Teacher's Guide

RAINATELGEMEIERTICIRCLES

From the #1 New York Times Bestselling Author Raina Telgemeier

Smile

From the #1 New York Times Bestselling Author Raina Telgemeier

Sisters

GHOSTS

Teacher's Guide
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Dear Educator,

I have taught all levels in the high school classroom, from very low freshmen to the highest of senior AP. So when I was selected to compose a good deal of the Raina Telgemeier Lending Library Study Guide, I was hesitant and honestly a bit worried about crafting ideas, questions, and projects for a younger target audience.

However, once I dove into stories, I knew that my fears were completely unwarranted. Good stories, regardless of the age-level, spark interesting and unique conversation and discussion. And while I may never teach these books at the high school level, I can process the types of content they may yield because they are human; they come from real emotional places, and if you’ve ever been a kid, you can relate to something that Raina writes about in her graphic novels.

While *Smile* and *Sisters* have greater links to each other than they do to *Ghosts*, the themes of family and hardship travel throughout. When read separately, each one of these books opens up a part of our memory that allows us to travel back to being young; when read together, they open parts of our memory that link together to capture a larger part of our childhood. I’m no longer close to the age of the protagonists in these novels, and if I can still feel what they feel, I know our younger students will have no problem relating.

There are many ways in which you can read a lit circle with your classes. If you only have time for one, you can offer up the books and allow your students choices, and shape assessments accordingly. If you have time for all three, which you might at the speed in which graphic novels can be read, you can rotate the titles within the classroom, allowing the students to create assessments and projects for the books that they have read, helping the next group experience the book(s) as they have.

However you choose to teach these Raina Telgemeier books, know that you are in for some great discussion about family, friends, hardship, and love. Many of our students might have had different paths than Raina, and different experiences throughout life, but at our core, we can all discuss what it means to love and share experiences with those around us.

I’m humbled to be able to help you throughout this journey, and I’m excited to hear about the amazing pathways that you and your students take.

Happy reading!

-Eric Kallenborn
GHOSTS, SISTERS, & SMILE
PLOT SUMMARIES

Ghosts:

Catrina and her family are moving to the coast of Northern California because her little sister, Maya, is sick. Cat isn't happy about leaving her friends for Bahâ–a de la Luna, but Maya has cystic fibrosis and will benefit from the cool, salty air that blows in from the sea. As the girls explore their new home, a neighbor lets them in on a secret: There are ghosts in Bahâ–a de la Luna. Maya is determined to meet one, but Cat wants nothing to do with them. As the time of year when ghosts reunite with their loved ones approaches, Cat must figure out how to put aside her fears for her sister's sake — and her own.

Source: https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/ghosts-teaching-guide/

Smile:

In Smile, Raina just wants to be a normal sixth grader. But one night after Girl Scouts she trips and falls, severely injuring her two front teeth. What follows is a long and frustrating journey with on-again, off-again braces, surgery, headgear, and even a retainer with fake teeth attached. And on top of all that, there's still more to deal with: a major earthquake, boy confusion, and friends who turn out to be not so friendly.

Source: http://www.scholastic.ca/books/view/smilesisters-box-set

Sisters:

In Sisters, Raina can't wait to be a big sister. But once Amara is born, things aren't quite how she expected them to be. Amara is cute, but she's also a cranky, grouchy baby, and mostly prefers to play by herself. Their relationship doesn't improve much over the years. But when a baby brother enters the picture and later, when something doesn't seem right between their parents, they realize they must figure out how to get along. They are sisters, after all.

Source: http://www.scholastic.ca/books/view/smilesisters-box-set
**Bleed** - images that run outside the border of the panel

**Border** - edge or outline of the comic page

**Captions** - contain information about a scene or character

**Colorist** - This person gives the comic color, and add to the weight and vibrancy of the image. The colorist is often responsible for helping set tone and mood via color.

**Dialogue Word Balloons** - contain character dialogue; communication between/among characters

**Emanata** - text or icons that represent what is going on in a character’s head

**Frame** - lines or boxes around a panel(s)

**Graphic weight** - a term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways

**Gutters** - space between panels where the reader infers movement and action between panels

**Panels** - squares or rectangles that contain a single scene

**Penciler** - Primary artist. This person takes the script and draws the comic. They draw the comic in pencil which then gets inked and colored later on.

**Sound Effect** - words that show sound is happening

**Thought Balloons** - contain a character’s thoughts

**Writer** - The writer writes the story and has the overall vision of how the story will go. They write the dialogue and how the story will progress.
Whether you have siblings or not, you can understand just how powerful of a force they can be. For some of us, our siblings determine what we like, who we hang out with, and ultimately, whom we become. And for others, siblings are something we long for, having never experienced the joy or terror of having one ourselves.

During this project, you will come to a better understanding of what it means to be a sibling and what it means to be affected by one.

For this project, you will need to interview three different classmates: one only child, one with only one sibling, and one with multiple siblings.

You will ask the three classmates the same five questions and write/type their answers (but first, answer them yourself):

1.) What does it mean to be a sibling?
2.) How do siblings affect a family as a whole? Why do you think that?
3.) Do parents with more than one child have a favorite? Why do you think that?
4.) What makes siblings argue and fight? Why do you think that?
5.) What is the best and worst part of being a sibling (even if you do not have one, what do you think)?

After you have the answers, look at them, re-read them, spend some time thinking about them, and create a poem based on what you have learned from your classmates. The poem can be whatever shape/structure that your teacher determines.

Feel free to use actual lines from your classmates’ answers!

When your poems are done, take turns reading them to the class. See what similarities and differences come out. As a class, discuss what you have learned.

If poems aren’t your jam, consider creating a Venn Diagram with your results. Compare yours with your classmates, noting similarities and differences.
1. Why do you think Raina Telgemeier wrote an entire graphic novel about her mouth? Is the book about more than that? What do you think?

2. What is the relationship like between Raina and her sister? How do we know?

3. Do you think the title *Smile* is a good one? If you could re-name it, what would you call it?

4. Throughout the book, do you think that Raina's friends are unfair to her? Why or why not?

5. Why does Raina use the jagged lines to break apart the panels on pages 66-67?

6. Some pages like 64 and 74 are only one image. Why do you think Raina did this when creating *Smile*?

7. As a kid, Raina is really worried about being judged by the other kids in her class about her braces and teeth issues. Can you relate to a time where you felt strange or out of place because of something out of your control? What did you do to deal with it?

8. A lot of the panels have very simple backgrounds (p. 105-106, 108-109 e.g.). Why do you think Raina creates them this way?

9. What do you think about the cover? Would you change it if you could?

10. This is an award-winning book. If you had to explain to people why this book has won awards, what would you tell them?

11. In the book, Raina finds herself interested in boys. Do her crushes feel real? How are these situations similar or different than real life?

12. Throughout the book, what do you think Raina wants the most?
1. Do you have any siblings? Do you get along with them? If you do not have siblings, do you wish that you did? Why or why not?

2. Explain the relationship between Raina and her sister.

3. Page 28 contains a very interesting layout. What do you like or not like about this page? How is it different from the rest?

4. How do the sisters annoy each other? Does this seem the way that normal siblings act?

5. Throughout the book, how do the parents react to the sisters’ behavior toward each other?

6. Why does Raina want a little sister? How are things different than she anticipates?

7. How does the trip to visit family differ from past visits that they have had?

8. Have you ever had a friend or family member that has changed since you have known them? How did they change? How did that make you feel?

9. Which sister do you relate to the most? Why?

10. As the creator, how does Raina show the panic of the lost snake (p.151-53)?

11. Anything that follows the story at the back of a comic or graphic novel is called “back matter.” Look at the photo album at the back of the book. Why do you think Raina put that in the back matter?

12. Why does Raina discuss pets so much throughout the book?
1. Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think people are afraid of ghosts?

3. The book opens with the main characters, Cat and Maya, moving to a new city because it helps with Maya’s illness. Compare and contrast how the two sisters handle the move to a new place.

4. Thinking about this move, what does how Cat and Maya handle this change tell us about their personalities?

5. Thinking of your other experience with Telgemeier’s books, why do you think she often writes about the relationships between sisters?

6. One important aspect of Ghosts is the importance of traditions and culture. What are some of your family or cultural traditions? Why are they important to your family or culture?

7. If you had to pinpoint the lesson/lessons that Maya and Cat learn from the ghosts of Bahía de la Luna, what do you think that is? Where in the book do they learn this?

8. Another important topic in Ghosts is death and how we deal with it. How do the ghosts help Cat cope with death? How do they help Maya deal with the possibility of her own death?

9. Throughout the story we see that Cat feels like an outsider in her hometown, and also in her own culture because she didn’t grow up celebrating those traditions. When is a time where you’ve felt out of place or different? How did you deal with that?

10. Have you ever lost someone important to you? How did you deal with that loss? How would you help someone else cope with the loss of someone important to them?

11. Compare Cat and Maya from Ghosts to Raina and Amara from Smile and Sisters. What are some similarities/differences you see between the two older and younger sisters? Their relationships?

12. A common phrase/idea that is woven throughout the book is “just go with it.” Why was this repeated throughout the book? How did each character benefit from this lesson?
BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS
FOR ALL THREE NOVELS

1. How is a graphic novel different from a traditional book (besides one is mostly pictures and one is mostly words)?

2. What is the biggest similarity found in all three books? The biggest differences?

3. Is the art the same in all three books? What is different in the art? What is similar?

4. Which of the three books do you relate to the most? Why?

5. If you were going to make one of these books into a movie, which one would you choose and why?

6. Which page of each book contains your favorite art? Why is that your favorite page?

7. Thinking of your other experience with Telgemeier’s books, why do you think she often writes about the relationships between sisters?

8. The Ghosts cover has a different feel than the other two books. If you were going to change the cover to look more like Sisters and Smile, how would you change it?

9. You have to put ONLY ONE of these three books into a time-capsule to let future generations know about what it’s like to be a kid. Which one do you use? And if none, why?

10. What year of your life would make the best book? Why?

11. While Raina’s drawings are fairly simple, they tell a good story. Explain why simple art can tell a complex story.

12. Read the back of each book. Explain which of the books’ back covers gives us the best idea of the story inside.
There is a lot of humor in the three books, and if we are going to try and write a creative piece based on one or more of the graphic novels, we should try to work on our humor!

This short brainstorming project will help you think creatively and hopefully bring out the funny in you!

The first thing we will need is a topic. Any topic will do, but a topic that relates to your story or idea is better because that way, you will be developing humor that you can use in your story. For example’s sake, let’s keep it simple with a few examples like “Family,” “School,” or “Road Trips.”

We take a topic that you would like to develop, and we plug it into an amazing graphic organizer that was developed by Judy Carter in her book *The Comedy Bible*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weird</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stupid</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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We fill in each box with as many items that we can think of that would be Hard, Weird, Scary, or Stupid about any aspect of “School” that we think up. At this point, we are not trying to be funny, we are just trying to be honest, and we are trying to get down as many ideas as possible! Let’s see what we can come up with:

Topic: School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard</th>
<th>Weird</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Homework</td>
<td>-Some teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Riding the bus</td>
<td>-School lunches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Waking up</td>
<td>-Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Listening to teachers</td>
<td>-Health class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Tons of reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Being yourself</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scary</th>
<th>Stupid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Asking someone out</td>
<td>-Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-The Principal</td>
<td>-Making posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-School lunches</td>
<td>-Group projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Riding the bus</td>
<td>-Parents picking you up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Bullies</td>
<td>-All school announcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-School dances</td>
<td>-Class pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Getting sick</td>
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That’s a pretty good start! Now, we can take one of the items on the list and use the graphic organizer to work that idea out further. Watch! And remember, we are not trying to be funny, just honest...

Topic: Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard</th>
<th>Weird</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-They can be loud</td>
<td>-What they think is cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-They can be mean</td>
<td>-That they are friends with other teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-They might find it hard to relate to students</td>
<td>-What they eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-When do they go to the bathroom?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scary</th>
<th>Stupid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Bad breath</td>
<td>-Their outfits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-They can be mean</td>
<td>-They try to be cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Substitutes</td>
<td>-When they date each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-When they assign lots of homework</td>
<td>-Their coffee mugs</td>
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</table>

See! When we just did a brainstorm about “Teachers,” we got a lot more specific, and many of these ideas could make great concepts or jokes. Maybe the teacher in the story has terrible breath, and the kids almost pass out because of it, and he/she only drinks from an old mug that did say “Number One Teacher,” but it’s so old it just says “Number Te ch,” and all of the students have inside jokes about “Number Tech the English teacher!,” a very lame superhero.
PROJECT IDEA #1: HUMOR WRITING

Use the blank form provided to develop a few ideas of your own! Remember, be honest; don’t try to be funny, but have fun! Share your concepts and ideas with others to work on them. Having a comedy buddy is essential!

Topic:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Hard</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scary</th>
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Notes on which of these concepts would make good joke ideas: __________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________
**Characterization:** This activity is perfect for introducing or assessing characterization! Have each group identify the main or major character(s) in their books. Have them determine all they can about the characters based on the following criteria:

1. How they look
2. What they do
3. Their environment
4. What they say
5. What others say about them

Then you can have them complete a handout with specific assumptions they make about the character(s) and compare them to the other groups. Look for similarities and differences. Is there a style that Raina seems to employ across all the books? How does the Raina character change from *Smile* to *Sisters* for example. Is Catrina somehow like Raina?

**Hero’s Journey:** Have students look at the “hero’s journey” across their specific novel.

**Themes:** Have the teams mix up and put a one representative from each book into three person teams. Have them explain the nature of their novel including plot, character, and motifs. Do the novels share any thematic elements? Each smaller group should create a posterboard or digital presentation that explains their findings.

**Dream Cast Project:** Have each team cast the movie version of their book (I wonder why they aren't already movies) and create a movie poster for the book including the stars they have chosen. Alternately, students could actually film a small section of the book and post it on Youtube. I think that the low tech special effects could be cool!

**Silent Socratic Seminar:** Silent Socratic Seminar: after the students read the three books, select 3-6 of the “Big Picture Questions,” depending how many kids are in the class and the size of the groups that you would like. Write one question on the center of a large sheet of poster paper/board and place it in the middle of a table or group of desks. Have the first group of students write an answer to each question on the paper. After 5-8 minutes, have the students rotate stations and at each station they have to respond to the question on the paper and also to one of the comments that a student has made on the paper.

To differentiate the groups, have each group use a different color marker. When you are done, put the posters up around the room, have the students read all of the posters, and have them help you select a group that did the best job responding! Reward that group with treats.

**Essay Writing:** *Smile* is how we fit into our current world at large, while *Sisters* is about how we fit into our smaller world, and *Ghosts* is about fitting into a bigger world as we grow up. Have the students write an essay in which they discuss the ideas of interconnectedness. How do our worlds collide and inter-mingle? What does it mean to be a part of multiple worlds?

**Mini-Comic Project:** Select a moment in your life that is thematically similar to one that is experienced in one of the three books. With help from the teacher, create a 3-4 page comic book script, planning out exactly how you would want your comic to look.

**Mapmaking:** What trip would you like to take? Plot out your journey and anticipate the trials and tribulations you would experience with your crazy family in a 2-3 page story.

**Fan Fiction:** Select a unique character from each of the three books and write a short story in which they interact with each other. What would they do? What would they say? Would they get along?
**PAIRING SUGGESTIONS**

**Diary of a Wimpy Kid (Books and Film)**
This series tell the adventures of Greg Heffley, a kid growing up, dealing with many of the same school and home issues that we are exposed to as readers through Raina’s books. With over ten books in the Wimpy universe, it’s probable that the readers of *Smile*, *Sisters*, and *Ghosts* have some exposure to the series, even if it’s just though the films. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a natural companion piece to the Raina books primarily because they tell the boy’s perspective of growing up with difficulty.

**Ms. Marvel (Comic/Graphic Novel Series)**
Tossed into the world of superhero greatness, Marvel’s *Ms. Marvel*, written by G. Willow Wilson, has to come to terms with being a teenage girl with the responsibilities of the world on her shoulders. She has to save the city, pass high school, and navigate her crazy demanding family. While our protagonists in the Raina books do not have to worry about saving the world, readers can find lot of similarities when discussing character motivations and drive.

**Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events (Book Series)**
This unique book series tells the tale of the Baudelaire children, orphans, sent to live with their greedy uncle after the unfortunate demise of their parents. The children have to band together in their quest for mental and physical survival. The sibling relationships found in this series can easily be paired with the familiar relationships that are found in *Smile*, *Sisters*, and *Ghosts*.

**Matilda (Book and Film)**
The classic story, *Matilda*, by Roald Dahl seems to be a perfect fit for the Raina books if you are looking to find a character that works as the yin to Raina’s yang. In a way, Matilda is the opposite of Raina’s protagonists: popular, confident, and without a real family. Reading these tales side by side explores the many sides of the world that we can be born into.

**Sunny Side Up and Swing It, Sunny (Graphic Novels)**
Jennifer and Matthew Holm deliver a tale of familial love, destruction, and redemption in these two books. Sunny, our protagonist, deals with many of the same issues that Raina’s protagonists do, and seeing as they are all about the same age, it makes sense that these books would pair nicely. They would make for a nice compare/contrast essay or just an extension of thematic exploration.
Raina Telgemeier Discusses Her Novels at Book Expo America 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lasrXaMa7k


Cool FAQ Page From Raina’s Website – Find Out Lots About of Unknowns About Our Author: http://goraina.com/about/


Cool Graphic Novel Reading Guides from Raina’s Website: http://goraina.com/reading-guides/

Here is a Collection of Family Friendly Poems about Sisterhood: https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poems/family/sister/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR
Eric Kallenborn