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# MISS NELSON IS BACK

Authors: Harry Allard & James Marshall

Illustrator: James Marshall

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin

## THEME:

Things are sometimes not what they seem, so it's important to look closely and discover the truth.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

When their teacher Miss Nelson has to go away for a week, her students' big plans to "really act up" are thwarted by the dreaded substitute, Viola Swamp. LeVar is surprised in this episode by a mysterious set of clues that lead him to be transformed by a make-up artist and then to a performance by Blackstone the Magician. The real surprise turns out to be a birthday party for LeVar.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss with students why the kids in Miss Nelson's class did not want Mr. Blandsworth for their teacher. Was he a believable school principal? Why not?

Ask students to rate Viola Swamp as a substitute on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 as the highest) and give reasons for their ratings.

Discuss why students sometimes misbehave when they have a substitute teacher.

Invite students to share stories about their favorite birthday celebrations.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Divide the class into small groups. Have each group choose an object to hide and devise a set of three clues that would lead to its whereabouts. Arrange a time when each group can be in the classroom without the other students present so that they can hide their object and "plant" their clues.

Make a birthday graph of the students in the classroom. There are different ways to do the graph: 1) make a set of construction paper cakes, one for each month, and have the students make a candle (with their name and birth date on it) for the appropriate cake; 2) make a pictograph using photocopies of the students' school pictures and have them glue their pictures under the name of their birth month; 3) make a pictograph using small cutouts of birthday cakes that the students have colored and labeled with their name and birth date.

Brainstorm with the students a list of ways that they can be helpful to a substitute teacher.

Invite someone who knows magic into the classroom to show the students a few simple tricks.

Give the students two construction paper ovals, cut in about the size of their faces. On one of the ovals, have them draw the face of Miss Nelson. On the other oval, have them draw the face of Viola Swamp. Glue the two ovals with the blank sides together. Before securing all the way around, slip a craft stick or tongue depressor between the two ovals at the bottom and then finish pressing the ovals together. Obtain copies of the book *Miss Nelson Is Back*, its "prequel" *Miss Nelson Is Missing*, and the sequel, *Miss Nelson Has a Field Day*. Read the books to the students while they hold up their two-sided faces, showing Miss Nelson and Viola Swamp as they appear in the stories.

Using a variety of scrap materials, have the students create disguises for themselves. Solicit donations of old clothes so students can dress up as well.

As a class, plan an author, book or character-related birthday party. Some possibilities include: a Winnie-the-Pooh party on A.A. Milne's birthday (January 18), a "Reading Rainbow" party on LeVar's birthday (February 16), a Dr. Seuss party (March 2); or a "wild things" party on Maurice Sendak's birthday (June 10). Birthdays of some popular authors/illustrators of **Reading Rainbow** books are as follows: Vera B. Williams (January 28), Aiki (September 3), Tomie dePaola (September 15), James Marshall (October 10), Steven Kellogg (October 26), Kevin Henkes (November 27), and Jan Brett (December 1). Students might have other ideas for authors whose birthdays they would like to celebrate. Have students make the decorations and party favors. They might make placemats by drawing a picture related to the author's books and then laminating it. Bookmarks or stick puppets would make good party favors. (Children could exchange these at the party.) Have the class plan the refreshments and enlist parent volunteers to help prepare them at school. Students will also need to decide on the entertainment for the party. They might read or dramatize parts of stories, for example.

Have students make masks using grocery bags. Help them mark the places for the eyes, nose, and mouth. Provide all sorts of materials for them to use to decorate the masks, such as scraps of construction paper (encourage them to experiment with curling the paper, zigzagging it, etc.); yarn, ribbon, wallpaper scraps, cloth or felt scraps, sandpaper, pipe cleaners, and the like. Have a parade to another classroom to see if those students can guess who is behind each mask.

## RELATED THEMES:

observation skills  
mysteries

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**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #76 — Opt: An Illusionary Tale

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

Harry Allard was James Marshall's French instructor at Trinity University in San Antonio. The Miss Nelson books were born when Harry called James on the telephone and simply said the words, "Miss Nelson is missing." The first book in the series was plotted in one weekend with both of the authors contributing lines in the story, while James made sketches.

**ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

A self-taught artist, James Marshall's ideas usually came from his daydreams and doodles. Stories emerged from the personalities of the characters. Since he enjoyed making people laugh, he thought about what might look funny in his illustrations. The words, for him, always came later. He not only illustrated the Miss Nelson books, he and Harry Allard worked on the plots and characters together. The two of them also collaborated on the hilarious series about the Stupid family.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

GRANDMAMA'S JOY

by Eloise Greenfield, illus. by Carole Byard (Philomel)

DADDY IS A MONSTER SOMETIMES

by John Steptoe (Lippincott)

HARLEQUIN AND THE GIFT OF MANY COLORS

by Remy Charlip and Burton Supree (Four Winds)

**HIGHLIGHTED BOOK:**

THE UPSIDE DOWN RIDDLE BOOK

by Louis Phillips, illus. by Beau Gardner (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

ARTHUR'S BIRTHDAY

by Marc Brown (Little, Brown)

THE SECRET BIRTHDAY MESSAGE

by Eric Carle (Crowell)

MAGIC

by Jon Day (Thomson Learning)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, EVERYWHERE!

by Arlene Erlbach, illus. by Sharon Lane Holm (Millbrook)

BIRTHDAY RHYMES, SPECIAL TIMES

selected by Bobbye S. Goldstein, illus. by Jose Aruego & Ariane Dewey (Doubleday)

THE 13<sup>TH</sup> CLUE

by Ann Jonas (Greenwillow)

MY HEAD IS RED AND OTHER RIDDLE RHYMES

by Myra Cohn Livingston, illus. by Tere LoPrete (Holiday House)

THE BIRTHDAY SWAP

by Loretta Lopez (Lee & Low)

THE BIRTHDAY DOOR

by Eve Merriam, illus. by Peter J. Thornton (Morrow)

THE SURPRISE

by George Shannon, illus. by Jose Aruego & Ariane Dewey (Greenwillow)

MAGIC TRICKS YOU CAN DO!

by Robyn Supraner, illus. by Renzo Barto (Troll)

