



# DEAR SUBSTITUTE

**Grades:** PK-2

**Age Range:** 4-8

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## *About the book:*

When a substitute teacher named Miss Pelly comes to class, one student bristles at the change in routine—Miss Pelly doesn't follow the rules like Mrs. Giordano. But in time, our student learns that even though the substitute may do things a little differently, and she may be a bit silly, mixing things up might not be so bad.

## *About the authors:*

**Liz Garton Scanlon** is the author of more than a dozen beloved books for young people, including *All the World*, which was a Caldecott Honor book and New York Times bestseller, the middle-grade novel *The Great Good Summer*, and *Bob, Not Bob*, another picture book co-written with Vernick. Scanlon is on the faculty of the Vermont College of Fine Arts and is a frequent and popular presenter at schools, festivals and conferences. She lives in Austin, Texas, with her family. Visit her at [www.lizgartonscanlon.com](http://www.lizgartonscanlon.com)



**Audrey Vernick** writes nonfiction and humorous fiction picture books as well as middle-grade fiction. Included among her twenty titles are *First Grade Dropout*, *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten*, and the New York Times Notable Book *Brothers at Bat: The True Story of an Amazing All-Brother Baseball Team*. She enjoys frequent visits to elementary schools, where she focuses on where she finds her ideas and where young writers can look for their own. Follow her on twitter at @yourbuffalo and visit her online at [www.audreyvernick.com](http://www.audreyvernick.com).



## *About the illustrator:*

Chris Raschka is a two-time Caldecott Medal Winner and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors for his illustrations. He has been hailed by Publishers Weekly as one of the most original illustrators at work today, and continues to create stories and art that appeals to readers of all ages.

## *Pre-reading Discussion:*

### Consider the front cover...

- Examine the girl featured in this illustration. Explain what she is doing. Describe how she feels about what she is doing.
- Identify the items featured in the frame. Predict what a series of apples and pencils in the frame suggest about the setting of this story.
- The title of the book is *Dear Substitute*. Tell all that you know about a substitute. Why would this girl be writing a note to a substitute?

### Consider the back cover...

- Identify the animal depicted in the illustration. Tell what the animal is doing.
- Describe the feeling in the illustration. How do the colors and the images make you feel?
- Based on your observations, predict what this story is going to be about.

## *Post-reading Discussion:*

**Dear Substitute,  
Wow. This is a surprise.  
What are you doing here?**

- Explore the feeling of surprise the girl experienced when she discovered that her teacher, Mrs. Giordano, was absent from class. How is she affected by the substitute's presence?
- Explain why Miss Pelly, the substitute, is not aware of the basic classroom rules such as homework being turned in, library rules, the turtle's needs, and Room 102 classroom responsibilities.
- Describe what the girl wants. Tell what or who is standing in her way of getting it.
- Identify why Miss Pelly presents a problem to her.

**Dear Miss Pelly,  
Now you care about the rules?  
How did you even see us swapping?**

- Consider why the girl was troubled by Miss Pelly at lunchtime.
- Tell what it means to have back-of-the-head-eyes.
- Determine why the girl's eyes filled with tears.
- Do you think Miss Pelly was aware that the girl was close to crying? Explain your answer.
- Explore the importance of following rules.
- Consider if some rules are more valuable to follow than others. What makes this so?
- Discuss how rules help to create a fair and safe environment.

**Miss Pelly says it's that kind of day.  
She says sometimes you have to  
mix things up a bit.**

- Determine why Miss Pelly decided to add an extra story time to the weekly schedule.
- Did she break a rule by doing so? Explain your answer.
- Consider what the phrase "that kind of day" means.
- Do you agree that "sometimes you have to mix things up a bit"?
- Explain how reading something different at an unexpected time benefitted the girl.

**A funny old friend is Turtle  
If he doesn't die of dirt-le.**

- Explain what event inspired the girl to write a poem.
- Note that Miss Pelly worked with the girl to write a poem about the class turtle. Imagine what their time together might have been like.
- Earlier in the story, the girl was troubled that the substitute was not aware that the turtle's cage was scheduled to be cleaned. Yet, at this point, the girl and Miss Pelly used this issue in a creative way. Identify what has changed in the girl? Tell why she is no longer upset about the turtle's cage. How did this change in her character come about?

**Dear Miss Pelly,  
I wonder what kind of food you  
bring in your lunch.**

- Notice that the girl's note to Miss Pelly is framed by a hand-painted heart. Explain the significance of the shape of the frame.
- The word *surprise* means unexpected or astonishing. Tell which definition best expresses the meaning of the word *surprise* in the note.
- Describe events in the story that caused the girl's perception of Miss Pelly to change.
- Tell what the girl learned as a result of the surprising, mixed-up experiences with Miss Pelly.

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**Extension Activities:**

**Epistolary Prose:**

*Dear Substitute* is written in a form of writing called an "epistolary," which means that the story is told through a collection of letters. In this story, the girl wrote letters to express her feelings about various aspects of her surroundings and experiences. Write an epistolary piece focusing on aspects of your life that are important to you. Like the girl in the story, comprise a collection of notes written directly to the objects, people, or events that matter the most to you. Illustrate your work (use watercolor paints, if possible). Share your epistolary with your class.

**Chris Raschka's Watercolors:**

Chris Raschka is quite famous for his watercolor illustrations. Click [HERE](#) to watch a video of Chris telling a story of a trip to Seattle using watercolor.

- Do you agree with Chris that using watercolor shows every stroke and mistake?
- Discuss how his paintings tell stories of his experiences.
- Describe his painting process. Were you surprised with the techniques or supplies he used? How so?
- Review the illustrations in *Dear Substitute*. Identify how the use of color, shape, size, and background images help to add emotion to the story.



Common Core State Anchor Standards:  
Reading-R.1, R.2, R.3, R.7, R.10. Writing-W.2, W.3, W.4, W.9  
Speaking & Listening-SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, SL.5, SL.6.

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