



Grades 4 – 7; Ages 8 – 12

My Art, My World
by Rita Winkler

Teacher's Guide
by Helen Wolfe

ISBN: 9781772602142

Second Story Press
www.secondstorypress.ca

A: Book Summary

My Art, My World is a picture book by Rita Winkler, a woman living with Down syndrome. The book is filled with many examples of Rita's original artwork, which depicts the activities in her busy life.

Rita deals with the daily challenges of being a person with Down syndrome with the same humour, patience, and optimism reflected in her art. She works at a coffee shop, takes art, dance, and yoga classes, is studying sign language, participates in a day program for adults with developmental disabilities, and spends time with family and friends.

This book introduces young children to people with Down syndrome. Children and adults with Down syndrome have unique physical and developmental differences. Through Rita's own voice and art, this book can serve as an introduction for students to learn and become familiar with people with developmental disabilities. After reading the book, your students will understand the similarities between their lives and experiences to those of people with Down syndrome. *My Art, My World* is appropriate for students from six to nine years old, either as independent reading or as part of their classroom curriculum.

It is possible that students with Down syndrome are also attending your school or classroom. Therefore, having your students read *My Art, My World* would facilitate welcoming schoolmates and classmates with Down syndrome into their lives.

Pre-reading Activities

Activity 1: Being an Artist Like Rita

This is an exercise geared to having students depict themselves accurately by drawing or painting self-portraits. Your expectations and the results will vary depending upon the age and skill level of your students. If possible, tell them to stand or sit near full-length mirrors in any way that they feel comfortable, and to look at themselves as they are drawing or painting. Ask them to draw themselves from head to foot with as much detail as possible, to include facial expressions, and to show their arms and hands.

Activity 2: We Are All Different

The purpose of this activity is to introduce and reinforce the concept that even though your students are roughly the same age, they all have significant differences.

Once they've had enough time to finish their self-portraits, put the students in pairs. Try to organize pairs who are physically different from each other in many ways: ethnicity, height, body type, eye colour, hair colour, and other variables. Using their artwork, have the students ask and answer these questions about each other.

1. How are we both the same?
2. How are our hair, height, eyes, faces, and skin colours different from each other?
3. Do we smile the same? How are our smiles different?
4. Do we stand the same way? How do we stand differently?
5. Do we wear clothes or other things that are different from each other? Why do we wear what we wear?

Activity 3: Recognizing Differences: Drawing My Teacher

This exercise is designed to help students understand the physical differences between themselves and the adult woman profiled in the book and to prepare them to express and appreciate those differences.

Have your students do a drawing or painting of you that is as detailed as possible. Before they do this activity, discuss with them how this drawing or painting will be different from the one that they did of themselves. Ask your students these questions before they begin:

1. Is your teacher taller or shorter than you?
2. How is their hair different from yours?
3. How are their skin and eyes different from yours?
4. How are the things they use or carry different from yours?

Allow your students enough time to put as much detail as they can into their drawings. Then, use the questions above to discuss the differences between adults and children.

Comprehension Activities

These questions can be used to help students understand the main concepts in the book. They also help students describe their feelings and make predictions about what they have read and seen.

Rita's art is not representational. She uses colours and shapes to express what she sees and how she interprets the world. Some questions ask students to imagine how Rita felt when she created the art and what message she was trying to convey.

Activity 4: A Close Look at Rita's Art

These questions can be used for small-group or class discussion, group comprehension, and writing practice, homework, or individually evaluated work.

1. Look at the first picture of Rita that you see. What are some words that you would use to describe her?
2. Look at Rita's face. She is a woman who can be about the same age as your parents. What are some ways that she looks like other adults, such as your parents?
3. Rita has Down syndrome. How does her face look a little different than other adults that you know?
4. What can we know about Rita when we look at this painting of her?
5. When does Rita like to draw?
6. Where does Rita work?
7. How does Rita get to work by herself?
8. How does she feel about using the cash register by herself? Why does she feel this way?
9. How do we know that Rita loves fish? Do you also love fish? If you do, explain why you love them.
10. What are telemarketers? Why don't people like it when they call their home?
11. What would you say to a telemarketer who calls your home?
12. Look at Rita's picture of New York City. How does her picture remind you of a big city?
13. Who in Rita's family lives in New York City?
14. Do you think that Rita likes big cities? Why or why not?

15. Do you live in a big city or a smaller place? What kind of place do you like to live in? Why do you like to live there?
16. How are Rita's pictures of spring and summer the same? How are they different?
17. How do you feel when you look at these pictures? Think of some words that describe your feelings.
18. Why does Rita say that the flowers "look like they're smiling at everyone?" Do you agree with Rita's feelings? Why or why not?
19. Why do you think Rita painted her pumpkin all different colours? How would you decorate your own Halloween pumpkin?
20. What are poppies? Do you know when we wear them and why?
21. How does Rita's picture of winter make you feel? Why do you feel that way?
22. Why would Rita think that winter is also beautiful? Do you also think that winter is beautiful? Why or why not?
23. What are "fireworks?" When do we sometimes see fireworks? How does Rita's picture make you think of fireworks?
24. When is New Year's Eve? What does "eve" mean?
25. How does Rita draw her friends Carolyn and Sammy? What can you tell about Carolyn and Sammy from Rita's drawings of them?
26. What kind of person is the "Lady with the Purple Arms?" How do you think Rita feels about her?
27. Do you ever see people in your imagination? If you do, talk about them or draw your own picture of who you see in your imagination.
28. When there's a lot of snow in the winter, what kind of snow people do you make? How do you make them? How do you dress them up?
29. Look at the picture of Rita's dance class. How do you know that she's having a good time?
30. What are "hobbies?" What are some of your hobbies?
31. Look at the picture of Rita doing yoga. Why do you think that doing yoga can make you feel well and healthy?

32. Do you know anyone who does yoga? Would you ever try it? Why or why not?
33. Rita says that she practices yoga poses like “twisted chair,” “elephant,” “happy baby,” and “downward dog.” Imagine what some of these positions would be like and try to do them with a partner. Make sure that your teacher or a trusted adult can supervise.
34. Look at the picture of Rita doing “downward dog.” Do you think that it’s easy or hard to do yoga poses? Give a reason for your thinking.
35. Look at Rita’s last piece of art in the book. How is this last picture different from the other ones in the book? Who or what is she trying to show in this picture?

Activity 5: True/False Questions

Depending on whether it's presented orally or as a reading activity, this exercise is appropriate for students in kindergarten to Grade 2.

If your students are in Grade 3 or up, you can ask them to rewrite the false statements to make them true.

Rita's Life and Art: YES or NO?

Read these sentences about Rita's life and art. If the sentence is true, circle YES, but if it's not true, circle NO.

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|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. Rita is ten years old. | YES | NO |
| 2. Rita loves making art. | YES | NO |
| 3. Rita paints with bright colours. | YES | NO |
| 4. Rita takes the bus by herself. | YES | NO |
| 5. Rita doesn't have a job. | YES | NO |
| 6. Rita likes to paint animals and nature. | YES | NO |
| 7. Rita likes to talk to telemarketers. | YES | NO |
| 8. Rita's Uncle Mark lives in Toronto. | YES | NO |
| 9. Rita thinks summer flowers are smiling at her. | YES | NO |
| 10. Rita paints poppies to remember our soldiers. | YES | NO |
| 11. Rita's pictures of her friends look just like them. | YES | NO |
| 12. Rita loves to dance and takes a dance class. | YES | NO |
| 13. Rita has learned sign language. | YES | NO |
| 14. Rita is very good at bending and stretching. | YES | NO |
| 15. Rita has a very busy life. | YES | NO |

Activity 6: Fill-in-the-blanks

A fill-in-the-blanks exercise helps reinforce new vocabulary.

This fill-in-the-blanks worksheet called “Learning New Words” is appropriate for Grade 2 and Grade 3 students. The worksheet can be done as a class or assigned as group work.

You may wish to do one or two examples with your students and allow them to have copies of *My Art, My World* to help them to complete the worksheet.

Learning New Words: Fill in the Blanks

Here are some new words that we learn in *My Art, My World*.

language	yoga	shop
bus	dance	art
swim	whenever	city
pesky	deaf	hobbies
	huge	

One of these words belongs in each of these sentences. You only need to use each word one time.

1. The book has many of Rita's pictures that show she is very good at _____.
2. Rita goes to her job by riding a _____.
3. Rita works in a coffee _____.
4. She doesn't like when telemarketers call to sell her things. She thinks they are annoying or _____.
5. Rita says, "I draw _____ I can."
6. Rita has a few _____ that she likes to do in her spare time.
7. She loves to _____, do _____, and _____ with a group of people.
8. Rita's Uncle Mark lives in New York _____.
9. The buildings in that city are _____.
10. Rita wants to communicate with _____ people, so she is learning sign _____.

Activity 7: Giving Personal Opinions

This worksheet is a sentence-completion exercise, which allows your students to give their personal opinions about what they have seen or read in the book, and to make connections between Rita's experiences and their own.

Encourage students to do this exercise independently by telling them that there are no wrong answers. They should feel free to express their personal opinions and connections to Rita's story.

What Do You Think?

Finish each sentence below with your own ideas.

1. I think that the colours in Rita's paintings are _____ because _____.
2. I like to draw whenever _____.
3. When I'm not at school, the hobbies that I like to do are _____.
4. I (do / do not) like animals because _____.
5. My favourite kind of dancing is _____ because _____.
6. In my imagination, I sometimes see _____.
7. When I grow up, the kind of job I would like to do is _____ because _____.
8. My favourite part of *My Art, My World* is _____ because _____.

B: Extension Activities

These activities provide more opportunities for your students to explore their creativity and to learn directly from people with Down syndrome.

Activity 8: Guest Speaker Presentation

If your students are comfortable with guest speaker visits, invite a guest speaker who is either an adult with Down syndrome (accompanied by a support person) or a child with Down syndrome (accompanied by a parent or other adult).

Inform the speaker and support person ahead of time of the age and academic level of your students, and ask them to prepare a 15-minute presentation, which might also include time for students to ask questions.

Activity 9: Journaling

If your students in grades 3 or 4 are comfortable with journaling, here are topics that you can present to them either while or after you finish reading the book.

- What are three words that you can use to describe Rita's paintings? Explain why you choose each word.
- Do you think that Rita's life is similar or almost the same as yours? If you do, describe three ways that her life and your life are similar.
- Do you think that Rita's life is different from yours? If you do, describe three ways that her life is different from your life.
- Which of Rita's paintings is your favourite? Choose that painting and explain why it's your favourite one in the book.

- Do you think that Rita’s hobbies are interesting? Which of her hobbies would you like to have if you could? Why would you want this hobby?
- Do you think you would like to make friends with a person who has Down syndrome? If so, how would you spend time with your new friend? What special activities would you do with them?

Activity 10: Writing a Letter to Rita (Grades 3 and 4)

Your students can write a letter to Rita expressing what they learned from her book and how reading it made them feel. There are many grade- and age-appropriate exercises online that can help your students practice simple, friendly letter writing. However, here are instructions that you can provide your students in a worksheet format.

Writing a Letter to Rita

You are going to write a letter to Rita telling her what you learned and how you felt about her book, *My Art, My World*.

Make sure to do these things in this order:

- a. Write today’s date at the top of the page.
- b. Tell her who you are and what grade you are in.
- c. Tell her why you liked her book and art. Give her three reasons for why you liked it.
- d. Tell her which picture is your favourite and why you liked it.
- e. Ask her one or two questions about herself and her life.
- f. Finish your letter with “Thank you” and then write your name.