

Ready, Steady, School!

Teaching Notes created by Martin Galway

Synopsis

Follow gender-neutral gnome Pom on a fascinating adventure around different animal schools – see rabbits learning how to read, frogs creating beautiful artwork and foxes playing sports! But where will Pom decide to go to school next year? Could Pom’s school be a mix of all of that?

About the author and illustrator








Marianne Dubuc is an award-winning illustrator and writer of books for children of all ages. She studied Graphic Design at the University of Québec, Montréal and has been published in more than 25 countries. In 2014, Marianne won the Governor General Award for outstanding illustrations in *Le Lion et l'oiseau (The Lion and the Bird)* and in 2018 for *Le chemin de la montagne (Up the Mountain)*, which are both published by Book Island. In 2020, she received the prestigious Vicky Metcalf award for her entire oeuvre.

***Ready, Steady, School* is a book rich with detail that children will enjoy exploring time and time again. Allowing time to explore the illustrations is very important.**

The central character, Pom, is presented in gender-neutral terms which opens up the ways by which young readers might relate to, or identify with, or comment on the experiences shared in the book. Young readers may well default to a particular interpretation or form of character labelling as they discuss the book. This may provide further scope for discussion about how characters are perceived and the assumptions/inferences we make when we enjoy a book.

The following notes provide some suggestions to support you and your children to more fully explore and enjoy the book.

	<p>Warming up with the cover and title page</p> <p>Talk about what the children can see and extend through discussion. <i>How many animals can the children name? What different activities can you see the characters doing? Which would they most like to join in with?</i> This is an opportunity to discuss important social and emotional topics about the importance of sharing and joining in, of helping each other, of being good company, and of having time alone and to be left alone. <i>Does anyone in the picture look like they are enjoying time alone? What are they doing (for example walking and looking at nature around them; reading in the library, riding a scooter)? Who is playing together and having a good time? What are they doing? Who is learning? What do you think they might be learning about?</i></p>
	<p>Introduce the main character, Pom. Explain that we are going to be visiting the different schools that the animals attend with Pom. Explain that Pom is so excited to go to school but has to wait a whole year! You may wish to use relatable events to clarify that for someone as young as Pom, a year is a long time. We celebrate our birthdays every year. <i>How old are you? You are X years old.</i></p>
	<p>You may wish to introduce the video of Marianne Dubuc speaking about the book. Across each spread, there are particular elements to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● a character that is visiting the page (for example Goldilocks at the bears' school) ● a character dropping something ● a character sleeping (note that at the school for sloths there is a lot of sleeping) <p>Use these challenges to encourage attention and noticing across the book-sharing.</p>
	<p>Throughout, you may wish to link Pom's adventure, and the events in each school to the time of day. Each school has a clock on the wall, and the routines mimic a fairly typical school (or in the case of the sleepy times at sloth school, a day nursery). Events could be plotted on a timeline, or in note form to support an end of day recount from Pom's point of view. Support children to see the ways in which the day is organised - arrival/lessons/lunch/end of day tidying/collection.</p>

	<p>Share the title page. Read the title expressively. Point to each word in turn and use to reinforce the concept of a word, and that each word carries meaning. Read together expressively. <i>How shall we say this?</i> Read in a flat voice. <i>Does that sound right? No, it's more like a start of a race, or when we are wanting to start something but we have to wait a bit. Then we are ready - so we say Ready, steady....</i> Experiment with drawing the phrase out. Discuss activities the children want to do and ask them to imagine waiting. Explain that just before we are about to do the thing we are excited about, we might say, "Ready, steady, go!" This will help the children to appreciate the feeling that Pom has of wanting to go to school but having to wait. Use this understanding to celebrate that Pom does get to go and look at all of her friends enjoying school and that this makes Pom very happy across the book. <i>Can the children think of a time when they enjoyed watching others do something that makes them happy?</i></p> <p>You may wish to consider the smaller number of animals making their way to school. Discuss what might lie ahead for these animals during a school day. Encourage creative responses based on what is known about the animals. You may wish to have a brief conversation about some safety risks on these journeys. <i>Can the children spot some of the behaviours that might lead to an accident?</i> Use as an opportunity to write brief imperative statements in the form of singular rules: Look where you are going when you are riding on your bike! Do not sleep walk to school! Allow children to illustrate these statements. These statements may be made into Health and Safety posters together with children's illustrations.</p>
	<p>Pom's departure for a tour of schools</p> <p>As with all the spreads as they are shared, read and explore- allow plenty of time for noticing – and encourage children to revisit in order to further explore all of the details in the book.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find and highlight the italicised letters <i>"These letters are leaning to tell us that they are different to the rest of the story. Here they are showing us that these are the words that wolf is reading. Let's listen to those again...[Re-read expressively] What sort of story is he reading? What do you think might happen in this story?"</i> • <i>Why is Pom so excited? If you were going to school, who would you choose to walk with first? Why? What would you talk about?</i> • Role-play finding out about the chosen character's school: What it is like there? What is happening? What is being learned? Record these predictions and once the school has been visited, carry out the same role-play but with the child explaining what it is like to be at the school drawing upon what they have learned from the spread.

- Creative challenge: children may want to imagine what the inside of Pom’s house looks like and draw pictures in the style of the book illustrating a room/some rooms in Pom’s home.








Nibbles and Scribbles - school for mice



- *What objects can children find and name? What is especially interesting to them? Have children noticed how household items have been used by the mice to create much of the school’s furniture and equipment? Celebrate this ingenuity. What else do the children notice? Label the rooms according to what is going on within them. Consider making a model of classroom for mice using a shoebox or similar, and various household items.*
- Play counting games. Many of the students are grouped into 2s and 3s. *Can children identify and sort them?* Perhaps a photocopy of the spread could be used to identify these different groups, for example circling groups of two in one colour and groups of three in another.
- Read aloud the paragraph beginning ‘Behind a garden wall...’ Linger on the phrases: ‘Ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling! Time to go in!’ Enjoy the rhyme (ting and ling) and the near rhyme (ling and in) and use these to briefly explore expressive reading of a sing-song nature. Take pleasure in how the words feel and how they give a positive feel to the start of the day. Write the phrases out and point to each word as they are read to encourage awareness of individual words linking to spoken words. Use the term “word” “space” and rhyme” to support this part of reading. Explore other words that rhyme with “ting” (wing, sing, ping, thing, Bing, king, zing). Provide a simple definition of the words that are new or unfamiliar. Now share a special word that rhymes: ring. *The mice ring the bell and it makes the sound ting-a-ling. Doesn’t that sound like a bell? What a good choice of words to help us hear the bell.*
- Begin a table that will support the children to record their favourite things about each school as a way of noting what Pom might notice and that they will look forward to doing when they start school. Note: children might offer “mouses” for column 2. Depending on the stage of learning for the children, this may be an opportunity to reinforce learning around plural words, or, for younger children it might simply offer a discrete opportunity to explore the two terms: mouse and mice.



It may look like this:


Name of school	Who attends this school	Things to look forward to
Nibbles and Scribbles	Mice	Ringing the school bell
Little Leapers		

	<p>Little Leapers – school for rabbits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having visited two schools, you may wish to discuss why the school names have been chosen. ● <i>Can children name the vegetables growing on the roof?</i> This is a chance to explore the conditions plants need to grow, depending on stage of learning, links may be made to learning in science/topic/outdoor learning ● Allow children to enjoy exploring the tunnels and follow passageways/ladders etc. Speculate where the tunnel at the bottom right of the page leads. <i>What other rooms might the rabbits have created underground?</i> As you speculate, use tentative language to make clear that we do not know for sure, but we can enjoy wondering: perhaps, maybe, it might..., possibly. ● Enjoying counting rabbits - especially the bunnies arranged into pairs for the school trip. ● Complete the next row of the table ● Complete the next row of the table.
	<p>Bulrushes – school for frogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share an image of an actual bulrush. Support children to describe it in terms of its appearance, and how they imagine it would feel to touch. If possible, provide opportunities for children to feel a bulrush for themselves. ● Explore the difference between the words frog and froglet. What might be the difference between a frog and a froglet? Explore the lifecycle of a frog. ● Explore each lily pad. <i>What activity would children most likely to join in with?</i> ● As with previous opportunities to share in expressive reading, linger on the singing lesson. Model the reading of the song’s lyrics, exploring options for how it might be sung. Encourage children to join in, and enjoy the use of ‘Tra-la-la’ and the associated rhymes. <i>Can children compose another verse of this song?</i> They might keep or change the ‘Tra-la-la’ refrain (for example a simple change along the lines of ‘Sha-la-la’ or a more distinct alternative such as ‘Tree-lee-lee’). Explore which sounds have been changed in terms of sounds and whether they are at the beginning of end of the word. <i>Can children think of the things that frogs do and use this knowledge to extend the song?</i>
	<p>F is for Foxtrot – school for foxes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore and name each activity. Ask children to share what they know about each sport. <i>Do they know any famous sportspeople that practice that particular sport?</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarify the name and nature of each activity and consider the benefits/appeal of each. <i>Which would the children most like to do?</i> Take a vote and consider accommodating this into a special PE lesson or a home exercise session using a video shared by a professional coach. ● Encourage children to discriminate between different teams (e.g. green shorts versus blue shorts in the basketball lesson). Count the team members. <i>Are the teams fairly balanced in terms of numbers?</i> Now consider who is doing what. <i>Are all team members taking part?</i> ● Arrange activities from favourite to least favourite and encourage children to extend their answers using the word 'because'. ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>The Honeypot – school for bears</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Referring to any timeline/table of the day's events, consider what has happened up until now. Discuss why it is important to take a nice long break and enjoy some lunch. Check the time on the clock and relate to own routines. Briefly discuss in relation to that day's lunch - if it has happened, reflect on what the children did and the food that they enjoyed; if it is yet to happen consider how much time has to pass before lunch: <i>what will happen between now and lunch? What are children looking forward to about lunch?</i> ● Remind children that each lesson has had a visitor that is the odd-one-out. <i>Can they spot the visitor to The Honeypot who is enjoying some lunch with some friends?</i> Relate the child on the right with the yellow hair to the story of Goldilocks. Discuss what children know of the story. If they are not familiar with it, make a note to share the story at a suitable time. ● Consider what makes for a good lunchtime experience. While rules play a part here, focus on the social aspects of lunchtime (and perhaps the ways by which things can sometimes go wrong). Agree some "Tips for a happy and healthy lunch break". ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Snooze Shack – school for sloths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow children time to explore the double page spread. <i>Are children already aware of this type of animal?</i> Explore its name and support children to pronounce it (the initial adjacent consonants might be tricky for some). Draw the word out to support this work - <i>"Let's say the name in the way that a sleepy sloth might... can we make it sound almost like we are yawning... sssslllloth..."</i> ● Watch videos/look at pictures of sloths in their habitats and share information about these very laid-back animals. Encourage children to act out being a sloth. <i>Would it be nice to live like a sloth? Why? Why not?</i> ● <i>Can children find the guest character in this spread?</i> Relate the picture of a sleeping child wearing a crown to other stories that we know (The Princess and the Pea and Sleeping Beauty). Make a note to share these stories if they are unfamiliar to children. You may wish to consider alternative versions of those stories (e.g. Mini Grey's The Princess and the Pea). Making links between the

	<p>previous spread and this, challenge children to justify why Goldilocks might also like to visit here (in the story Goldilocks slept in the bears' beds; there were three bears and there are three beds on this sleeping platform).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the picture to support development of descriptive language: <i>Which sloth is most comfortable? Most sleepy? Most relaxed?</i> ● Compose lullabies to help sloths get to sleep. Focus on soft, sibilant sounds: sleepy, slumbering, snoozy sloths. What about composing songs that help wake up sloths? For a powerful contrast, compose suitable songs to wake the sloths up. It will need to be very lively as sloths love to sleep. ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Tree Tops – school for squirrels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is a very busy picture. Allow plenty of time for exploration. If possible, link to woodland walks/forest school. Draw upon children's likely experience of seeing squirrels in their environments. <i>How do they move? What do they do? How do they appear?</i> ● Consider the ways by which the squirrels undertake activities that children are likely to experience at school. <i>What activities would children most like to do?</i> Follow up by making plans for outdoors work/nature trails/exploring nature websites. ● Use found objects from nature to explore their properties and/ to make art e.g. collage. wax rubbings, or still life drawing. ● Note that some squirrels are "flying". <i>Is this something that children have seen? Can squirrels fly?</i> Explore different types of squirrels around the world and address this point of enquiry. ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Once Upon a Time – school for wolves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss the name of the school once children have explored the illustration. <i>Why is the school called Once Upon a Time?</i> Discuss the phrase and consider how it is used to open many traditional tales. Briefly explore the meaning of the phrase, and how it tells us that we are about to hear a story that happened a long time ago, but that we do not know exactly when. Explore other story openings, perhaps drawing upon a library visit. ● Discussion around this room should lead to some rich insights around reading identities and the importance of reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>What is your favourite book?</i> ○ <i>When do you like to read/be read to?</i> ○ <i>What stories can you remember?</i> ○ <i>Why do we read/share stories?</i> ○ <i>If you were going to write a book, what would it be about?</i> (Take notes here as this may support later shared writing sessions; consider some book-making sessions based on 'stories for the wolves at Once Upon a Time')

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arrange to visit a library! ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Slowcoach – school for tortoises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read the introduction to the school tortoises. Discuss why the name Slowcoach particularly suits the pupils at this school. <i>Can the children mimic the movements of a tortoise?</i> Consider what other things- alive and not alive - move slowly. <i>What does slow feel like?</i> Generate ideas that can be recorded and possibly turned into a list poem. You may wish to share the poem <i>Slowly</i> by James Reeves to complement this. ● Compare this spread with that of Treetops school. <i>Can children identify differences in terms of the range and nature of activity? Does one feel busier than the other does?</i> Discuss why it is important to clean up and go beyond simply this being the ‘right thing to do’; consider how tidy and organising will help to set the scene for another enjoyable day of school the next day. It might help children to appreciate this more fully by discussing their feelings when they have found it difficult to find a particular item that they needed, or wanted to play with. ● Discuss the range of responsibilities/jobs that the tortoises undertake: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Which would you most/least like to do?</i> ○ <i>Which would you do best?</i> <p>This thinking might support the creation of a poster setting out the jobs that characters at another school need to do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Bristle Britches – school for hedgehogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore the school’s name. <i>What do the children notice about the two words? Do they identify the shared initial sounds?</i> Practice blending the sounds orally by pretending to be cold, and shivering and first saying “Brrrr” and then moving on to say ‘Brrrristle Brrritches...Bristle Britches. <i>Do children recognise the shared third sound (the vowel)?</i> Clarify the meaning of bristle (perhaps using a hairbrush) and britches and establish why this is another good name for the school. Review the growing table that has been used to record observations for each school. <i>Do all the names suit the animal students? Which is your favourite name? Can children invent a related name for a teacher for each school (e.g. Mr Hardshell for the tortoise school)?</i> ● Read and share the page. Establish that the school day has come to its end and so the children are being collected from school. This is a good time for a parting chat with your friends. It is a good time for parents to say hello to each other. It is also a good time to share what has happened at school that day. <i>What do you think the characters are saying to each other?</i> Pick another school and think what sorts of conversations the young animals would be having with their carers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As with all spreads, allow time for the children to explore the page and pore over the many details. <i>Have the children noticed the distressed hedgehog that has rolled itself into a protective ball?</i> Discuss why this is an effective way by which real hedgehogs protect themselves in the real world. <i>What might have caused this hedgehog to curl up into a prickly ball?</i> Role-play a discussion that begins with the printed question “Are you okay?” and explores ways by which to make the hedgehog feel better and ready to go home. ● Before moving onto the final spread - ask the children to reflect on the book so far. Children might pick a favourite school and then prepare a short series of statements of things that they would share as they travelled home with their parent/carer. Now remind children that Pom has been visiting all the different schools across the day. <i>What will Pom share with their parent after school?</i> ● Complete the next row of the table
	<p>Pom's sharing page</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read and explore Pom's account of the day. Consider the ways by which Pom has turned what was seen into a list of things to look forward to when the time comes to go to school next year. <i>Which of these things would the children look forward to? Are there any other activities that Pom has not mentioned, but that the children are looking forward to?</i> ● Children may wish to use a similar format of drawing pictures in speech bubbles to create their own sharing page of what they are looking forward to at school, or to review what they now love doing at school. ● Momo says that school 'is going to be a terrific adventure' for Pom. Imagine Pom has now started school. <i>Can children think of questions that they might ask Pom after the first day at school? Can children imagine what Pom will say in response?</i>