

## A Curriculum Guide to

### ***Frindle***

By Andrew Clements

#### **About the Book**

“If there is any justice in the world,” *Kirkus Reviews* wrote in its rave review of *Frindle*, “Clements may have something of a classic on his hands. By turns amusing and adroit, this first novel is also utterly satisfying.” Nick Allen, a fifth grader with a gift for creative ideas and a taste for troublemaking, coins a new word for *pen*—Frindle. All he wanted to do was play a little trick on Mrs. Granger, a legendary language arts teacher with a passion for proper vocabulary. After all, she told him that ordinary people determine which words end up in the dictionary. But when his new word sweeps the nation, Nick fears that he might have created a monster. “Readers,” *School Library Journal* predicted, “will chuckle from beginning to end . . . Outstanding and witty.”

#### **About Andrew Clements’s Books**

Nora wants to prove that test scores—even high ones—can be misleading. Nick wants to push his teacher’s language lesson to its ridiculous extreme. Cara wants everyone to know what’s really going on in her classroom. Jack doesn’t want any of his classmates to know what his father does for a living. Greg is on his way to being a millionaire—with a little help from his fellow students. Dave and Lynsey have engaged their entire fifth-grade class in a no-talking contest.

Andrew Clements’s stories are set firmly in the most essential of childhood settings, school, but the reason they strike such a chord with middle-grade readers goes deeper than this straightforward platform. Clements takes the everyday reality of grade-school life and turns it into an exceptional laboratory for observing the development of a person’s character. The works of Andrew Clements give readers insights and strategies for rising to the challenges of their classrooms.

The students who populate Clements’s tales are both highly interesting and appealingly imperfect. They have grand ideas or astonishing talents, yet they make mistakes or fail to turn in their homework. The parents and teachers who surround these students are carefully depicted with an empathetic eye to the adults’ points of view. The results are grade-school worlds pulsing with energy, style, and a light touch of humor: worlds that are profoundly, identifiably real.

And, in Clements’s realistic schoolyards, his young characters begin to discover the people they hope to someday become. Whether exploring the validity of test scores as measures of human worth, confronting prejudice, or observing how individuals come to terms with their own special talents, Clements’s honesty is uncompromising, his eye unflinching. Best of all, no matter how difficult a situation he presents to them, Clements is always optimistic that his characters can learn, change, and grow. They are testaments to the good that can come from imperfect situations and the potential that can be realized in the most surprising moments.

## **Prereading Activities**

The following activities align to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.3–6.1, 2, 4, 6, 7) (W.3–6.3, 4) (SL.3–6.1, 2, 3) (L.3–6.1, 4, 5, 6) (CCRA.R.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9) (CCRA.L.4, 5, 6) (CCRA.W.3)

1. Dictionaries are an essential classroom tool. Have students thumb through dictionaries and tell what they notice about the organization of the book. Then, students should try and determine how many words are in the dictionary, how words are added, and how words and meanings have changed over time. Next, they should create a list of five–ten\* words and try to determine their origin, the time period for when they were used, and the many different meanings. (\*See *Frindle* Tier 2 word list at end of unit.)
2. Have students brainstorm all the synonyms that they know for *pen*. What do they notice about the list? Have students work in small groups to find five words that have a lot of synonyms and five that do not. Compare lists and discuss what they notice about the words that have more and the words that have less.
3. Baby language is how babies communicate without actually using real words. The sounds they put together are not in the dictionary, yet they are understood by families. Students should ask their parents what baby words they used for everyday things, and how their parents figured out what they meant. Students should then bring in the words to share and create a “baby word” dictionary as a class.
4. The relationship between a teacher and student can be very special. Have students think about a special teacher in their lives, or a memorable moment with a teacher. What made this relationship special? How did it develop? Have students do a think-pair-share activity. As you move around the room, the students or you can share the ideas and memories that they are talking about with their partner.
5. The art of letter writing and the craft of penmanship is becoming a lost art. What do you notice about receiving a handwritten letter in the mail versus an e-mail? Have you ever received a handwritten letter? Do you write letters to family, friends, or a pen pal? One of the things Mrs. Granger does in this story is to write a letter to her student, Nick. She wants him to read it much later when he has accomplished something. Using pen and paper, write a letter to yourself about what you would like to accomplish for the school year—what you want to improve and what you hope will be better. Seal the letter, address it to yourself, and give to your teacher for you to open at the end of the year.
6. The illustrator of *Frindle*, Brian Selznick, has added visual elements to support the story. From looking at the pictures, what can you infer or predict about the characters and events in the story? An example to use is *Nick, age 2 months* (the picture opposite the Title page).

## **Discussion Questions**

The following discussion questions align to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.3–6.1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) (RF.3–6.3, 4) (W.3–6.1, 2, 3, 4) (SL.3–6.1, 2, 3, 5) (L.3–6. 4, 5, 6) (Math Content NBT4-5.B.4, NBT.4-5.B.5, NBT4-5.B.6, NF.5.B.5, NF5.B.6)

1. The first two paragraphs of the book describe Nick as a student. As you are reading, find examples of why you agree or disagree with this description. At the end of the book, do you still agree with the description of Nick at the beginning? Explain why or why not. If you were to write a description of Nick, what would it be?
2. Nick is full of creative ideas. Students are used to his antics and are delighted when they know what's going to happen. Write about a creative idea that you have had. How would you use this idea in your school? Would your idea have a positive impact on your school? Explain why or why not, and support your answer with examples.
3. What is the relationship between Nick and Mrs. Granger? Find examples and quotes in the story that show how they interact with each other, and how the author has developed the relationship between Nick and Mrs. Granger.
4. Similes and metaphors are tools that writers use to help with descriptions. Find examples of similes and metaphors and explain how they help set moods and tell us more about characters. An example might be, "Her eyes were the color of a thundercloud." Or "Nick could feel a homework assignment coming the way a farmer can feel a rainstorm."
5. Chapter 9 is titled "Chess." Explain how the events in this chapter are like a chess game. Can you think of another metaphor that would explain the interactions between Nick and Mrs. Granger?
6. What is a trademark? Why is it important? Explain the importance of a trademark in this story.
7. New inventions and technology have changed how words are used in our everyday language. For example, *meat* used to mean ALL food—today its definition is much narrower. *Awful* was a short version for "full of awe" and now has a negative meaning. *Friend* means a buddy or pal that you can trust and think of with affection, but with the advent of Facebook, it has taken on a new meaning: Can you really be a friend with someone you have never met? Can you think of new words we use today, or new meanings for old words? Some examples might be *stumble*, *stream*, *tag*, *spam*.
8. How do the media cover events in this story? Are they truthful? What role did the newspaper story in the *Gazette* play in the use of the word *Frindle*? Discuss the role of media in this story: Were they a good or bad influence? Find examples to support your decision. Substitute yourself for Nick in the *Gazette* newspaper article (Chapter 11). How would you react and what would you do?
9. Write an article for the *Gazette* from a "Frindle" point of view. What would you say about Nick, Mrs. Granger, and the other students in the story?

10. Later on in the story, Nick has an idea about cafeteria food. Compare this idea with the Frindle idea. Give an explanation of the differences and why each idea worked. Give specific examples from the story to support your comparisons.

11. What if Mrs. Granger had created and used the word *Frindle*? What do you think would have happened? Would the outcome have been the same?

12. Explain how Mrs. Granger’s fight against the word *Frindle* actually helped it all along. Use examples from the story to support your answer.

13. Mrs. Granger writes to Nick, “Every good story needs a bad guy, don’t you think?” Partner with another student and role-play the relationship between Nick and Mrs. Granger. Try to imagine what each character was thinking and the reasons behind their actions. Find examples to show how the relationship between the two characters has grown or changed. For example, ask students to dig deeper into the teacher’s behavior, especially the discrepancy between her thoughts (benevolent) and her actions (villainous on the surface) and ask them to behave with the same level of complexity—and then evaluate one another.

14. Describe the significance of the gift Mrs. Granger receives at the end of the story.

15. Andrew Clements writes many stories about school kids—their hopes, dreams, troubles, and talents. Make connections and compare and contrast the book *Frindle* with some of Clements’s other school stories: *The Landry News*, *The School Story*, *The Janitor’s Boy*, *A Week in the Woods*, *No Talking*, *Lost and Found*, etc. How are the plots, main ideas, characters, and settings the same? How are they different? Why do you think Andrew Clements is so popular and appealing to readers?

16. Nick’s father received a check for \$2,250 for all the items sold with the “Frindle” name. Nick’s father responds that this will help pay for Nick’s college. In a small group, research to find out how much it currently costs to go to one semester of college (choose a state or local college). There are two semesters in an academic school year. How much does it cost to attend that college for one year? If the cost of college doesn’t increase, how much will it cost to go for four years? If Nick wants to pay for himself and ten more people to go to college, how much money does he need?

Justify your answers using pictures, words, and numbers.

Note to the teacher:

For younger students, suggest the school name and maybe even provide them with tuition cost for one quarter, and then point out there are three quarters to an academic year (if this is true for your school). Mention that the fourth quarter is summer.

For older students, ask them to think about Nick and what kind of school he’d like to go to. Then research to find a school like that, and use that one. Or have students think of a school they would like to attend and use that school.

## **Activities**

The following activities align the following Common Core State Standards: (RI.3–5.7, 9) (RF.3–5.3) (W.3–6. 2, 4, 6, 7) (SL.3–6.4, 5, 6) (L.3–6.1, 3, 4, 5, 6) (CCRA L 4 – 6)

1. Word games are a fun way to increase vocabulary. Have an area set up in the classroom where games such as Scrabble, Boggle, word searches, and crossword puzzles can be played. Charades is another way to have students explore the use of language in creative and fun ways. Online tools are also a fun way to help build vocabulary. Consider on-line sources such as word clouds, word walls, Tagxedo, Free Rice, etc. Twenty-one online vocabulary tools and resources can be found here: <http://www.learningunlimitedllc.com/2013/02/20-digital-tools-for-vocabulary/>

2. Create a game called “Name that Definition.” Have students find five-to-ten interesting and unique words\* from the dictionary. Before they look up the definition, have students write down what they think the word means. Then have them write the correct definition and a third definition that they make up that someone might choose. Create a class list and have students try to choose the correct definition. (\*see Frindle Tier 2 word list).

3. If your school has morning announcements or a television studio, have students work on having a “word of the day.” Have them say the word, define it, and use, in a sentence for the rest of the school to learn and use.

4. Create a “Frindle” blog, Animoto book trailer, or podcast about the book. These can be done in the style of a news journalist or TV announcer for grabbing student’s attention. Sites such as Wordpress (<http://wordpress.com>) or Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org/>), Animoto (<http://animoto.com/>), and Read Write Think (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/podcasts-nuts-bolts-creating-30311.html>) offer helpful tips and free sign-ups for teachers.

5. Where do words come from? Who decides if it gets into the dictionary or not? Every year new words are added to the dictionary. Have students research and find words that have been added to the dictionary in the last five years. Sites such as: [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com), [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com) and [www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com) can help students research and find words that have been added recently. Share with the class the words that have been found.

6. Create a class mini-dictionary using words that students have newly created for everyday items. Have the students follow the format of a dictionary using student definitions. Provide an illustration for the new word, use the word in a sentence, put the words in ABC order, and determine the part of speech (verb, noun, adjective, etc.) for each word.

### **Frindle Word Bank: Tier 2 Vocabulary**

(Reference page 33 of [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf))

- absorbed
- acquire
- awkward
- blurted
- cleverness
- commotion
- complex
- consumers
- creativity
- crimson
- disruptions
- emphasize
- endures
- engraved
- essential
- forbidding
- frantically
- glanced
- imagination
- jolt
- jumble
- mania
- Mastermind
- Monopoly
- oath
- oblong
- origin
- preliminary
- procedures
- profound
- pupil
- rascal
- rebellion
- remarkable
- reputation
- ruckus
- scholarship
- sidetrack
- trademark
- tropical
- vandalism
- villain
- vocabulary

*This updated guide was written in 2013 by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District, San Luis Obispo, CA.*

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