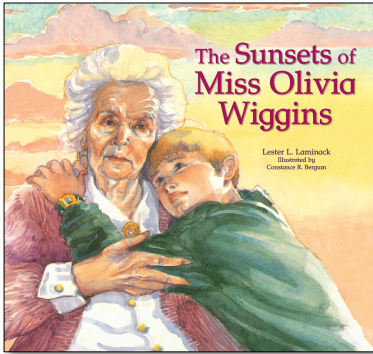


TEACHER'S GUIDE



The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins

Written by Lester L. Laminack | Illustrated by Constance R. Bergum

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Ages 6–10

AR • F&P • GRL Q; Gr 4

ABOUT THE BOOK

“See what we have for you, Momma Olivia?” said Troy proudly. “Grandma Angel and I brought a bunch of lilacs from your yard.”

“Miss Olivia Wiggins didn’t say anything. She didn’t move, she didn’t blink, but slowly, quietly she began to think.”

When young Troy goes with his Grandma Angel to visit his great-grandmother, Miss Olivia, sights, sounds, and scents take Olivia back into her memories.

It’s hard for Troy to understand why Miss Olivia, who has Alzheimer’s, is no longer able to talk to him or even seems to know he’s there. He knows things will never be the same, but she’s still his Momma Olivia. He knows that she’s always there waiting for his next visit.

Laminack’s gentle, poetic voice touches all of us as he weaves a story that radiates love and reveals the strength of the bonds between generations. Bergum’s sensitive, eloquent watercolors capture the profound moments of past and present.

THEMES

Aging | Alzheimer’s disease | Family

BEFORE YOU READ

- Invite your students to examine the front cover and the art throughout the book. As you examine the cover, note the title and the view behind the old woman and the young boy. Invite your students to think about the following:
 - The significance of the title and what it might reveal about the story.

- The relationship between the young boy and the old woman in the illustration.
- Why the artist chose to paint in watercolors and use pastel hues.
- Take a moment and leaf through the pages before you read. Admire the art. Linger over the story in the illustrations. Invite your students to think about the following:
 - The connection between the title and the scenes portrayed in the illustrations
 - The span of time represented through the art
 - The relationships that exist between and among the characters portrayed in the art
- Read the summary on the flap and invite your students to share their insights and the connections they made between their examination of the art, the summary on the flap, and their own experiences.

AS YOU READ

- As you read the book aloud for your students, you might open with the dedication. These brief comments at the beginning of most books often provide insight into the inspiration for the story or give a glimpse into the life of the writer. In our classrooms, we want students to see themselves as writers, to understand that writers are ordinary people who notice and note the things around them. Knowing something about the writer and the story behind the book can provide an important frame for both young readers and writers.
- Continue reading aloud, taking care to make the illustrations visible for your students. Read the story

at a comfortable pace to make sure the tone and mood are reflected in the delivery.

AFTER YOU READ

- When you reach the last page of the story, close the book and ask the students, “So, what do you think?” Asking questions such as this implies that you see your students as people who listen, connect, and think as they engage in a story. Inviting their initial reactions also provides you with an opportunity to explore the connections they make as readers/listeners.
- Following the story, you might invite the children to do the following:
 - Retell the story. A child’s retelling allows you to determine whether the essence of the story was clear and understood.
 - Talk about other stories this one reminds them of, so you can find out whether the children see the relationships among stories (plots, characters, settings, tone, theme).
 - Talk about events and experiences in their own lives that the story reminds them of. These connections to personal life experiences allow you to determine whether the child recognizes the experiences of the characters as realistic events.
 - Talk about what students noticed during the reading. These observations about the writer’s craft, use of language and descriptions, the art, or other features of the book allow you to determine whether the child is listening and reading like a writer. These connections are the springboards to great discussions and opportunities for mini-lessons in your classroom writing workshops.
 - As children listen or read for themselves, questions will arise about the content of the story, the vocabulary used, the relationships among characters. Children will wonder about the writer’s life and the source of the story idea. Children will be curious about the relationship between the writer and the illustrator. This talk will open opportunities for clarifying confusions and making new connections.
- In each situation above, the focus remains on the reader/listener and the connections that individual makes with the story. Clearly, the teacher is one of those readers, and his or her connections and insights are also valuable to the conversation. When several people gather around a story and begin to share their connections with other stories and personal

experiences, the result is a lovely tapestry of rich rememberings. The tapestry is woven from threads of memories the story evokes, from other stories we are reminded of, from the conversations that arise out of observations and wonderings. The result is a richer and deeper understanding than any of us could have had alone.

CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Literature often raises questions for readers, and these questions can fuel follow-up inquiry or research projects. This type of extension provides an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary connections. (See the skills and subjects listed after each suggestion.) The suggestions that follow could be the invitation your students need to spark those connections.

- In the first memory flashback, when Olivia was just a young girl, a small toy horse is on the porch steps. Draw your students’ attention to the horse and talk about the fact that it is a toy. Then invite them to interview older relatives, family friends, or classroom volunteers to find out more about the kinds of toys that children would have had available in the days when Olivia was a small girl. This investigation could also move into searches through other picture books set in that time, catalogs of old toys, guides to antique toys, and the web. (*History, Social Studies, Research Skills*)
- Assume that the scene in the nursing home with Angel, Troy, and Miss Olivia is in the present day. Then, read through all the flashbacks in sequence and examine the illustrations of those memories. Next, invite children to develop a timeline to show the span of Miss Olivia’s life up to the present day. (*History, Mathematics, Critical Thinking*)
- Using the information from the first two points above, invite the children to develop a family tree showing where Angel and Troy fit into the timeline. You may also find the illustrations helpful here. (*History, Mathematics*)
- Review the scenes and the text from the flashbacks and think about Olivia’s life. If she had kept a journal, what might the reader expect to find on the page for each flashback? (*Creative Writing*)
- Create an ongoing project in the form of a graph, that lists and compares the toys of the three generations. (*History, Social Studies, Mathematics, Critical Thinking*)
- The opening scene closely focuses on Olivia’s hands making a quilt. Explore quilt patterns and find the story behind them. Make a quilt pattern using scrap

paper and explain the story behind the pattern.
(*Social Studies, Geometry*)

- In the opening of the story, Olivia is quilting. Use the text and other illustrations to determine if this is a picture of Olivia before or after she became married to Ned Wiggins. (*Critical Thinking*)
- When Troy visits Miss Olivia, he brings her a bunch of lilacs. Do a bit of investigating to see if you can find out why. (*Critical Thinking*)
- Invite the children to select an item (quilt, pin, toy horse) to follow through the story. Note how it is significant throughout the story. Use the text to support theories about these items. (*Language Arts, Critical Thinking*)
- After reading the story, invite children to talk with a grandparent, older relative, or family friend to collect a memory to share. Collect a shoe box of memory objects or a photo album to share. (*History, Social Studies, Research Skills*)
- Miss Olivia has Alzheimer's disease. Ask students to research Alzheimer's on the Internet, or you can contact the Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center at 800-438-4380. (*Research Skills*)

OBSERVATIONS & WONDERINGS

As the adult reader (teacher, librarian, parent) you might share your own observations and then wonder aloud to demonstrate the possibilities for young readers/listeners. Remember that the opportunities described above can become a predictable frame for reading and responding to most picture books.

Observation: While we were reading I noticed that the writer uses the phrase, "She didn't move, she didn't even blink, but slowly, quietly she began to think."

Wondering: I was wondering how this line helps the writer. What does the use of this line help him to do? How does this line help us as readers?

Observation: I noticed a small, wooden toy horse in several of the illustrations.

Wondering: I was wondering if there is a story behind the horse. Whose was it? Where did it come from?

Observation: I noticed that the end papers of the book are designed like the quilt Miss Olivia is making in the illustration on the first page. I noticed that the quilt is also in several other scenes.

Wondering: I wonder why that quilt is important?

Additional Observations: I noticed that when Miss Olivia remembers something from long ago, the writer uses italics. Or, I noticed that the story shows the life of Miss Olivia through a series of her memories. Or, I noticed that when Miss Olivia remembers something it is usually prompted by something that the other characters do or say.

Each of these observations and wonderings is an opportunity for sharing connections from the lives of the readers/listeners and for sharing connections with other books. The observations and wonderings about the writing (e.g., using the repeated phrase, using italics) is an opportunity for a mini-lesson in the classroom writing workshop. In these instances, you could explore the effectiveness of the strategy and try it out in your own writing as a demonstration. Clearly, you would also invite the children to explore a similar strategy in their writing.

BIBLIOTHERAPY

Often children facing difficult times in their personal lives find it comforting to read about others who have faced similar issues. Books such as this one become more significant as growing numbers of children live with the reality of a loved one with Alzheimer's or a similar disease that slowly takes a loved one away.

Clearly, the story will provide adults and children with opportunities to converse about their personal experiences. These conversations enable children to express with family and friends their feelings, concerns, fears, anxieties, and insights about situations.

Stories such as *The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins* will let children see that hope and love are powerful human emotions that give us strength to cope with difficult issues throughout our lives.

REVIEWS

“Realistic watercolors flow gently between present and past in this tender depiction of a life well lived, which speaks to the value of maintaining loving relationships, even when they are altered by Alzheimer’s disease.”

—**Booklist**

“Moments of real eloquence... The book provides an unusually empathic look at the reality of aging...

Children perplexed or upset by their own visits to deteriorating elders may find this book helpful and even consoling.” —**Publishers Weekly**

“Through this story readers will be reassured that older people can have a full inner life and will understand the importance of visiting them.”

—**School Library Journal**

“The story will strike a chord with young children who may, for the first time, realize their grandparents and great-grandparents were once children like themselves... The gentle watercolor illustrations of Miss Wiggins’ life—past and present—help bring the story to life for readers of all ages.”

—**Boston Herald**

AWARDS

- Association for the Care of Children’s Health/Joan Fassler Memorial Book Award

Available from Lester L. Laminack:

Jake’s 100th Day of School

The King of Bees

Saturdays and Teacakes

Snow Day!

The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins

Three Hens and a Peacock

Trevor’s Wiggly-Wobbly Tooth

Available from Constance R. Bergum:

Beneath the Sun

Under the Snow,

When Rain Falls

The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lester L. Laminack is a specialist in children’s literacy and professor emeritus at Western Carolina University. Laminack has written numerous books and articles for educators and is a familiar speaker at professional meetings and reading associations nationwide. He lives in North Carolina.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Constance R. Bergum has illustrated several children’s books. She holds an MFA in illustration from Marywood University and lives in Montana.

Peachtree Teacher’s Guide for
THE SUNSETS OF MISS OLIVIA WIGGINS
prepared by Lester L. Laminack

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