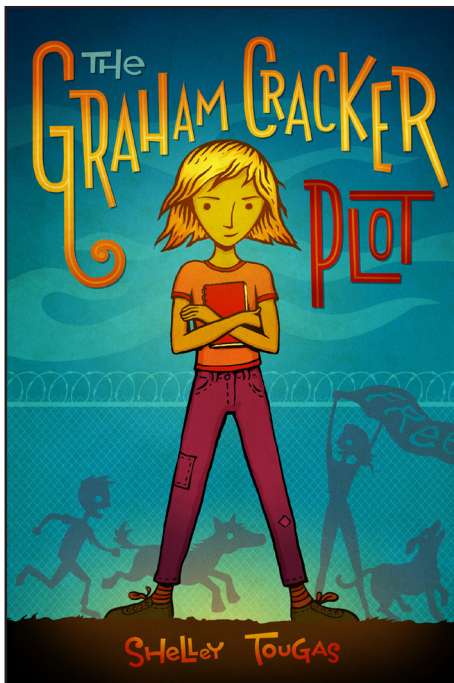


A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS

The GRAHAM CRACKER PLOT



Ages: 8–12
Grades: 3–7
9781596439887 • \$16.99

ABOUT THE BOOK

Daisy and her (sometimes) best friend Graham have a fail-safe plan for breaking Daisy's dad out of prison and escaping to Canada. All they need is a miniature horse, a getaway truck, and a penny from 1919. But that was before the rainstorm, the smelly dog, and the falling refrigerator. And that was just the beginning of the trouble.

In this funny, nail-biter of a novel, Shelley Tougas balances humor with a heartfelt story of friendship, family, admitting you're wrong, and unconditional love against all odds.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SHELLEY TOUGAS is an award-winning writer of nonfiction for children, including *Little Rock Girl 1957: How a Photograph Changed the Fight for Integration*. *The Graham Cracker Plot* is her first work of fiction. She lives in Hudson, Wisconsin.

To attain specific Common Core grade level standard for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!



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PRE-READING ACTIVITY: What Do You Think?

Before reading *The Graham Cracker Plot* have students mark their opinion of the following statements below. Then, place posters around the four corners of your room that correspond with the rankings and discuss the answers as a class, allowing kids to move between their answers.

| Statement: | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | WHY I think this: |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|-------------------|
| Sometimes kids are more responsible than the adults around them. | | | | | |
| Friendships can be complicated. | | | | | |
| Some choices we make are crossroads and can't be completely undone. | | | | | |
| Parents can disappoint kids, too. | | | | | |
| The hardest part about being wrong is saying you're sorry. | | | | | |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part One

1. After reading the first letter to Judge Henry create a list of ten questions and ten facts about Daisy. Put a star next to the three that you think will be most important to the story.
2. Describe the Chemist, especially his unique qualities.
3. Explain how Daisy's mom and grandma get along (or not). Why does Daisy have to be careful about what she says?
4. Why does Daisy believe her grandmother wanted her to bust her dad, the Chemist, out of the prison? What happened that made her suddenly want to do this crazy thing? Why is the Chemist in prison according to Daisy?
5. Do you believe in the magic of an idea coin? What is special about Graham's? What happens when Daisy uses it for the first time?



Part Two

1. Describe where Daisy and Graham live. How are their home lives similar? How are they different? What made them become friends in the first place? Is Graham's mom a good babysitter or not? Why?
2. Why do they end up inside a stranger's house instead of at the prison? Make a list of everything they do there that could get them in trouble. Then, rank those actions by the amount of trouble they could get into, starting with worst. Put a star next to the one that would get you in the most trouble.
3. After an argument, Daisy says, "When you asked me if I had any shame, I tell you, cross my heart and hope to die, my shame then and there almost burst my body into flames." (p. 132) What made her feel like this? Have you ever felt like this because of the way you treated someone?
4. Graham forces Daisy to listen to the voicemail on his phone. Why? What are the pros and cons for going back and forward at this point in the story. Why can't Daisy bring herself to give up on this idea?
5. How do they revise the plan with the new set of circumstances? How are they planning to distract the guards?

Part Three

1. What happened to their escape car? How do they try to solve the problem? In the end, what do they use instead?
2. What is a crossroad? Do you know if a decision is a crossroad *as* you make it or only after it's over? Which of the decisions they make are a crossroad for Daisy and Graham?
3. Outline the plan to bust out the Chemist step-by-step. Then, discuss in pairs what's most likely to happen. After reading this section, list what actually happened instead.
4. How does Daisy try to save the plan when it is completely falling apart? How does her dad react? What does the guard think about her plan?
5. What's Aaron's definition of misleading? Do you agree with him? Should Daisy have been told the truth about her father from the beginning? What might have been different if she had known?

The Final Part

1. Why was eating with the Gunderson's the most difficult part of the day? Think about the way each of them answered for what they are grateful for. What does it tell us about their character (or what type of person they are)?
2. When Daisy can see her dad for fifteen minutes how does it go? Would you hug him? Write him? Forgive him if he was your dad?
3. How is the judge deciding about Daisy in the same way she must decide about her own dad? How *do* you know if someone really regrets a mistake?
4. How are things patched up between Daisy and Graham? How does he finally apologize? Why is it so hard to apologize to people who are important to us? Why does Daisy's mom tell her to handle her friendship and tell the judge what he needs to hear?
5. Predict fifteen years into the future. What will Daisy become as an adult? Do you think she'll be successful or not? What about Graham?

CCSS: SL.5.1.A, SL.5.1.C



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INFERENCES: Reading Between the Lines

Sometimes a reader is told exactly what to think in a scene. For example, in *The Graham Cracker Plot* we're told that the Idea Coin has magical powers. Sometimes, though, readers have to make an inference. This is when a reader isn't *told* exactly what to think but they have to figure it out by reading closely and looking for clues. Split the class into groups and review the scenes outlined below. What can you infer from each scene? What is the clue or piece of evidence from the story that makes you think that? The first two examples are done for you. Expand the activity by selecting other scenes from the text to examine.

| Scene: | An inference that can be made: | Clue and evidence that make me believe this to be true: |
|---|---|--|
| When Graham is questioning his mom about whether she got fired or not. | Graham sounds more like a parent than a kid sometimes. He has grown-up worries. | "She called in sick three times last week so she could hang out with that guy she met" (p.60) "You are not the parent, Graham! I'm the parent." (p. 69) |
| Ashley is more upset by the storm than Graham and Daisy. | Ashley thinks like a child rather than an adult. | "I'm cold. I'm hungry. I need a blanket." (p. 111) "It's not okay. I need hair . . . My suitcase has my hair." (p. 113) |
| Daisy finds money (two \$20 bills) and a scrap note next to the toaster. | | |
| The Chemist does not get into the escape truck. | | |
| From the beginning of the novel, Daisy is writing a letter to a judge to prove she's cooperating. | | |

CCSS: RL.1; SL.5.1.A, SL.5.1.C



CHARACTERS: Watch Them Change!

As a group compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events from *The Graham Cracker Plot*, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

After reading the novel fill out the following chart and then use it to springboard discussion in class about character.

| Characters: | Describe the characters before the Graham Cracker Plot begins: | Describe them again <i>after</i> the story is over. How have they changed? |
|-------------|--|--|
| Daisy | | |
| Graham | | |
| Ashley | | |

Follow-up Questions

- Which character is most changed by the events in the story? What makes a character interesting to a reader?
- Compare the actions/choices of Daisy and Graham in the story. How would you describe them both?

CCSS: RL.5.3; SL.5.1.A, SL.5.1.C

POINT OF VIEW: The Character Who Tells the Story

Ask your friend what happened at the game or a dance and you'll get one story. Ask another and it could be a totally different version of the exact same event. Authors do this, too, when we have a narrator of a story. In *The Graham Cracker Plot* the story is told through Daisy's eyes. Using the scene in PART TWO, when the characters are in the Gunderson's house, ask students to think about how this scene would be described if it was told through these other character's eyes.

| Graham: | Ashley: | The teen who shows up: | Honey (the horse) or Fred (the dog): |
|---------|---------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | |



Follow-up Question

- Would we feel differently about what happened in the house if we'd read it through one of these other character's eyes? How would it change the story?

CCSS: RL 6; SL.5.1.A, SL.5.1.C

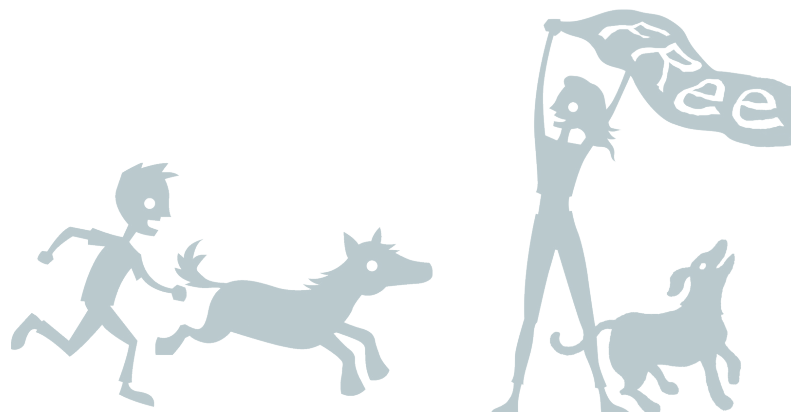
NARRATIVE WRITING: How To Tell a Story

Daisy writes about her amazing adventure in a series of letters to Judge Henry. Ask each student to write about an important time in their own life in a series of letters to someone important to them.

Pre-writing:

Ask students to brainstorm possible ideas to write about that are important based on these categories:

| Topics: | Specific ideas you could write about: |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Holiday memories | |
| Pets | |
| Grandparents | |
| A trip to a park, museum, or event | |
| Favorite place to go | |
| Mistakes or bad decisions | |



Have students circle the idea above that seems most exciting to them then ask them to brainstorm the details before they write their first letter using the questions below.

| | |
|--|--|
| WHO is in this story? | |
| WHAT is the most important moment? | |
| WHEN did it happen? (Season, time of day, how old you were) | |
| WHERE did it happen? (outside/inside, describe the place) | |
| WHY is this important to write about? | |
| HOW did it change you? | |

For the second letter ask students to focus on the details of an important PLACE using the chart below as a guide.

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Senses: | Details: |
| Things you can SEE | |
| Things you can HEAR | |
| Anything you can SMELL | |
| If you TASTE anything | |
| How things FEEL | |

In the third letter ask students to write about an important event and bring it to life in their writing. Before they start writing ask students to brainstorm the sequence of the events using the chart below as a guide.

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| In the beginning . . . | Then . . . | In the end . . . |
| | | |