

CHRIS VAN DUSEN

Chris Van Dusen's fun-loving picture books beg to be used in the classroom!

Here are ideas for how you can share them with your students.

Hattie & Hudson

Hattie McFadden is a born explorer. Every morning she paddles her canoe out on the lake, looking at nature and singing along the way. One day, her song draws an elusive monster up from the depths. Hattie names him Hudson, and they become fast friends. But when Hudson is spotted by the local townspeople, fear causes them to hold a meeting to discuss ways to rid themselves of this dreadful beast. Hattie devises a plan to show everyone that Hudson is truly a friendly monster.

Discussion Questions

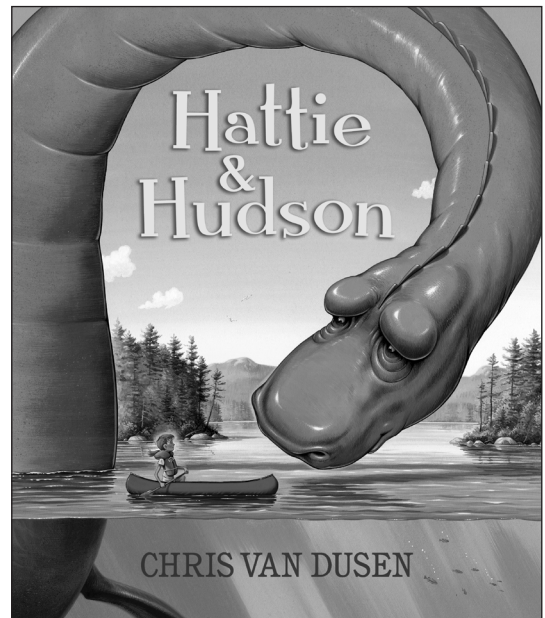
1. Everyone in town is terrified of Hudson. Why do you think they are scared of him? Why do you think they call him the Deadly Beast? Why does this make Hattie feel sick?
2. Do you think Hattie does the right thing? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe Hattie? What kind of person is she? Brave? Friendly? A leader? Give specific examples from the story in support of Hattie's character. Would you do the same thing if you were Hattie?
4. At the end of the story, a young boy walks up to Hudson and pats him on the nose. If the boy had not done this, do you think the townspeople would have eventually come to accept Hudson?

Hudson on the Lake

This poignant tale of an unlikely friendship forged between girl and monster can be used to remind children of the pitfalls of first impressions and prejudice, and the power of tolerance and acceptance. Tell the class that you are going to describe something and they should guess what it is. Say, "It is brown and fuzzy and very sweet." Most of the children will probably assume you are describing an animal, perhaps a dog, and so they'll be surprised when you pull out a kiwi! Continue to discuss expectations, prejudice, and first impressions. Ask, "How does this experience change the way you think about first impressions?" Mention that Hattie was not led by first impressions and did not see an obstacle when she met Hudson. What she saw was a lonely creature that needed a friend.

Now hold a discussion about the qualities of friendship. Create a list of these qualities and post the list in the classroom as a reminder of good character. You might title it "Do Like Hattie Does!"

Discuss how, although at first the townspeople's prejudice and fear made them want to get rid of Hudson, eventually



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they welcomed the idea of his staying around, and he even became a bit of a tourist attraction. Invite the children to create a brochure or poster advertising "Hudson on the Lake." It should describe the lure of Hudson the friendly monster and tout the activities offered at the destination. Suggest that the children make their creations colorful and exciting.

Local Legend & Folklore

Hudson is similar to the aquatic creature in the legend of Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster. Ask the children if they have heard of this legend. Then ask them if they know what constitutes folklore. Explain that folklore involves fictional tales that are perpetuated by people but are widely unsupported by fact. Find age-appropriate information on Nessie to share with the class; older children can use the library and Internet to research tales of the Loch Ness Monster. Once all the research has been collected and shared, compare the legend of Nessie and the story of *Hattie & Hudson*. Create a chart of the similarities and differences. As an activity extension, share other examples of folklore (e.g., Paul Bunyon, Big Foot). Challenge children to write their own folklore.

Songbird

While paddling in her canoe, Hattie sings a song that is so cheerful and charming that it draws Hudson up from the deep, dark lake. Transcribe all three verses of her song and display the lyrics on an overhead projector or give each child an individual copy. Discuss the A-B-A-B pattern of the song. Highlight each ending word of the first verse (making the A word one color and the B word another color) while discussing the rhymes. Have the children do the same on the next two stanzas. Invite each student to create his or her own song or poem incorporating an A-B-A-B pattern. They could write an original stanza or a continuation of Hattie's song.

Randy Riley's Really Big Hit

Randy Riley loves two things: science and baseball. While Randy may be a genius when it comes to the solar system, he strikes out on the baseball diamond. But when he sees something shocking through his Space Boy telescope, he summons all his science smarts and devises a plan that will save the day in a spectacular way.

Discussion Questions

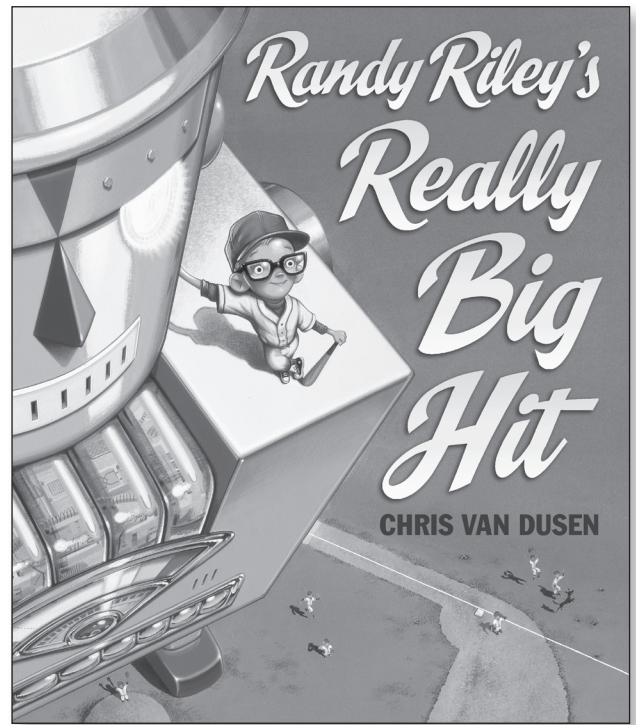
1. When Randy tries to warn his parents of the impending doom he sees, they don't listen to him. Do you ever feel like no one is listening to you? Instead of arguing with his parents, what does Randy do?
2. Randy enjoys baseball, but he isn't very good at it. Do you think Randy should have given up playing baseball because he wasn't ever able to hit the ball? Why or why not?
3. How is Randy able to combine his two favorite things in order to help save the town?

A Ride on Mars

Randy loves outer space and thinks it would be great "to ride a bike on Mars." Challenge your students to a creative-writing exercise by asking them what they think it might be like to ride a bike on Mars. Younger children may wish to draw a picture to accompany their story, while older children may prefer to research the conditions on Mars to make their story more realistic. Feel free to guide the class by sharing facts about Mars that would aid students in their writing.

A Shapely Robot

Randy builds a robot to battle the fireball that threatens the town. Have students create their own robot using various household items (such as tissue boxes, paper-towel rolls, juice lids, and so on). Challenge them to use items of many different shapes (square, rectangle, cylinder, oval, and so on). Have them write a description of how they made their robot and what materials they used for each shape. Invite them to name their robot and discuss its attributes.



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From Stargazing to Constellations

Randy knows about the planets, rocket ships, and constellations and likes to look through his telescope. Start a class discussion about groups of stars that form constellations. Explain that people long ago named these clusters because they thought the star patterns looked like various objects, animals, or people. Try to find visual examples to show the class, showing such constellations as the Big Dipper or Orion. For homework, have students look for constellations in the night sky. Ask them to record what they see. Discuss the findings as a class. Then distribute black construction paper to each student. Provide them with items such as buttons, sequins, or just a white piece of chalk and invite them to create their own constellation. Ask them to name their constellation and write a few sentences about it.

Randy's Big League

One of Randy's favorite pastimes is baseball. Why not have the class create their own oversize baseball cards, using themselves as the players? Invite children to bring in a photograph of themselves. Hand out sheets of white paper, and have students glue or tape their photo at the top. Then have them fill in the bottom portion of each card with their name and various stats, such as height, hometown, school, age, and favorite sport or hobby. Use the cards to create a bulletin board called "Major-League Readers."



King Hugo's Huge Ego

Hugo is a tiny king with a very large ego. But when he mistreats a villager who also happens to be a sorceress, the spell she casts causes his head to literally swell. After a valuable lesson is learned, Hugo and the sorceress end up living happily ever after.

Discussion Questions

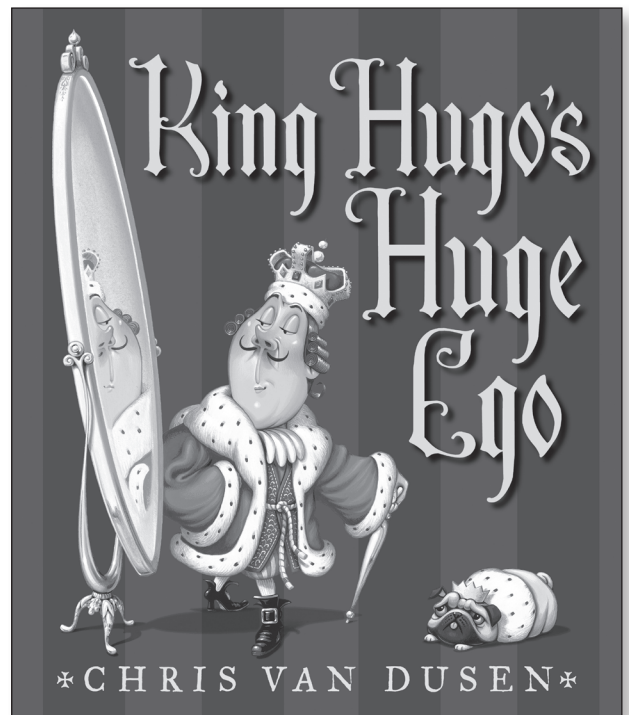
1. Ask students if they know what the word *ego* means. You may help define it by explaining that an egocentric person is someone who is interested only in him- or herself and that someone with a huge ego is usually boastful and conceited.
2. Is bragging ever acceptable? Does anyone like a person who constantly brags about himself?
3. What is the opposite of bragging? Is it possible to be a hero and also be humble and modest? Can you think of some real-life examples of people who fit that description?

Lesson Learned

After students have read *King Hugo's Huge Ego*, explain that some stories impart a message, called a moral. ("The Boy Who Cried Wolf" is a good example.) Ask the children if they think there is a lesson to be learned from *King Hugo's Huge Ego* and if so, what it might be. Responses may include "don't be so full of yourself" or "don't mistreat people." Invite students to come up with a moral that they would like to share with the class. Then challenge them to write a mini-story to convey their message.

Story Structure

Hold a class discussion about story structure. Explain that stories are peopled by characters and that most stories feature a problem, a solution, and finally a conclusion or resolution. Use some well-known fairy tales as examples. Create a five-columned chart displaying the title, characters, problem(s), solution(s), and resolution for each tale. Then distribute sheets of paper and ask students to create their own chart for *King Hugo's Huge Ego*, identifying the story's characters, problems, solutions, and resolution.



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Valuable Vocabulary

Author Chris Van Dusen often uses a variety of words that are similar in meaning—such as *spout/spit/sputter*, *bobbed/dipped*, and *topped/tumbled*. Discuss why he might use similar words in this way. Introduce your class to the concept of synonyms and the purpose of a thesaurus. Draw a circle on the board and write the word *egotistical* inside. Then reread *King Hugo's Huge Ego* with the class. Challenge children to listen for words that mean the same thing as *egotistical*. Write down the words as they call them out. Then, when you're finished reading, review the words suggested; some may need to be defined or disputed.

Challenge students to think of a word and come up with synonyms for it. You could also expand the activity to include antonyms.

Humble Hugo

When the huge-headed Hugo meets up with the sorceress a second time, she tweaks his ears, which causes an explosion of all the haughty things he has ever said. His head then deflates "like a giant pink balloon." Play a version of hot potato with your class, using a pink balloon. Blow up the balloon and decorate it with permanent marker to look like King Hugo. Have students sit in a circle and instruct them to pass the balloon to the person on their right and give that person a compliment. Once the game is in progress, you may suggest that kids switch things up by reversing directions, or by humbly stating good qualities of their own (for example, "I help my mom do the dishes").



The Circus Ship

When a circus ship runs aground off the coast of Maine, the circus animals stagger to the shore of a nearby island. They soon win over the wary townspeople with their kind and courageous ways. So when the greedy circus owner returns to reclaim them, the villagers conspire to outsmart him.

Discussion Questions

BEFORE READING:

1. How many of you have ever been to a circus?
2. Based on the cover of this book, can you predict what it may be about?

AFTER READING:

1. Discuss whose prediction was closest to the actual story. Did it surprise you to find out that the boat sank and that the animals had to swim to shore?
2. Why did the tiger jump into the blazing fire to rescue Emma Rose?
3. Do you think Mr. Paine should have been allowed to take his circus animals back? (After all, they did belong to him.) Why or why not?
4. Both Boston and Maine are real places, so do you think this is a true story?

Fact? Fiction? Or Both?

Read aloud the author's note at the end of *The Circus Ship*. The children might be surprised to learn that there really was a ship carrying circus animals that sank off the coast of Maine. Discuss how a book can be based on a real event yet still be a work of fiction—a type of book that is called historical fiction. Ask students what they think was real and what was made up to create an entertaining story. If possible, research the actual shipwreck of the *Royal Tar* and discuss with the class the similarities and differences between the real events and Chris Van Dusen's story.

The Amazing, the Stupendous, the Greatest

Explain to students that in days of old, the circus was a main form of entertainment. There were no televisions or Internet, so the only way to advertise the arrival of a circus was with posters that were designed to create excitement about the circus acts and various attractions. Have students create a poster promoting a special circus performance or animal trick. Challenge them to use adjectives and lively descriptions aimed at attracting people to the show.



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Big Book: 978-0-7636-5593-8

In the Center Ring

The Circus Ship features a variety of animals. Ask students which of the animals featured might actually be seen in a circus. Then invite them to play circus by using the animals from the story. Designate the center of the room as the “center ring,” and play the part of ringmaster by introducing each “animal” to the center. Very young children may wish to act like the animal of choice, making animal sounds and walking like their animal while parading into the center ring. Older students may prefer to team up to research animal facts to share with the rest of the class while standing in the center ring.

You could also turn this activity into a game of “Who Am I?” by having students offer clues to their identity. Some suggestions: *I am the tallest animal (giraffe). I am the largest land animal (elephant). I have stripes (zebra). I am the tallest bird, but I cannot fly (ostrich).*

Animated Alliteration

In both *The Circus Ship* and *King Hugo's Huge Ego*, Chris Van Dusen uses alliteration to enhance the story. Explain that alliteration is the repetition of sounds in neighboring words—usually the beginning consonant sound. Show examples from *The Circus Ship* (such as *Dottie Dailey* and *Fannie Feeney*) and from *King Hugo's Huge Ego* (such as *mighty and magnificent, gleaming gold, and robes of ruby red*). Challenge students to use alliteration by putting their name together with a descriptive word or words. (such as: “Brainy Brian” or “Jumping Jillian.”)

