrs. Bunce and Ms. Slomonsky’s approach to handling discipline is different. Are their goals similar? How might each teacher’s approach work better for some students and not as well for others? In answering that, ask students to consider the personalities of the people involved.

MATH*

Have the class do a survey of pets belonging to students in their classroom/school (i.e., how many cats, dogs, etc.). Younger students could develop a bar graph demonstrating the number of various pets. Older students might be interested in doing a study of pet longevity. Include a line graph of their pets’ ages. Compare their graph with their research of pet longevity. Ask students whose pet is closest to the average longevity age. From this point, a discussion of pet care/ pet loss could be incorporated.

HEALTH

Ask students what are Hubie's eating habits (i.e., on page 4) Hubie avoids the healthier fruits and reaches for a piece of apple pie.

Talk about the major food groups and the benefits of getting enough nutrients. Is it sometimes okay to eat "junk foods"? How often they include "junk foods" in their diet depends on whether or not they are getting enough of the right nutrients to start with, what their weight is and the kind/amount of physical activities they do.

Have the students keep a chart of all the foods that they eat and approximate amount of servings over one week. At the end of the seven days have them evaluate the results (i.e., nutrients they are getting or not getting enough of, how much refined sugars, what kinds of fats, etc.)

SOCIAL STUDIES*

Begin with a discussion of the importance of animals in various cultures throughout the ages (i.e., cats in the Egyptian culture were once worshiped, in Hindu culture white cows are considered sacred.)

ANCESTRY

On pages 32-33 Hubie is told that his great-grandfather liked to draw and paint. He wonders if his great-grandfather had red hair too. Have the students do a family tree. They could gather the information through interviews, old family pictures, and research on the Internet.

ART*

Art is a form of social expression. How does Hubie use his drawings as a way of expressing some of his frustrations? Are his drawings exaggerated representations of his feelings? Have students create their own drawing expressing a particularly moving incident in his/her life.

CLOSURE

Everyone has a talent. In Hubie's case it is in the arts. Ask students to think about their own special area of interest (i.e., playing a particular sport, building/fixing things, writing, etc.) Leave them with this question: How might they further develop their own talents?

*Suggestions submitted by Joan Masters, certified teacher in N-6 Elementary and Special Education.