A Curriculum Guide for Educators & Readers

Aligned to the Common Core Grades 3-5

Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge* as a classroom read aloud or as a selection for independent reading. Great for book clubs, too!

About the Author

Kristin L. Gray drinks coffee (cream, no sugar) and writes books (funny, not sad) from her home in northwest Arkansas. She loves to read, walk her dogs, and eat cake for breakfast. She will also travel any chance she gets. Kristin's fourth-grade self would never believe she has five children, two dogs, one fish, a bearded dragon, and a shy gecko. *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge* is her first novel. To learn more about Kristin, or to send her a cake, visit her online at kristinlgray.com.

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About the Book

Fourth grader Vilonia hasn't lost her rain coat in the three weeks she's had it and she's brushed her teeth every night and she's volunteered to be the Friday Library Helper. But all that hard work is worth it if it means she can get a dog. Besides, this dog isn't just because Vilonia has wanted one for pretty much ever. It's also to help Mama, who's been lost in one, big sadness fog for forty-three days—ever since Nana died. But Vilonia read that pets can help with sadness.

Now all she has to do is keep the library goldfish alive over spring break, stop bringing stray animals home, and help Mama not get fired from her job. And she's got to do all of it before the Catfish Festival. Easy as pie, right?

Common Core Aligned for Grades 3-5

3rd grade: ELA. RL.3.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.3.1,2,3; SL.3.1,2,4; L.3.4,5

4th grade: ELA. RL.4.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.4.1,2,3; SL.4.1,2,4; L.4.4,5

5th grade: ELA. RL.5.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.5.1,2,3; SL.5.1,2,4,5; L.5.4,5

Before You Read...

1. Take a close look at the front cover photo of *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge*. Describe what you see. Can you make any predictions about the character of Vilonia Beebe? Can you predict what this book might be about? What from the illustration and title of the book supports your prediction?

2. Read the text on the jacket flap. What do you learn about the book from this blurb?

3. List at least five questions that you have about this novel after looking at the covers and jacket copy.

4. Look closely at the design of the book: the colors, text, any illustrations, word choice. How would you describe the design of the book?

5. Who do you think is the intended audience of this book? If you saw this book on a shelf, would you want to read it? Why or why not?

Write one paragraph describing your thoughts about the book, and include one question you have that you hope to learn the answer to when you read. Share your paragraph with the class.

Chapters 1-5

1. Vilonia says that her spring looks "plumb awesome", even though "the last two months stunk." Explain what she means by this.
2. What does Vilonia's dad mean when he says, "the forecast changes daily when it comes to Mama?"
3. What causes Vilonia to miss her softball game?
    a. What does this say about her character?
    b. What do you think is more important, keeping a commitment to a team or helping an injured animal?
    c. What would you have chosen to do if you were in Vilonia's shoes?
4. Vilonia does not have a pet, yet she is well known at the Best Friends Animal Clinic. Why?
5. While at the clinic Vilonia sees a poster for the Howard County Animal Shelter. Using the description in the book, create your own version of the poster.
    a. Why does this poster excite Vilonia?
6. Using chapters 1-5 as evidence, create a chart with two columns. In one column, list examples of Vilonia being responsible. In the other column, list examples of Vilonia being irresponsible.
    a. Based on your chart, do you think Vilonia should be allowed to have a dog? Why or why not?
7. Vilonia has thirty sticky notes on her wall, stating reasons for having a dog. Can you think of thirty reasons for having a pet? List as many as you can and share them with the class.

Who is Vilonia?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Vilonia, on a large piece of paper.

Using Chapters 1-5 as evidence, write any known details about Vilonia inside the outline.

Outside the outline, record any questions about Vilonia that the class might have.

8. How does taking care of the library fish, Max, fit in to Vilonia's Great Pet Campaign?

9. What about the Beebe's house causes Bettina to think "something funny is going on?"

    a. Why do you think Vilonia does not want Bettina to know that Mama has the "Infinite Sadness?"

    b. How do you think Bettina would react to knowing how Mama is feeling? Do you think she would be understanding?

    c. Imagine that Vilonia tells Bettina the truth about Mama. Create a script of the dialogue, detailing how Bettina responds.

10. Vilonia says that her best friend, Ava Claire (AC) and her "go together like orange juice and toothpaste." What do you think she means?

    a. Describe AC in your own words.

11. Nana says that Ray Charles was a fighter like Vilonia. How was Ray Charles a fighter?

    a. How is Vilonia a fighter?

    b. Listen to some Ray Charles music on YouTube.

Like Orange Juice and Toothpaste—

All About Similes and Metaphors

Kristin L. Gray uses many delightful similes and metaphors to bring Vilonia's voice to life.

The metaphor is a literary comparison that compares two objects, but does not use like or as or than. A simile is a literary comparison that compares two objects, but uses like or as or than.

Metaphor: *The last two months stunk worse than my brother, Leon, when he forgot to wear deodorant.*

Simile: *I rode like the wind on the best kite-flying dat.*

How many similes and metaphors can you find in Chapters 1-5? List as many as you can.

Then, write some similes about yourself.

1. How do you feel?

Example: I feel as lazy as a polar bear on a hot summer's day.

_____
_____

2. How do you look?

Example: My hair looks like porcupine's quills.

_____
_____

3. How do you act?

Example: I am wigglier than a rabbit, hopping quickly from here to there.

_____

Pick one of your similes and explain its meaning. What are you comparing yourself to? Why did you choose to compare yourself to this thing?

c. Choose one of the following Ray Charles songs and rewrite one verse or the chorus to fit Vilonia's story so far: "Let the Good Times Roll" or "What'd I Say?"

12. Create the Beebe family tree and include all known details about each member of the family, using Chapters 1–5 as evidence.

Making Connections:

Vilonia does some computer research on "dogs and sadness" and finds some information regarding *The Healing Power of Pets.*

Conduct your own Internet research regarding how pets can help people cope with depression.

- What is an emotional support animal?
- What kinds of emotions can support animals help with?
- What kind of animals can be emotional support help?
- How and where are emotional support animals trained?
- How can someone get an emotional support animal?

Record your findings along with Vilonia's.

Visit http://www.certapet.com/faq/how-to-get-an-emotional-support-animal/ for more information or to connect with local organizations.

Chapters 6-10

1. Using the description on page 46 of what happened the day Nana died, create a screenplay script for the scene. Include all the information written in the novel, taking creative liberties and fleshing out where necessary. Be sure to have a definite beginning and end.

    a. Read or perform your scene aloud, using Ray Charles's "Am I Blue?" as the soundtrack.

2. What is an obituary?

    a. Describe the formula for an obituary.

    b. What do you think "obituaries are for the living" means?

    c. On a scale of one to five, with one being "not good" and five being "very good," how would you rate Vi's obituary for Mrs. Tooley? Explain your answer.

    d. How do you think Mrs. Tooley's family will react to the obituary that Vilonia writes?

3. How do you think Max got the fungus?

    a. Conduct an Internet search on proper goldfish care, including habitat.

    b. If you were Mr. Reyes, what sort of instructions, based on your Internet research, would you have told Viloina before she took Max home?

4. Why do you think Vilonia gives the name Ray Charles to the puppy?

Making Connections:

Vilonia's mother is experiencing grief. Define "grief" in your own words, using examples from the book to support your definition.

Write two to three paragraphs describing:

- Possible responses to grief
- How you would help a friend or classmate who is grieving
- How you would like to be helped if you were grieving

Using Vilonia's dad's saying, ""the forecast changes daily when it comes to Mama," as inspiration, consider how grief relates to nature or the weather.

Create a painting or drawing of what you think grief looks like.

Does grief look like an earthquake, a snowstorm, or a hurricane? Would you compare grief to a natural environment such as a desert, jungle, mountain, or tundra? Use the connections between nature and weather to enhance your visual depiction.

Chapters 11-15

1. "Ava Claire was one of the few people in town (other than immediate family) who knew the Truth." What is the Truth?
    a. Why do you think few people are given this information?
    b. Who else outside of immediate family do you think know this?
    c. What could happen if anyone else found out?
2. What two consequences does Vilonia face now that Max the fish is dead?
3. Ava Claire and Vilonia hatch a plan to replace Max with another goldfish. Explain, in your own words, the following elements in regard their plan:

a. Toothpick box

b. Swedish Fish

c. Creamsicle pops

d. Flashy pink Cadillac

e. Pete's Pets

f. Catfish Festival

4. Why do the four missing phone numbers on the Ray Charles's adoption flyer bother Vilonia so much?

5. Who do Vilonia and Ava Claire find in Vilonia's bedroom when they get home from the mall?

    a. If you were Vilonia, would you trust Leon to not say anything? Explain your answer using examples from the text for support.

Making Connections:

Explain what you think the title *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge* means. List all of the things that Vilonia is taking charge of.

Can you relate? Do you ever feel like you need to take control or no one else will?

Imagine that you need to take over the job or chore of someone else in your house. What would that look like?

Write a diary entry explaining how you would go about taking over.

Chapters 16-20

1. Vilonia wants to give Max what she calls a "Norse pyro-funeral." What does that mean? How does she plan to do this?
2. How does Max's funeral lead to the Wiloughby's henhouse catching fire?
3. Imagine that you are a news reporter who is covering the rescue of the Wiloughby's chickens. Using as many details from the scene as possible, write a newspaper article describing the incident.

To Mud Skull Creek

The three kids must navigate their way in the dark to Mud Skull Creek.

Using details mentioned in the text, draw an illustrated map of the area, clearly marking their path.

Other important landmarks, such as "Daddy's Shop" and the Willoughby's henhouse should be included, as well.

Be creative and add details based on what you know about the area from previous chapters.

4. Vilonia calls the phone number regarding adopting Ray Charles. List three things she learns from that phone conversation.
5. Visit members.petfinder.com/~MN186/DogForm.doc to download a Dog Adoption Form. Fill out the form as if you were Vilonia.
6. Vilonia tell Ava Claire that a "real friend would help" her work the food truck. But Ava Claire says, "a real friend would be more supportive of my first solo performance." Who do you agree with?
    a. Do you think Vilonia is being a supportive friend?
    b. Would you help if you were AC?
    c. Write an essay in support of either AC or Vilonia regarding this situation. Use details from the book to support your opinion.
7. Vilonia seems to be asking a lot of AC lately, without doing much in return. Pretend that you are AC and write a diary entry about this. How do you feel about the friendship? Do you feel like Vilonia is asking too much?
8. What does Vilonia mean when she sends Dr. Lafferty's obituary to Bettina and says that "the cycle of life smacked me square on the head?"

9. There are so many things that Vilonia prays about at the end of chapter twenty. List everything she includes.

    a. Can you predict answers to any of these prayers? Share your predictions with the class.

Chapters 21-25

1. Mrs. Willoughby says that Vilonia's dad spoke to her and therefore, Vilonia and AC did not truly apologize. Imagine that the three kids approach Mrs. Willoughby and tell her about the henhouse fire themselves. Write that scene, using both narration and dialogue as necessary.

2. Rory says the games at the festival are rigged. What does he mean by this?

    a. Do Internet research regarding "how carnival games are rigged." Report your findings to the class.

3. When Vilonia is told that the puppy has been adopted she runs home in the rain instead of staying to watch AC dance. Do you think she did the right thing?

    a. Rewrite the scene as if she stayed.

4. Imagine you are Vilonia and you are asked to explain why you ran off. Retell the reason in your own words.

5. After she explains what she has been up to, Vilonia's dad says, "I'd never been prouder of you or so mad at myself." What do you think he means?

6. What makes Vilonia's parents decide she can have a dog?

7. Explain the following quote in your own words: "That's the thing with hope: If you keep hoping long enough, and hard enough, even with life's disappointments, something good will happen."

    a. Support or oppose this quote using *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge*.

    b. Support or oppose this quote using experiences from your own life.

After You Read…

Below are a few final project ideas for the conclusion of *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge.*

1. Revisit the cover illustration for the book. Explain the details that the artist chose to include, using textual evidence as support.

2. Several themes run through *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge*.

Family	Responsibility
Grief	Friendship

   Choose one of these themes on which to base a 500-word essay.

   What can readers take away from *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge* in relation to this theme?

3. Choose a character, other than Vilonia and explore how they have changed from the beginning to the end.

4. Read the following summary of Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie*:

   One summer's day, ten-year-old India Opal Buloni goes down to the local supermarket for some groceries – and comes home with a dog. But Winn-Dixie is no ordinary dog. It's because of Winn-Dixie that Opal begins to make friends. And it's because of Winn-Dixie that she finally dares to ask her father about her mother, who left when Opal was three. In fact, as Opal admits, just about everything that happens that summer is because of Winn-Dixie.

   Why do you think this book means so much to Vilonia? Can you see any similarities to her story?

5. Create a book trailer for *Vilonia Beebe Takes Charge*. Carefully choose music, visuals, and words to create an overall feel for the book.