



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Misfits

James Howe

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Misfits

James Howe

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

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	5
Vocabulary Activities.....	5
Six Sections	7
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	18
Post-reading Extension Activities	20
Assessment.....	21
Scoring Rubric.....	31

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, brainstorming,
compare/contrast, pros/cons,
categorization

Comprehension

Prediction, sequence,
summarization, cause/effect

Writing

Poetry, persuasive and
informative speech,
transcript, essay, summary,
letter, magazine article,
character sketch

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
speech performance,
interview

Vocabulary

Definitions, pronunciation,
synonyms/antonyms, parts
of speech, context clues

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, theme,
characterization, point of
view, figurative language,
foreshadowing, genre

Across the Curriculum

Art—symbols, caricature,
abstract, modern artists;
History—civil rights
movement, Constitutional
Amendments; Politics—
American two-party system,
campaign strategies;
Rhetoric—ethos, pathos, and
logos; Health—stages of grief

Genre: young adult fiction

Setting: Paintbrush Falls, New York; Paintbrush Falls Middle School

Point of View: first person

Themes: individualism, self-confidence, overcoming stereotypes, fear of rejection, family, friendship

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. person

Tone: conversational, honest

Date of First Publication: 2001

Summary

Addie Carl, a seventh-grade activist, decides Paintbrush Falls Middle School needs a third party to run in the class elections. Together with her unpopular friends—Bobby, Joe, and Skeeze—she is able to overcome the administrative obstacles and form a new party. Her first party, the Freedom Party, disbands, but a new party, the No-Name Party, takes its place and runs on a platform of ridding the school of name-calling. The No-Name Party is narrowly defeated in the election, and the students learn to be true to themselves without worrying about what others think.

About the Author

James Howe was born on August 2, 1946. He began writing his first play at the age of nine or ten, a piece based on the comic strip “Blondie.” He went on to become a theater major at Boston University and did not consider writing as a career option, just as something to do for fun. He worked directing plays and serving as a literary agent in New York until he began writing full time in 1981. In the mid 1970s, he wrote *Bunnicula* with his first wife, Deborah. The *Bunnicula* series was quite successful, and the original book won the Young People’s Choice Award in 1982. Howe’s first wife died of cancer, and with his second wife he had a daughter, Zoey. This marriage eventually ended, and at the age of 51, Howe publicly revealed that he is a homosexual. He currently lives in New York State with his partner, Mark Davis.

After his success with *Bunnicula*, Howe continued to write for young children, working more on the *Bunnicula* series and creating the Sebastian Barth mysteries and the *Pinky and Rex* series. He began writing for young adults with his book, *The Watcher*. *The Misfits* was his second young adult novel and resulted in a spin-off, *Totally Joe*, in 2005. He has also edited two collections: *The Color of Absence: 12 Stories About Loss and Hope* and *13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen*. Howe admits that he doesn’t preselect themes for his books but that often the themes of friendship and being true to oneself emerge. He says he also likes to tackle difficult subjects with humor. *The Misfits* inspired the creation of a National No Name-Calling Week, the first of which was in March 2004. For more information about No Name-Calling Week, visit www.nonamecallingweek.org (active at time of publication).

Chapters 19–23

Bobby convinces Mr. Kiley and Ms. Wyman to allow the No-Name Party to exist. Mr. Kellerman tells Bobby about his own life and his mother's death. Addie continues to ask Bobby to help her prepare her speech for the elections, even though she is truly distraught over the question of whether Colin likes her. Bobby begins taking action to tell Kelsey he likes her. The Gang of Five realize people are calling each other names less and less, and they begin to believe they might win the election.

Vocabulary

coincide
disarm
impulsively
compelling
console
monastery
cranium
adamant
blatting
cardiac
ergo

Discussion Questions

1. Ms. Wyman does not want to hear Addie's explanation about the third party. Bobby, however, captures her attention with his arguments. Discuss the differences in Addie's and Bobby's approaches to both Ms. Wyman and Mr. Kiley. Why is Bobby's approach more successful than Addie's? *(Addie is ready for a fight, and her disposition is defensive and aggressive. She is ready with her arguments and logic. In the same way that Addie feels like she is not being heard, Addie also does not take a lot of time to listen to Ms. Wyman or Mr. Kiley. For example, when Mr. Kiley says he does not want to hear about fair or not fair, Addie continues to push that point. She does not want others to dictate her arguments. Also, because her arguments are so intellectual and grand in scope, she loses some of the deeper, more personal reasons that support her argument. Bobby is able to communicate the more emotional, personal reasons to Mr. Kiley and Ms. Wyman. Also, because he does*

not usually fight against the system, Ms. Wyman and Mr. Kiley realize that he is not just taking a stand because he does not want his rights violated or his freedom of expression revoked. They see that he is moved to action because he truly believes he can affect positive change that will benefit the other students. His ability to articulate the details of the No-Name Party's platform appeals to the adults, and they give the party permission to proceed in the elections. Of the three ancient persuasive methods—ethos, pathos, and logos, Addie uses logos [intellectual reasoning]. Bobby employs pathos [an emotional appeal] that makes the argument personal. It can also be argued that Mr. Kiley and Ms. Wyman perceive Bobby as having better ethos [character; spirit] than Addie. The "audience" who must be persuaded finds Bobby's character and approach more appealing than Addie's.)

2. Why do you think Mr. Kellerman chooses to open up about his life and grief over his mother's passing to Bobby, a twelve-year-old boy? How does Mr. Kellerman's life story relate to the larger message of being true to oneself and not letting others define you? *(Answers will vary. Though Bobby is young, he and Mr. Kellerman have both lost their mothers. Mr. Kellerman continues to talk because Bobby is willing to listen. Mr. Kellerman talks about listening to the people in his life when it came to making decisions and forming ideas about his identity. The author shows that the end result of a life lived based on believing you are only what others say you are, rather than figuring out who you are on your own, can lead to a small life with little happiness. Mr. Kellerman only pursued other people's desires for his life, never his own.)*
3. Why do you think Bobby does not want to have anything else in common with Mr. Kellerman besides a first name and the death of their mothers? *(Answers will vary. Perhaps Bobby finds Mr. Kellerman's life story unbearably sad and resolves to own his choices rather than let others dictate his entire life for him.)*

4. Why is Addie so upset about Colin? *(She realizes Colin did not think he was escorting her to the school dance, and Addie feels rejected, even though she still believes that Colin likes her.)*
5. Pam tells Joe that he will have to leave Paintbrush Falls in order to find other people like him. Do you agree or disagree that some towns are too small for some people, or do you think everyone should be able to find his/her place in whatever city or town he/she lives? *(Answers will vary.)*
6. The author communicates Bobby's phone conversation with Kelsey as a transcript. Do you think this is an effective way of communicating not only what both parties say, but also what each party is thinking or feeling? Explain your response using examples from the text. *(Answers will vary. A transcript style of communicating dialogue allows readers to infer what the characters are thinking or feeling since the author is not imposing his or her own impressions on the reader. It also keeps the author from being redundant in stating something that is obvious in the dialogue. The way the dialogue is written and what is said takes center stage. For example, students may comment on how they are able to determine that Bobby is nervous because of how he lies about his phone not working and repeats the same things over and over. It would be redundant for an author to then say, "Bobby is nervous," because his actions and words clearly imply that.)*
7. The Gang of Five continues to debate whether or not Colin likes Addie. Do you think Colin likes Addie? Consider the points Skeeze and the others make during lunch. Do you think it is possible for a popular person and an unpopular person to have a relationship? *(Answers will vary.)*
8. **Prediction:** Will the No-Name Party win the election?

Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: **Similes**—"chirping at other kids in the hall like they're Munchkins and she's Glinda, the Good Witch of the North" (p. 183); "Ms. Wyman's sigh is like a blanket she pulls over her on a cold morning" (p. 184); "something in his voice that is different, like he is opening a door to a room inside himself that no one goes in usually" (p. 200); "everybody broke into smiles, as if I was this surprise package" (p. 215)
2. Persuasion: The art of rhetoric includes three methods of persuasion—ethos, pathos, and logos. Research these three elements of persuasion, and write an essay defining each term.
3. Art: Kelsey mentions Andy Warhol and Chuck Close as artists whose portraits may influence her upcoming art project. Find a portrait by either of these two artists, and give the class a presentation about what is unique or interesting about the artist's technique.
Note to Teachers—Please be aware that not all art by these artists is suitable for middle-school viewing. You may wish to find several examples of each artist's work for students to choose from rather than letting them search on their own.

Characterization

Directions: Write the name of a character from the book in the center rectangle. In each oval, write an adjective that describes the character's personality. Then fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail about the character that illustrates that part of the character's personality.

