



Classroom Guide for
GETTIN' THROUGH THURSDAY
by **Melrose Cooper**
illustrated by
Nneka Bennett

Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Reading Level: Grades 2-3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.2/.5

Lexile Measure®: 680

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 4.1

Themes

Family, Single Parents, Parenting, African Americans, Sharing/Giving

Synopsis

Thursday is a difficult day for André, Davis, and Shawna because it is the day before Mama gets paid each week. Money is tight on Thursdays, and if the family runs out of something like toothpaste or soda pop, they have to find a substitute until Friday, when Mama will have the money to buy it. Things are particularly difficult the year André is excelling in Mr. Mitchell's class. André's mother has promised a "royal celebration" that very day if any of her children get on the honor roll, and André anticipates this very thing. But then report card day falls on a Thursday! André's family is delighted when he makes the honor roll, and he hopes against hope that somehow things will be different this week. But as the evening wears on, disappointment sets in when André realizes there will be no celebration that night. Mama promises him a party the next night, but André finds it hard not to be angry about his predicament. As André sulks, Mama, Davis, and Shawna come up with a solution. They hold an imaginary party—with cake and candles and even presents. On the following night, André has his real party with real cake and real gifts. After that things go back to normal, but getting through Thursdays doesn't seem so hard ever since his imaginary party and the gifts of love he received "that didn't cost a dime."

Background

Gettin' Through Thursday links realistic childlike concerns with the worries of the adult world at a level children can understand and appreciate. Many children face situations similar to André's at home, and this story presents a positive example of how families come together and support each other even though they may not have

as many material goods and financial resources as others. In addition, for many students adult concerns at home may affect their performance and behavior in school in both obvious and subtle ways. *Gettin' Through Thursday* provides a positive model for facing and solving problems at home while it fosters an appreciation for academic success in school.

Awards & Reviews

"Choices", Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

Children's Book of the Year, Bank Street College Children's Book Committee

"André hates Thursdays. It's the day before his mother's payday; it's the day when things are tightest in their household and everything seems to run out. But hard-working, resourceful Mama doesn't let André and his siblings sulk or go without for long. When the toothpaste is gone, she tells André's older brother, Davis, to use baking soda. When sister Shawna needs a bandanna for the dress rehearsal of a play, Mama suggests using a towel until payday and the real play. André tries to make it through the week without thinking about Thursdays too much, but when report card time comes, and he knows he's on the honor roll in school, he hopes his mother will remember her promise to "drop everything and throw a royal party" even if it is the wrong day of the week. He is let down when Mama postpones the celebration until payday, but she, Davis, and Shawna come through to give André the party he deserves, first as a "dress rehearsal" and then for real. Cooper's rhythmic writing sings, and the authentic voices of her characters resonate in this heartwarming story about simple but meaningful gestures that link the world of adult worries with more childlike concerns. Bennett depicts the characters' emotions exceptionally and realistically; the facial expressions tell readers all they need to know about the story's subtext." *—Kirkus Reviews*

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before reading the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. How do you feel when you do well in school? How do the members of your family respond when you come home with good grades?
2. Have you been really impatient waiting for something? What was it? What happened?
3. What is your favorite day of the week? Why? What is your least favorite day? Why?
4. What is a promise? How do you feel if a promise is broken?
5. What is a dress rehearsal? This term usually applies to a play. For what other kinds of things might you have a dress rehearsal?
6. What is the best gift you have ever received? How did you get it? What made it special?

Teaching Tip

If students are reading this book in April or early May, you might want to relate the story to Mother's Day. Ask students about special things their mothers do for them and their families. Do their mothers have any special traditions or ways of doing things or celebrating events that they enjoy?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

As you introduce the book, ask students to think about what the title means. Does the title suggest that it's easy or hard to get through Thursday? Why do you think so? Why might Thursday be harder to get through than other days?

Draw students' attention to the cover illustration. What is the boy looking at? What do you think he thinking? What does it sometimes mean when you look at the first star at night?

Vocabulary

This book contains many examples of compound words. Review what a compound word is and remind students that when they come to an unfamiliar compound word in a story, they can break it apart. Often the two words that make up a compound word will be familiar and students can use this strategy to read and figure out the meanings of unfamiliar compound words.

Write the following chart on the chalkboard, omitting the words in parentheses. Then have students look through the book to find the missing word for each compound. For each entry, have a volunteer fill in the missing word and the completed compound word. The answers are in parentheses.

Word + Word = Compound Word

earth	+	_____	=	_____	(earthquake)
night	+	_____	=	_____	(nighttime)
_____	+	ground	=	_____	(underground)
pay	+	_____	=	_____	(payday)
_____	+	friend	=	_____	(girlfriend)
_____	+	paste	=	_____	(toothpaste)
bath	+	_____	=	_____	(bathroom)
some	+	_____	=	_____	(sometimes)
_____	+	dream	=	_____	(daydream)
hand	+	_____	=	_____	(handbag)
_____	+	one	=	_____	(someone)
_____	+	shake	=	_____	(handshake)
every	+	_____	=	_____	(everybody)
head	+	_____	=	_____	(headwrap)
_____	+	pack	=	_____	(backpack)

Teaching Tip

As students read the book, they may notice that the “g” is left off many words that end in **-ing**. Explain that often when people speak, they leave off the final “g,” and in this book the author is writing the way her characters talk. Point out that there is an apostrophe where the missing letter should be.

READING AND RESPONDING**Discussion Questions**

After reading the book, use these questions to generate discussion and expand students' understanding of the text. Encourage students to refer back to the text to support their responses.

1. What is the problem with Thursdays for André and his family? What happens in André's home on that day?
2. What does André mean when he says “my family and I grit all we got”?
3. How do you know that Mama is good at solving problems?
4. What promise does Mama make at the beginning of the school year? Why do you think she does this?
5. Why does André put his report card on the bottom of the pile of mail?
6. How does André feel about his report card? How does his family feel?
7. How do the members of André's family get along? Find some examples in the story to support your answer.
8. Why does André get upset on the night Mama reads his report card? Why is the celebration so important to him?
9. How do Mama, Davis, and Shawna try to make André feel better?
10. What is the gift André gets that “didn't cost a dime”?

Literature Circles*

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing the roles of group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Questions section of this guide to help students explore the story and relate it to their own experiences or the experiences of people they may know.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that convey the family's values.
- The **Illustrator** might draw some of the scenes mentioned but not shown, such as Mama at work or the family at the library.
- The **Connector** might look for other school stories or stories that tell about special gifts.

- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find other books by the author and other books illustrated by the artist.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Two such books you may wish to refer to are: *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 1994) and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Help students personalize what they have read by encouraging them to respond to one or more of the following. Students may respond in sketchbooks, journals, or oral discussion.

1. André's mother promises a royal celebration as a reward for getting on the honor roll. Do you agree or disagree with André's mother about the importance of school? How do you feel about being rewarded for your performance in school? What rewards do you think are the best? Why?
2. When he sees the first-star, André wishes that Report Card Day wasn't on a Thursday. How would you feel if you were in André's situation? What wish would you make? Why?
3. At first André is very disappointed about not having a celebration for his report card even though he knows it is Thursday. What advice would you give André?
4. What is your favorite part of this story? Why?

Other Writing Activities

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities.

1. In the story, Thursday is a difficult day for André and his family. Write a story about a week with no Thursday.
2. The story is told from André's point of view. Try retelling the story from the viewpoint of Mama, Davis, or Shawna.

Teaching Tip

You may wish to draw students' attention to the fact that this story is told in the first person. Have students note the use of the pronoun "I." Point out that "I" is André in the story. Ask students to find stories that are told in the third person using the pronouns "he" or "she."

3. Have students compile a list of the different problems the characters in *Gettin' Through Thursday* face. Then have students work in small groups to brainstorm and record imaginative ways for solving each problem.

4. Remind students that André's week has a certain pattern. Have students keep a diary or journal to record their activities for a week and then analyze their entries to see what patterns emerge.

ESL Teaching Strategies

The following activities may be used with students who speak English as a second language.

1. Write the words that appear in dialect ("gettin'" and so on) in their full form on index cards. When students come to each a word in the text, show them the correct spelling and give the formal pronunciation.
2. Use real objects or photographs to help students identify concrete nouns from the story such as refrigerator, toothpaste, parakeet, handbag, tray, seeds, calendar.
3. Model how to use the illustrations to enhance the meaning of the text. Read aloud the text on each spread and then comment on how the illustration provides clues to the meaning of the passage.
4. Call on strong English speakers to act out parts of the story that may be confusing, such as a hug-dance or a five-part handshake.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

Social Studies

Use the importance of the days of the week in the book to encourage students to research how each day got its name. Suggest that students search the Internet and consult encyclopedias and or other reference materials. Have students make a chart with text and illustrations that explains the story behind each day's name.

Math

Help students relate Mama's weekly paycheck with making a budget to cover needs and wants. Talk about how her paycheck probably covers basic expenses such as rent, food, clothes, heating, telephone, and health needs. Point out that these most likely come first when Mama pays her bills, and anything left over goes for other purposes including celebration parties. If students receive allowances or have money from other sources, have them work out weekly or monthly budgets for themselves.

Drama

Review with students how Mama, Davis, and Shawna act out giving a party for André. Then have students brainstorm a list of similar events that they might act out. Students can work in groups to act out their events for the rest of the class.

Language Arts

Draw students' attention to the colorful writing in this book. Point out that the author uses figures of speech called similes. If necessary, review what a simile is (a figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared, often in a phrase introduced by "like" or "as"). Have students find and discuss some of the similes in *Gettin' Through Thursday*. Help them identify what is being compared. A few examples are:

- "we feel it [Thursday] comin', like an earthquake rumblin' underground"
- "I hear him chirrupin' like a robin after rain"
- "Every minute crept by, slow as a wounded snake."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melrose Cooper is a full-time writer and the author of more than fifteen books for children and young adults, including *Life Riddles*, *I Got A Family*, *Pets!*, *Kwanzaa*, and *I Got Community*, which was a "Reading Rainbow" selection. She lives in upstate New York with her family and many pets.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Nneka Bennett is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and is the illustrator of a number of children's books, including *Solo Girl*, *Juma and the Honey Guide*, and *Vision Of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker*. Bennett's animation work has appeared in documentaries and short films. She lives in New York City.

Resources on the Web

For reviews, awards and related web links for *Gettin' Through Thursday* visit:
<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/gettin.html>

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at: <http://www.leeandlow.com/teachers>

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