

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead

NOVEL UNITS[™]



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WHEN YOU REACH ME

by
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Teacher Guide

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author.....	3
Characters	4
Background Information	5
Initiating Activities.....	6
Vocabulary Activities.....	7
Seven Sections	8
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	21
Post-reading Extension Activities	24
Assessment.....	25
Scoring Rubric.....	38

Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, inferring, predicting, supporting judgments

Literary Elements

Characterization, story mapping, setting, conflict, theme, point of view, author's purpose, figurative language, genre

Vocabulary

Definitions, synonyms/ antonyms, word maps, root words, compound words

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, dramatizing

Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, poetry, journalism, essay, report

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, cause/effect, analysis, evaluation

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—history, Miranda rights, culture, friendship, relationships, homelessness; Science—time travel; Health—epilepsy, laughter; Math—hexagons, tesseraacts; Art—illustration, design; Music—composing

Things You Wish For—Things You Keep Secret

Miranda and Richard help Mom practice for *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, but they keep secret their plan for how to spend the winnings. Meanwhile Sal permanently ends his long-time friendship with Miranda, forcing Miranda to make friends with Annemarie. Later, while serving as an office monitor, Miranda meets Marcus, the boy who punched Sal. Marcus points out a time-travel flaw in Miranda's favorite novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. The ensuing conversation about time travel confuses Miranda; regardless, Marcus compliments her as a "pretty smart kid" (p. 52).

Vocabulary	
nonexistent	
official	
panic	
linoleum	
hexagonal	
et cetera	
prolong	
paraphrase	
ideal	
technology	
proposal	
pathetic	
revolved	
assure	
physics	

Discussion Questions

- Miranda does not miss her nonexistent dad. Do you agree with Miranda that "no person can't miss something she never had" (p. 28)? (Answers will vary. Miranda is comfortable with her life, and Mom and Richard fulfill her needs. However, in Miranda's favorite novel, the main character is searching for her missing father. Miranda may relate to the story and wonder about her father and how her life would be different if he were around.)
- What can you infer from Miranda's observations of the kid in the green jacket? (Answers will vary. The kid does not seem like a bully even though he did punch Sal. He is intelligent and knowledgeable as shown by his ability to tell time without a watch. Miranda's description of the boy's home, the attic room above the garage with dried plants and bedsheets for curtains, implies his family may be poor.)
- Why hasn't Miranda paid much attention to the other girls at school? What has she noticed about them? Do you think making friends with Annemarie means Miranda will be okay with Sal? (Miranda spent her time with Sal instead of the girls. She has noticed that the girls are nice to one another, often pair up and trade best friends, and some of them tease Alice Evans. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover the chapter title, "Things That Bounce," in relation to Miranda bouncing back from Sal's rejection of making new friends.)

- What does Miranda mean when she says, "Mr. Stard always makes my lips burn, but I didn't care. It was worth it" (p. 28)? (Answers will vary. Miranda wants to fit in and is willing to put up with small discomforts, such as burning lips, to be Annemarie's friend. Also, Annemarie's treatment is nicer than Miranda's and Annemarie's father took care for the girls. Miranda enjoys the excitement at Annemarie's house.)
- Why does Mom need the two weeks before going on the game show? Do you think Miranda and Richard are doing everything possible to prepare her? (Mom only answers four of six categories in the allotted time, which will prevent her from winning \$20,000. She needs more time to practice. Answers will vary. Miranda, Richard, and Mom are making practice sessions resemble the show. However, Mom is not practicing in front of an audience, which may make her nervous at the TV studio.)
- What reason does Mom give for Mr. Tompkin's class studying buildings every year? Do you think Mr. Tompkin made the right career choice? (According to Mom, Mr. Tompkin wanted to be an architect but became a teacher after avoiding becoming a soldier in Vietnam. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover the reasons Mom avoided the Vietnam era draft and the resulting consequences. Also, discuss staying true to yourself and whether Mr. Tompkin could still become an architect if he wanted to badly enough.)

7. Why is Miranda unaware of the dentist's office at her school? Do you agree that she should not tell Mom about the dentist? (*Students hide the fact that they have been to the dentist because they are embarrassed to be receiving free health care. Miranda does not want Mom to learn about the dentist because she may sign Miranda up for the free care. Answers will vary.*)
8. What does Marcus tell Miranda about time travel? What does he say about common sense? Does what Marcus says make sense to you? (*Time travel, in theory, is possible. According to Einstein, common sense is how people are accustomed to thinking, but the status quo can get in the way of what is true. People need to question common sense in order to learn new ideas. Answers will vary.*)
9. Why do you think Marcus does not notice things about people? (*Answers will vary. Marcus is preoccupied with his thoughts. With his love of math and physics, he is concentrating on solving problems and working out theories. He never reads while the dentist examines his teeth.*)
10. **Prediction:** What is Rickard and Miranda's secret plan for Mom's game show winnings?

Supplementary Activities

1. Science/Math: Research how to tell time with a clock. Demonstrate your findings to the class.
2. Math/Art: Miranda sees patterns and designs in hexagonal floor tiles. Create artwork that uses hexagons and math (e.g., concentric layers, fractions, puzzles). Include a caption explaining your artwork.
3. Architecture: Annemarie found a Main Street project as Miranda's class did. Elect a classmate as head of the Planning Board to approve all proposals.
4. Culture: Write a one-page report about Vietnamese culture and tradition. Include an illustration with your report.
5. Science/Speaking: Research why scientists believe time travel may be possible. (A good source to begin with is NOVA Online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/impact/> at time of publication.) Share your findings in class, and state whether you think time travel is possible.

Things That Smell–Messy Things

Jimmy hires Miranda, Annemarie, and Colin to work part-time at his sandwich shop. On Friday, Miranda returns home to an unlocked apartment door, and then Mom discovers the hidden spare key is missing. The following Monday, Miranda finds a perplexing note asking for the location of the apartment key. At the sandwich shop, Miranda discovers a second note that confuses and frightens her. Later, Miranda and Colin look inside Jimmy's plastic bank filled with two-dollar bills, and Miranda notices that Annemarie seems interested in Colin. Jimmy compliments Miranda's sense of humor for dubbing Jimmy, Annemarie's other friend, as "Swiss Miss." Battling for Annemarie's friendship, Miranda and Julia declare war on one another.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it fair that Jimmy hires Miranda and her friends and then does not pay them with money? How would you explain his actions? (*Answers will vary. Jimmy may be lonely and want the kids' company but is too cheap to pay them. Discussion could cover child labor laws. Also, students could compare Miranda's school's off-campus policies to their school's.*)

The Title Tells All

Directions: Use the chart below to describe a chapter from the novel.

Title of chapter:

Based on the title, what do you think this chapter will be about?

At the space provided below, create an illustration for the chapter based on the title.



After reading this chapter, write a brief summary below.

Character Attribute Web

Directions: The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about Miranda in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases that tell how Miranda acts and looks, as well as what she says and feels.

A character attribute web for Miranda. At the center is a circle labeled "Miranda". Four lines radiate from this circle to four rectangular boxes: "Acts" (top-left), "Says" (top-right), "Looks" (bottom-left), and "Feels" (bottom-right). Each box is connected to the central circle by a line. Below each box are four numbered lines for writing.

Acts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Says

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Miranda

Looks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Feels

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Sociogram

Directions: A sociogram shows the relationship between characters in a story. Complete the sociogram below by writing a word to describe the relationships between the characters. Remember, relationships go both ways, so each line requires a descriptive word.

