

## CLASSROOM GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY *CLASS PICTURES*

James Whitcomb Riley School is closing, and students who have been together for years will be going their separate ways. In a series of poems, one keen observer offers thoughtful reflections about her classmates in Mr. Beck's homeroom.

### Discussion Questions

Why do you think there are no faces shown either on the cover of the book or in the illustrations?

Larka and the narrator are best friends, and the poem about Larka tells you why. Based on the interests of the students in *Class Pictures*, who might be your best friend? Why did you choose that person?

Who is the narrator of the book? Why do you think the author decided not to give her a name?

We know a little bit about the narrator from the description in the poem, "me." Based on the observations of her classmates, what kind of person do you think the narrator is? Is she someone you would like to know? Be friends with? Why or why not?

The poems in *Class Pictures* exemplify, in particular, these attributes of writing: *voice* and use of *details*. The author of the book wrote the poems, creating a narrator who is telling readers about her classmates. Discuss the narrator's voice—in what ways is it recognizable? How would the poems be different if another student were the narrator (e.g., Jack or Tiffani)? Encourage students to locate specific details in poems that help readers develop a visual image of the narrator's classmates.

### Activities for *Class Pictures*

Students can:

- Make a poster about one of the students in *Class Pictures*.
- Illustrate one of the poems that does not have an illustration.
- Interview a classmate. As a whole group, devise a simple questionnaire and use it as the interview tool.
- Using the information from the interview, write a biography of a classmate...in the form of a book or a poem.
- Search magazines, catalogs, newspaper ads, etc., for faces. Based on the information in the poems, match faces to individual students.
- Make a computer Memory Book using Gita's idea. Collaborate with the technology teacher on this project. Students will design their own pages. Discuss how they might want to represent themselves. Possibilities for individual pages include focus on families, talents, interests, culture, and other ideas students might have. As a class, brainstorm items that might be included on the page, e.g., photographs, original drawings, quotes, lettering, etc. Remind students that space is limited and they will need to be selective

and choose items that reflect the focus of their pages. In order to help students organize their ideas, have them make a rough sketch of their page before they begin work on the computer. (The sketch is a preliminary plan—they can alter it as they construct the page.)

- As a class, decide on a service project and select a leader (e.g., Trang). Discuss how the project will be organized, including goals, the different responsibilities involved, advertising, and record-keeping.
- Research the history of their school. Collaborate with the school librarian in locating resources. Make a plan for sharing the results with the rest of the school.
- Research information about the poet James Whitcomb Riley, the school's namesake. In the last poem, there is a line from one of his most famous poems. Have students locate the full text of this poem. They can also view the [painting of Riley](#) by John Singer Sargent that is mentioned in the last poem.
- Focus on individual students from *Class Pictures*.  
For example:
  - Think of some new cupcake ideas for Quinnie, including the flavor of the cupcake and the "surprise" inside.
  - Make a list of favorite books to recommend to Candace.
  - (Ben likes soccer; Jack likes basketball) Students can write about their favorite sport and tell why they enjoy it.
  - (Shelby is obsessed with cats) Students can make a poster featuring their obsession.
  - It appears that Howie may be shifting his interest to snakes, how can he share that interest at school in the classroom?
  - Dovie told many stories. Invite students to share some of their favorite school stories that they might tell a new student.
- Read the poems about some of the [teachers](#) in *Class Pictures*.