



# Teacher's Pet

## Morris Gleitzman

### Title Talk

Work from the general towards the specific. Use the first group of questions to generate interest and dialogue prior to reading the story. This discussion should highlight context and reaction to the implications of the title *Teacher's Pet*.

#### **Before reading:**

- What does the term 'teachers pet' mean? Who might use such a term?
- Who is it likely to be applied to? How do you think someone would feel given that label? How would you feel?

#### **After reading:**

- Who is the 'teacher's pet' in this story? Can you identify and explain the 'twist' in Morris Gleitzman's tale about the character who is the teacher's pet?
- What sort of relationship exists between the 'teacher' in question and the 'pet' in question?
- In what other ways do 'pets' and 'teachers' feature? What roles do they play?

### Character analysis

Get to know the main characters. Try to understand their motivations and empathise with the emotions experienced as the plot unfolds.

You can do this in two ways:

1. By selecting a character of interest to you and reviewing events in which that character is involved. Focus on what he/she is thinking and what other people think of him/her. Write a point-form list or a narrative that reveals the attitude and experiences of that character. Share your opinion – what do YOU think of that character's behaviour? Support your views with examples from the text.

2. Use the three criteria set out below. Answer the corresponding questions or write using the three perspectives as your guide.

- Step into the character's shoes – what is going on in his/her head?
- Objective perspective – what are your perceptions as reader of what is happening to/with that character?
- Subjective perspective – see the character through the eyes of someone close to them (eg: Mum, Dad, best friend, enemy, sibling or pet).

### **Ginger**

- Imagine Ginger answering – ‘How am I feeling about the situation I am facing with Mr Napier? What strengths can I draw on to help me?’
- What do you, the reader, think disadvantages Ginger – both in the sense of personal qualities and the situation she is in?
- How would Mr Napier or Isabel or Mitzi answer the question ‘What do you think of Ginger Smith?’

### **Ginger’s parents**

- Imagine Mr and Mrs Smith answering – ‘What challenges are we facing as parents who are also teachers at our children’s school?’
- As reader, what do you make of their behaviour? Do you think they treat Ginger appropriately – as teachers and as parents?
- Describe how Ginger sees her parents or what Mr Napier’s view of them might be.

### **Mr Wong**

- Imagine Mr Wong answering – ‘Why am I reluctant to return to school?’
- As reader, consider the expression ‘power shifts’ in the context of what has happened between Mr Wong and Mr Napier. Explain the position you see both these men in when Mr Wong is still at home.
- From the perspective of Ginger, Mrs Wong, the staff or Mr Napier, does Mr Wong still have anything to offer and what will make a difference to him?

### **Mr Napier**

- Imagine how Mr Napier would answer – ‘What are my ambitions? What is in the way of achieving my goals and how shall I deal with that?’
- As reader, what do you think of the way Mr Napier treats his students and his staff? Do you have any ideas as to why he behaves in a certain way?
- How would Ginger feel listening to some of the things Mr Napier says or what feeling would there be among his staff about having a Principal like him?

Other characters to analyse include: Cerberus the dog, Mitzi (Ginger’s sister), Isabel (her best friend), Locklan Grosby (the meanie) and Ms Cunningham (Ginger’s ally).

### **Check out the Chapter headings!**

- Make a list of all the chapter headings Morris Gleitzman has chosen. What do you notice about them?
- Discuss his clever use of words to create these humorous headings with several meanings. Find out about language devices – puns, double entendres, the term ‘play on words’ – and talk about how they work. Encourage students to come up with their own – either as alternatives to Morris Gleitzman’s choices, or in the context set by their own creative writing.

### **Be the Illustrator!**

- There are many scenes and settings in *Teacher’s Pet* that are ideal to illustrate. For example, Ginger’s home with the family cats who have definite personalities! Or, the building site cellar where the stray dogs are kept. Then there’s the pile of people and dogs in the ice rink – imagine how funny that would have looked! Some characters really lend themselves to having a portrait created – one that might not be too flattering! Think of Mr Napier and Fitzherbert . . .

- Choose a character or a scene that stands out in your mind. Write down the descriptive text that creates the setting or character you wish to illustrate. Then get to work on a picture – utilise simple pencil and paper or more colourful tools such as paint or texta. Be adventurous with materials, textiles or computer-generated images. Illustrations could be a group or paired effort or a compilation of individual contributions.
- Create a collage or a gallery of characters, a montage of scenes or simply display students' chosen excerpts along with explanatory text or quotes from the story.

## **Inspiring Ideas for Writing!**

Use Morris Gleitzman's work as a model and a springboard for students' own creative compositions. Engage students in individual or shared writing tasks that explore different genres. The different styles outlined below provide opportunities to develop skills in writing to suit different audiences and purposes.

### **1. Transactional Writing**

- Letters, Cards, Messages, Memos, Minutes etc . . .  
For example, from Ginger and friends to the council to explain the dog situation and their suggested resolution; from Mum and Dad to Ginger listing positives they see in her; to Mr Wong requesting his return or Mr Napier suggesting his resignation!
- Write a school Newsletter from Mr Napier to the school community explaining the problem and what he plans to do; a memo from the council to neighbourhood homes regarding what to do if encountering a stray dog; a message from Ned or Isabel to Ginger or a list of doggy items needed by the furry friends.
- Design an invitation card for Mr Wong to attend the surprise outing or a certificate for presentation on Pets Day; a note of thanks to Miss Cunningham or Ginger.

### **2. Recount**

- A narrative from the perspective of one of the main characters (or from an unexpected viewpoint such as Cerberus, a council ranger, a pet at Pets Day or another parent) that retells the story. This could then be presented orally or turned into a drama, or an excerpt could be read at assembly.

### **3. Persuasive Writing**

- Choose one of the many issues which could be contentious or about which you hold a strong opinion. Write your argument for or against, or develop a persuasive piece that enables the reader to see your point of view. Support it with examples from the text or real life as appropriate.  
eg: What should happen regarding housing the dogs in the story or stray dogs in general? Should Mr Napier face some sort of punishment? Are there any morals or messages you feel the story tries to convey?

### **4. Review and Personal Response**

- Write about your response to the story and to the work of Morris Gleitzman. You can write a general review or choose one of the following options as your focus:
  - A quote
  - An outcome to an event
  - Comment on the style of writing
  - An exchange between two or more characters
  - A problem faced and resolved
  - Compare with other books written by Morris Gleitzman

### **5. Reports and Article Writing**

- Write an article for the local paper, the School or Council Newsletter or magazine about the dog problem, Pets Day at school or the episode at the ice skating rink. Use quotes from interviewing relevant people such as Mr Napier, Ginger, the council ranger or the Manager of the rink. It could be an investigative piece which uncovers Mr Napier's activities and ulterior motives, or an informative outline (or even advertisement) about Pets Day – how it is run, who can be in it, what the prizes are and how the event turned out on the day.

### **6. Superlative Speech writing!**

- Come up with a speech one of the characters might make in a given situation from the story. For example: Ginger at assembly, Mr Wong on his return to school, Ginger's parents when they were all found at the rink, Mr Napier to the School Council. These could be written onto cards and performed for the class who could critique the speaker and how convincingly they presented their material.

### **7. Query with a Questionnaire!**

- Design a Questionnaire about an issue faced in the story (eg: Should Mr Wong or Mr Napier be Principal? Should teachers be allowed to teach their own children? What should become of stray animals?) Imagine you ask the questions contained in your questionnaire of the characters from the story. What would each character respond? Draw on your imagination and your knowledge of the story to write your answers.

### **8. Dramatise!**

- Starting with the activity above (no.4), develop a role-play. Assign character roles to students in the class and 'interview' them using your questionnaire. This could be rehearsed as a skit or done as an impromptu performance where the class watches as the players ad lib!
- Surprises – there are plenty in Morris Gleitzman's book! (eg: which dog did the biting, the softer side of Locklan, Cerberus' gentle nature etc) Some are prepared as surprises for others – such as Ginger's trip for Mr Wong, but many are completely unexpected – such as Mitzi's inclusion of Cornflake in her school bag! List the unexpected twists or events. What were the outcomes of these surprises? Create a role-play that makes the most of one of these surprising situations. Entertain the class with what did happen or what could have happened!