



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES K-3

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Olivia

Ian Falconer

**Olivia Saves
the Circus**

Ian Falconer

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Olivia

Olivia Saves the Circus

Ian Falconer

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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Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Summaries	3
About the Author/Illustrator	3
The Caldecott Medal	4
Initiating Activities.....	4
Section-by-Section	13
Each section contains: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Language Arts Activities	22
Art Activities	23
Science Activities	23
Assessment.....	28

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Critical thinking, classifying,
brainstorming, problem
solving, research

Listening/Speaking

Discussing, dramatizing, role
playing, debating

Comprehension

Predicting, comparing and
contrasting, analyzing

Writing

Creative writing, sentences,
poetry, lists, skits, tall tales,
pattern-writing, collaborative
writing

Vocabulary

Alphabetizing, defining,
writing

Literary Elements

Analyzing character, story
elements, exaggeration

Summaries

Olivia introduces a delightfully feisty young pig with boundless energy. Olivia is good at lots of things, like dressing up, singing songs, building sand castles, dancing, painting on walls—and wearing people out. Full of fun and also highly precocious, Olivia challenges her mother every step of the way. This illustrated story, Ian Falconer’s debut children’s book, is quickly becoming a classic.

In *Olivia Saves the Circus*, the spirited young heroine recounts her family trip to the circus. The performers are out sick, so naturally Olivia steps into the Big Top ring herself. Olivia rides a unicycle, jumps on a trampoline, juggles five balls, tames lions, and flies through the air—at least that’s how she reports spending her vacation to her class. *Olivia Saves the Circus* is a dryly humorous encore to *Olivia*, Falconer’s 2001 Caldecott Honor Book.

About the Author/Illustrator

Painter and illustrator Ian Falconer’s two picture books, *Olivia* and *Olivia Saves the Circus*, have been sold to date in 21 countries in 17 languages. *Olivia*, selected as the 2001 Caldecott Honor book, was a dramatic premiere for this first-time children’s book author: over 500,000 copies were printed in the U.S. less than a year after its initial publication. Ian Falconer is no newcomer to art, however. This shy, creative illustrator has designed covers for *The New Yorker* magazine; he has also designed sets and costumes for the New York City ballet and the San Francisco Opera. First approached by editor Anne Schwartz to illustrate a manuscript, Falconer instead presented her with *Olivia*, a picture book he had spent five years creating for his niece. Schwartz recalls *Olivia* as contemporary but timeless, the best work she had ever seen come from a portfolio. Fast becoming classics, *Olivia* and *Olivia Saves the Circus* possess instant appeal.

Ian Falconer combines expressive artwork with understated text in both picture books, using charcoal and gouache on paper as his medium. Because of his work on stage sets, he includes scenes about both the opera and ballet in *Olivia*. Details from paintings by Jackson Pollock and Edgar Degas further testify to Falconer’s originality. He was initially discouraged from making “circus” the topic for his sequel to *Olivia*. However, Falconer followed his instincts to create *Olivia Saves the Circus*, a book more about a child’s imagination than the circus itself. Falconer, who lives in New York City, has realized great success. He is, according to his editor, an author and illustrator in touch with his inner child.

Source: Gayle Feldman, “A Star is Born.” *Publisher’s Weekly*, September 10, 2001.

Olivia

From “This is Olivia.” to “She feels it’s important to come prepared.”

Vocabulary Activity

Add words from the book alphabetically to a class word wall. Select common words that children will use often in their writing. Practice the words by chanting and writing them.

Discussion Questions

1. Look at the picture of Olivia on the opening page. What book is she holding? (*a book entitled “40 Very Loud Songs”*) What is she doing? (*Olivia is singing.*) Predict some things that Olivia is good at. (*Answers will vary.*) What type of animal is Olivia? How can you tell? (*Olivia is a girl pig. She has a snout, pointed ears, and hooves.*)
2. Look at the pictures of Olivia in action. Describe some things that Olivia does to wear herself and other people out. (*Olivia hammers a nail, stands on her head, plays with a yo-yo, bounces a ball, stirs something inside a bowl, and jumps rope.*)
3. Why is Olivia looking at herself in the mirror? (*She is admiring herself as she plays dress up.*) What is Ian doing to copy Olivia? (*Ian is wearing lipstick, just like Olivia.*) How does he feel to be copied? (*Answers will vary.*) What are good reasons to copy other people? (*because you like them, or what others are doing seems fun*) What are some bad reasons? (*because you are making fun of them, or you want to make them angry*)
4. What does Olivia do when Ian won’t leave her alone? (*She scares him by wearing a paper bag mask.*) What would you do if a brother, sister, or friend kept bothering you? (*Answers will vary.*)
5. Who does Olivia live with? (*her mother, father, brother, dog Perry, and cat Edwin*) Who do you live with? (*Answers will vary.*)
6. What are some of Olivia’s morning activities? (*She moves the cat, brushes her teeth, and combs her hair.*) What are your morning activities? (*Answers will vary.*)
7. Name some of the clothing that Olivia tries on. (*caps, ear muffs, sunglasses, swimsuits, dresses, and more*) Which are warm weather items? (*the sunglasses, baseball cap, and swim suits*) Which are cold weather items? (*the gloves, ear muffs, cap, and sweater*)
8. What does Olivia bring to the beach so that she is prepared? (*ear plugs, goggles, floaties, and fins*) Why is it important to be prepared? (*Answers will vary.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Create an attribute web for Olivia, adding students' descriptions. Enlarge and use the attribute web on page 10 of this guide.
2. As a class, brainstorm a list of things that Olivia is/would be very good at. Then, have students illustrate one thing that they are good at, and add a dictation. Display the illustrations.
3. Instruct students to name some things they do that wear themselves and other people out. Students may use their ideas to create individual mini-books entitled, "(Student's Name) in Action."
4. As a class, classify Olivia's activities according to how long they would take to complete. Use the categories one second, one minute, or one hour. Time students bouncing a ball or playing with a yo-yo to verify their estimations. Brainstorm more examples for each category and record on a class chart.
5. Have students make a paper bag mask like the one Olivia wears to scare Ian.
6. Provide a standing mirror and a variety of dress-up clothes appropriate for boys and girls. Photograph the students playing dress-up to create a class book.
7. As a class, brainstorm a list of annoying things that younger siblings or friends do, such as take your toys or make a mess in your room. Now use the ideas to write a collaborative class poem on chart paper. Have students watercolor illustrations, cut them out, and add them to the chart.
8. Have students create an illustrated family tree showing the people they live with. They can also add extended family members or pets.
9. Have students brainstorm various morning and evening activities. Compile these ideas on a T-chart. Read the picture book *What the Sun Sees, What the Moon Sees* by Nancy Tafuri to the class. Have students create individual books about what they do in the morning and what they do at night using the double-ended book format of *What the Sun Sees*. The book can start from the front cover telling what children do in the morning, then start from the back cover telling what children do at night.
10. Bring in various items of clothing, one for each student in the class. Have students select an item of clothing and place it on a two-column floor graph. Into what two categories can the clothing items be sorted? Start with winter/summer clothing. Try sorting the clothing several times, each time using two new categories, such as stripes/no stripes. Keeping one of the floor graphs in place, have students draw their clothing item on an index card. Tape the cards on chart paper that has been divided