



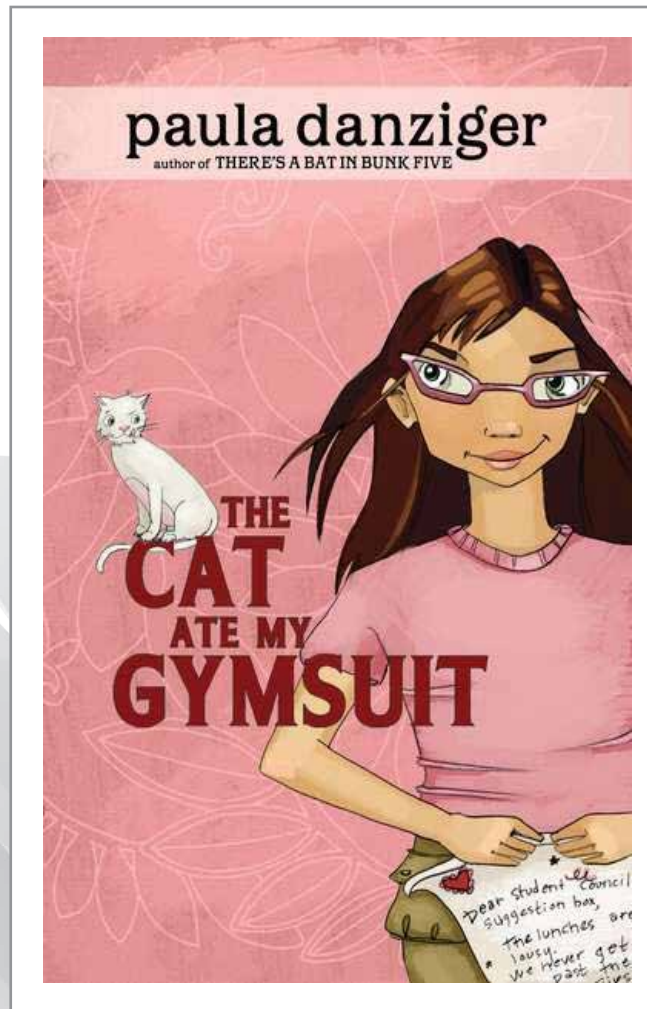
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Cat Ate My Gymsuit

Paula Danziger



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Cat Ate My Gymsuit

Paula Danziger

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	3
<b>Initiating Activities</b> .....	3
<b>Ten Sections</b> .....	9
Each section contains: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions, Supplementary Activities	
<b>Post-reading Discussion Questions</b> .....	28
<b>Post-reading Extension Activities</b> .....	29
<b>Assessment</b> .....	32

## Skills and Strategies

### Writing

Letters, reading log, poetry,  
newspaper articles,  
persuasive essays

### Vocabulary

Word mapping, synonyms,  
analogies

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interviewing,  
Readers Theatre

### Comprehension

Predicting, compare/  
contrast, main idea, cause  
and effect

### Literary Elements

Characterization, problem/  
solution

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research

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## Summary of *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*

Thirteen-year-old Marcy Lewis, the narrator, hates her tyrannical father, dislikes being overweight, worries about getting pimples, and wishes that her mother would stop nagging. She does have a pal, Nancy, but she suspects that their friendship only exists because their mothers are friends. And she does have a sweet four-year-old brother, Stuart, but there is only so far you can go in relating to a preschooler who puts orange pits into his teddy bear's head. Marcy is smart—but school is boring—at least until Ms. Finney comes to teach Marcy's English class.

Then, with the arrival of this sensitive, enthusiastic, innovative young teacher, things start to “look up.” Marcy loves the chance to explore her feelings during the after-school club Ms. Finney starts (“Smedley”). She enjoys her growing friendship with Joel, a new student. She begins to realize that her best friend Nancy likes her for herself, not just because Nancy's mother is a friend of Marcy's mother.

Unfortunately, not everyone likes Ms. Finney and her “radical” ideas and teaching methods as much as do her students. Marcy's father complains about the “ideas” Ms. Finney puts into Marcy's head, and blames what he sees as new rebelliousness on her teacher's “bad” influence. Joel's father, a member of the school board, admires Ms. Finney, but other board members and parents criticize her clothes and her techniques: group dynamics sessions, videotape productions, light shows, and student plays. Tension comes to a head when the principal suspends her for refusing to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Marcy, Joel, Nancy, and other students come to her defense, which leads to their suspension.

When Marcy joins other students in organizing a protest, she is surprised and pleased to find that her mother—usually so careful to placate Marcy's father—is on her side. At a tumultuous public hearing, the school board makes a statement that while it does not approve of Barbara Finney's failure to say the Pledge, it is within her legal rights. She is reinstated, and Marcy's hopes soar—only to be dashed a few moments later when Ms. Finney announces that she can no longer teach effectively in her former position, and resigns.

After their initial disappointment and sense of betrayal, Joel and Marcy realize that Ms. Finney is doing what she has to do. A month later, Marcy and her family are making some positive changes. Marcy's mother is taking night courses; Marcy is seeing a psychologist, losing weight, and continuing to grow closer to Joel. As for Ms. Finney, she is returning to graduate school for a doctorate in bibliotherapy—something Marcy decides she might like to do some day.

## Initiating Activities

1. What are the qualities of a good teacher? Think of one of the best teachers you have ever had. What sorts of things did you learn from him/her? What did you learn about yourself from him/her?
2. What is conformity? Who encourages you to be different? Are there times when it is more important to conform (or be different) than others?

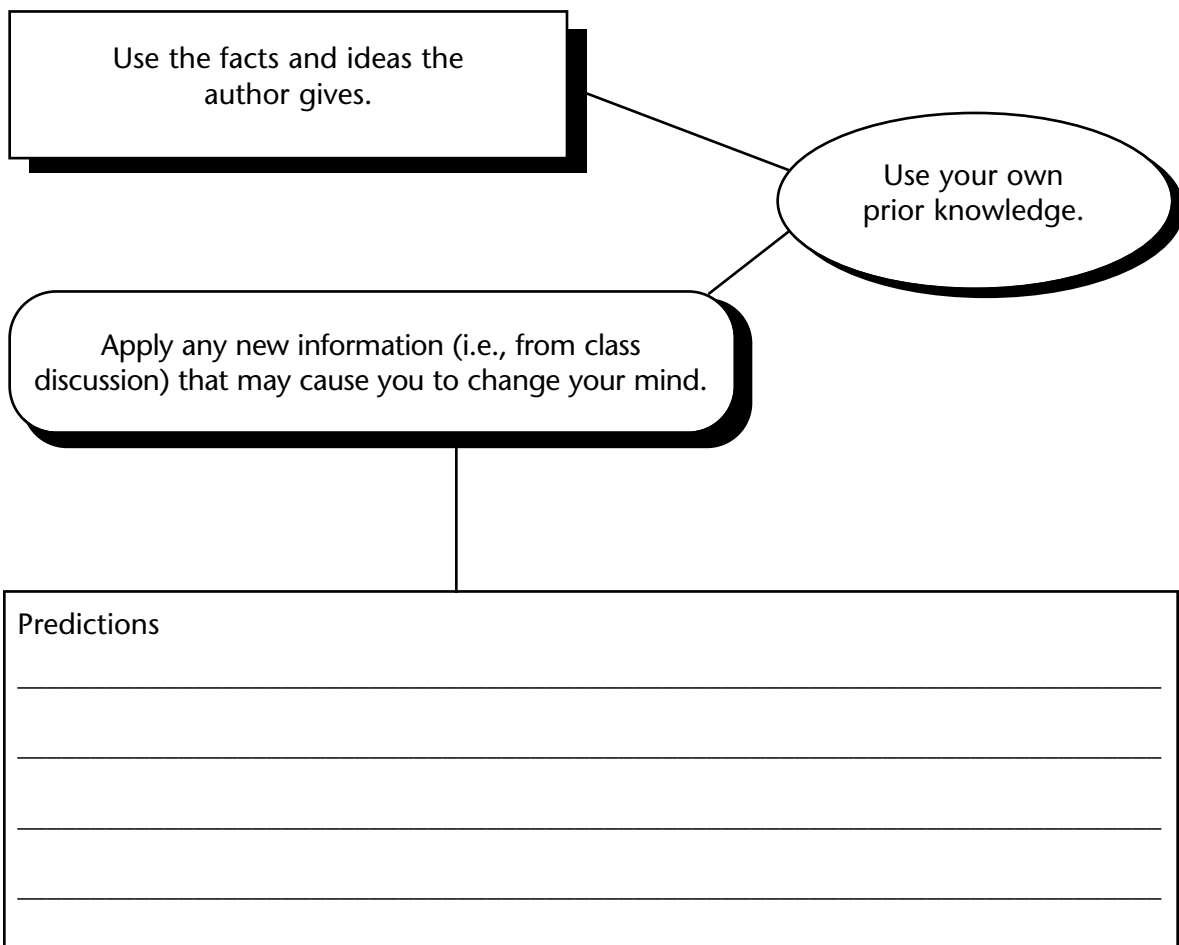
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## Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could be either an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.



- 
4. How does Smedley make things worse at Marcy's house? (*Marcy wanted to try some of the communication exercises at home, but her father wanted to watch television.*)
  5. Ms. Finney allows students to give an interesting kind of book report. What is it? Have your teachers ever allowed you to use different ways of reporting on books you have read? Which are your three favorite ways? (*Ms. Finney has her students role play various characters; other possibilities include—dioramas, tapes, videotapes, radio plays, poems, etc.*)
  6. Of the learning activities Marcy describes, which have you experienced? Which do you like? (*example: writing children's books and sharing with hospitalized children; team contests instead of typical tests; learning games to teach a lesson, such as how to derive meanings from context.*)
  7. **Prediction:** How will Marcy get detention?

### Supplementary Activity

Do one of the learning activities described in the book (e.g., make up a game board, like the one outlined on page 34 in the book, for testing spelling and vocabulary words).

## Chapters 7–9, pp. 36–52

### Vocabulary

images (37)	derivation (38)	loquacious (38)	siblings (38)
erudite (38)	recuperate (39)	syndicate (42)	concussion (48)
sensitivity-training (48)			

### Vocabulary Activity

Answer the following questions.

1. Can a two-year-old be erudite? (*no*)
2. Is sensitivity-training designed to help you improve your eyesight and hearing? (*no*)
3. Could you get a concussion by falling on ice? (*yes*)
4. Could your great-grandparents be your siblings? (*no*)
5. Do doctors want their patients to recuperate from operations? (*yes*)
6. Can a syndicate be illegal? (*yes*)
7. Does the derivation of a word tell you where it came from? (*yes*)

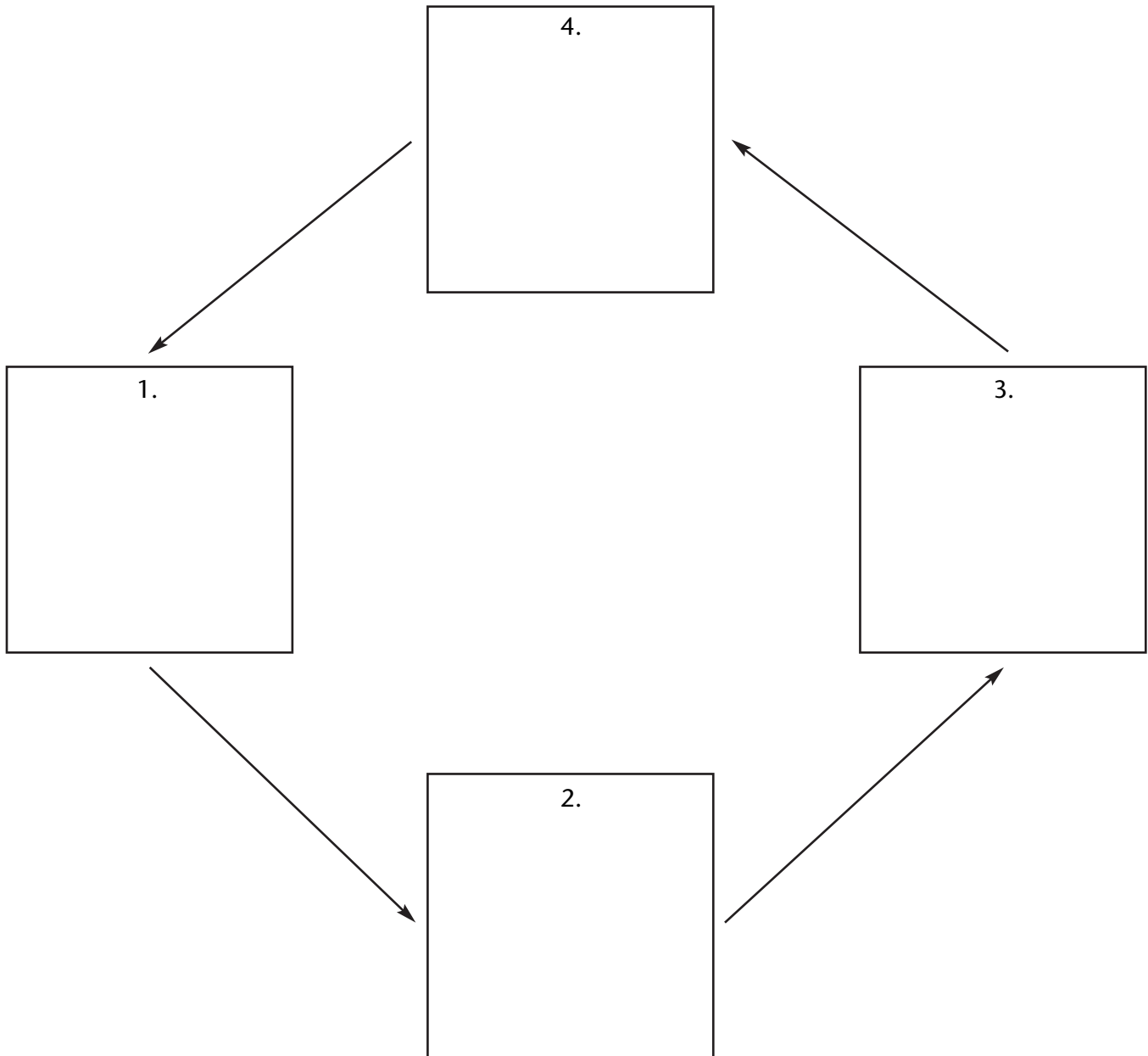
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## Cycle

The arguments in Marcy's house often start and end the same way. Briefly describe one of these "cycles" by labeling each box below. For example: What cycle of events often begins and ends with Stuart sucking his thumb?

*[Sample answer: 1. Stuart sucks his thumb; 2. Stuart's father criticizes him for sucking his thumb; 3. Stuart's mother takes a tranquilizer; 4. Stuart gets upset and sucks his thumb more than ever.]*

Describe the series of events in the four boxes below.



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## Vocabulary Activity

**Directions:** Write each vocabulary word in the left-hand column of the chart. Complete the chart by placing a check mark in the column that best describes your familiarity with each word. Working with a partner, find and read the line where each word appears in the story. Find the meaning of each word in the dictionary. Together with your partner, choose ten of the words checked in the last column. On a separate sheet of paper, use each of those words in a sentence.

Vocabulary Word	I Can Define	I Have Seen/Heard	New Word For Me