

GRADE 4 English Language Arts
Reading and Responding: Lesson 21
(continued from lesson 20)

Read aloud to the students the material that is printed in **boldface type** inside the boxes. Information in regular type inside the boxes and all information outside the boxes should **not** be read to students. Possible student responses are included in parentheses after the questions.

Any directions that ask you to do something, such as to turn to a page or hand out materials to students, will have an arrow symbol (\Rightarrow) by them.

Optional: At some point during the lesson, you may read the passage aloud so students can hear fluent, expressive reading and the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words. You may read the passage aloud at any point during the lesson as you feel appropriate. The decision to read the passage aloud should depend on student needs, the degree of text difficulty, and the particular lesson.

Purpose of Lesson 21:

In this lesson, the tutor and students will

- read and respond to a poem,
- identify the author’s purpose,
- connect literature to personal life,
- practice analytical thinking,
- write a response to the “Whatifs,” and
- write a poem.

Equipment/Materials Needed:

- Student Worksheet: Reading and Responding Lesson 21-1
- Student Worksheet: Reading and Responding Lesson 21-2
- Pencils
- One or more copies of Shel Silverstein's books (optional)

Today we will do some writing activities that go along with Shel Silverstein’s poem “Whatif.” First let’s read the poem aloud together so we can enjoy the way it sounds. After reading together, ask one or two students to read it aloud.

For this activity, students will have a copy of the poem (Student Worksheet 21-1) with spaces between the lines so they can respond to the *whatifs*.

1. Demonstrate answering a *whatif* question. Read aloud “***Whatif I flunk the test?***” (***Answer: I’ll get some help before I take the next one.***)
2. Get a student to respond to *Whatif the fish won’t bite?* Ask one or two more students to volunteer a response to one of the *whatifs*.
3. Ask students to write responses to each *whatif* in the space provided. (If this activity seems to be too much writing, ask students to respond to any 10 *whatifs* they choose).
4. Allow 15-25 minutes as needed. After students have completed their responses, discuss some of them.

⇒ Distribute Student Worksheet: Reading and Responding Lesson 21-2.

Now that we have read and discussed the *Whatif* poem, let’s see whether you can answer a few questions.

1. Why do you think the *whatifs* in this poem come at night? When do *your whatifs* come? Before you answer this question, can anyone tell me what kind of answer will be needed? Pause. This question asks for an opinion; will all of you have the same answers? Pause. The key words *what do you think* mean that this question is not asking for facts, but an opinion. Remember, your opinions are right if they can be supported.

I think *whatifs* come at night because that's when we get still and are not doing other things that might keep us from worrying. My *whatifs* come at almost any time, if I let them.

2. What does the author mean by saying the *Whatifs pranced and partied all night long*? (This question may be difficult for 4th graders to answer, but encourage them to try.)

Maybe this *whatif* is about people who can't sleep because they worry so much. I'm not sure exactly what the author meant, but this *whatif* makes me think about people who worry so much it seems as if they *enjoy worrying* as much as attending an *endless party*. Do you know anyone who worries all the time and seems to enjoy worrying?

Pause. Have students share.

3. Based on the *whatif* poem, what do you think the *author believes* about worrying? Circle each choice that you think the author believes. There can be more than one answer because the author can have many beliefs. Provide examples to support your answer.

Be careful about answering this question. It's a little different from other multiple choice questions you have had. This question is *not asking for the best answer*. It is asking for *all answers that make sense*. What are the key words? Pause. The key words are *author's beliefs about worrying*. When answering this kind of question, it is easy to get confused and begin responding as if the question asked for the *reader's* beliefs. **Remember, this question is asking about what the *author* believes, not what *you* believe.**

- A. All worries are very serious.
- B. We spend too much time worrying about things that won't happen.
- C. We should spend more time worrying and not just worry at night.
- D. When we are busy, we don't worry so much as when we are idle.
- E. Students worry a lot about what people think about them.
- F. Children are too young to have serious worries.
- G. Children's worries are just as important as adults' worries.
- H. The *whatifs* visit only children and *never* visit adults.

Allow students a few minutes to answer Number 3. Then go over each choice and discuss whether the author believes it and how we know it. Have students volunteer their answers and explain how they found them before providing the following answers and reasons underlying them.

The author's beliefs are B, D, E, G.

- **Choice A is incorrect.** One example of a worry that is not very serious is on line 7: *Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?*
- **Choice B is correct.** The whole poem is about worries and how they bother people; the third line says the Whatifs *pranced and partied all night long.*
- **Choice C is incorrect.** Since so many of the worries are about things that probably won't happen, the author probably thinks we spent *too much time* worrying.
- **Choice D is correct.** The *whatifs* probably come at night because we are too busy to listen to them during the day.
- **Choice E is correct.** Examples of student worries can be found in Lines 5 (*Whatif I'm dumb in school?*) and 11. (*Whatif I flunk the test?*)
- **Choice F is incorrect.** Several examples show that children have serious worries. One example is line 20. (*Whatif my parents get divorced?*)
- **Choice G is correct.** Two examples are lines 19 (*Whatif they start a war?*) and 20. (*What if my parents get a divorce?*)
- **Choice H is incorrect.** Several examples are probably about children's worries. All of the above examples are about children's worries. There are several more. Let's go down the list and see how many of these *whatifs* are children's worries.

Read each whatif line and ask students to decide whether or not a child would have this particular worry.

For the last activity, students will write their own *whatif* poems. Explain that these poems don't have to be so long as Silverstein's poem and that they don't have to rhyme. Allow students a great degree of flexibility in writing their poems. This activity may take as much as 30 minutes. When most students have finished, ask volunteers to share their poems.

Optional: End the lesson by reading aloud or having a student read aloud a selection from one of Silverstein's books.

Student Worksheet: Reading and Responding Lesson 21-1

WHATIF (Shel Silverstein)

Last night while I lay thinking here,
Some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
And pranced and partied all night long
And sang their same old Whatif song:

Whatif I'm dumb in school?

Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?

Whatif I get beat up?

Whatif there's poison in my cup?

Whatif I start to cry?

Whatif I get sick and die?

Whatif I flunk the test?

Whatif green hair grows on my chest?

Whatif nobody likes me?

Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?

Whatif I don't grow taller?

Whatif my head starts getting smaller?

Whatif the fish won't bite?

Student Worksheet 21-1 (continued from page 34B)

Whatif the wind tears up my kite?

Whatif they start a war?

Whatif my parents get divorced?

Whatif the bus is late?

Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?

Whatif I tear my pants?

Whatif I never learn to dance?

Everything seems swell, and then
The nighttime Whatifs strike again!

Student Worksheet: Reading and Responding Lessons 21-2.

1. Why do you think the *whatifs* in this poem come at night? When do *your whatifs* come?

2. What does the author mean by saying the *Whatifs pranced and partied all night long*?

3. Based on the *whatif* poem, what are the **author's beliefs** about worrying? ***There may be more than one answer.*** Provide examples to support your answer.
 - A. All worries are very serious.
 - B. We spend too much time worrying about things that won't happen.
 - C. We should spend more time worrying and not just worry at night.
 - D. When we are busy, we don't worry so much as when we are idle.
 - E. Students worry a lot about what people think about them.
 - F. Children are too young to have serious worries.
 - G. Children's worries are just as important as adults' worries.
 - H. The *whatifs* visit only children and *never* visit adults.