



MISS NELSON IS MISSING!

Based on the book Miss Nelson is Missing! by Harry Allard and James Marshall

Book, Music & Lyrics by Joan Cushing

A California Theatre Center Study Guide for Teachers and Students

SYNOPSIS

The students in Room 207 are notorious for misbehaving. They just don't seem capable of following the rules and being respectful to their kind and gentle teacher, Miss Nelson. One morning Miss Nelson is mysteriously missing from school and the students have a moment of satisfaction, thinking that they have succeeded in driving her away. Their celebration turns quickly to dread when the substitute teacher, the strict and formidable Miss Viola Swamp, descends upon the classroom. Soon the children are inundated with homework in a military-style classroom and even have their storytime taken away! Ultimately, the students realize how terribly they miss Miss Nelson and decide to take matters into their own hands. After an unsuccessful attempt to enlist the assistance of a police detective, the children decide that it was their own behavior that drove her away and set about to right their wrongs. To the students' delight, the clever Miss Nelson returns to room 207 the very next day and is somehow knowingly pleased to find a newly appreciative and much more respectful version of her class!

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. How do the children of Room 207 treat Miss Nelson? Why do you think they behave this way?
2. What is respect? How do obedience and being unselfish relate to respecting others? How does Room 207 learn to respect Miss Nelson?
3. What is the true identity of Viola Swamp? What are some other ways Miss Nelson could have gained the respect of her students besides tricking them?
4. Discuss Pop Hanson's role as the narrator of the play. What is the purpose of a narrator? Why do you think the author chose to make one of the characters a narrator?
5. Observe the students' behavior as the story progresses. In what ways does their behavior change the longer they are without Miss Nelson?
6. Make two columns on the board and use them to compare and contrast Miss Nelson's and Viola Swamp's classroom management techniques. Which teacher's methods are more effective?
7. Discuss Detective McSmogg. What makes him such a good comic character? Why does he want to search for Miss Nelson in such far-off places?

LITERATURE

1. Read Miss Nelson is Missing! by Harry Allard and James Marshall to familiarize students with the story. Talk about what they expect from a theatrical performance of the story.
2. In the play, Miss Nelson reads Pinocchio to her class. What kinds of things can the kids in Room 207 learn from this story? Compare the themes of Pinocchio to those of Miss Nelson is Missing!.

CREATIVE WRITING

1. A journal or diary is often a daily record of personal activities, reflections, feelings, events, and/or observations. If Miss Nelson, the students of Room 207, Pop Hanson, or another character from the story kept a journal, what do you think he or she might have written? Choose a character from the play and write a journal or diary entry from his/her perspective.
2. What if the kids discovered that Miss Nelson was pretending to be Viola Swamp? Write an alternative ending to the story.
3. Miss Nelson's students do not fully appreciate what a wonderful teacher she is until they are without her. Think of a time in your life when you lost something and only realized how much you appreciated it after it was gone, and write a short essay about it.

4. The students of Room 207 write a letter to Miss Nelson apologizing for their bad behavior and begging her to return. Imagine you are one of Miss Nelson's students and write a letter to her, asking her to come back to your class.

5. Miss Nelson's students experience a full range of emotions between the time that they learn Miss Nelson is gone and when she returns. It starts with elation, followed by confusion, fright, determination, abandonment, relief, and in the end, gratitude. Think of a time in your life when you experienced any or all of these emotions and write about it in the form of a short story told from your perspective.

ART

1. Make a mural. On a large piece of paper, draw the progression of events that happen to the students of Room 207 over the course of the play.

2. Mr. Blandsworth shows the students slides of his pet goldfish. Draw a series of pictures of your own (real or imaginary) pet that you could present to your class as a "slide show".

3. Mr. Blandsworth also tells the students about his ballpoint pen collection. As a class or in small groups, decide on an item to collect. See how many different varieties of your item your group can find. Make an artistic display of your items for others to view.

4. Using crayons, markers, and or construction paper, create a new disguise for Miss Nelson (besides Viola Swamp). Display your pictures on the bulletin board.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. "Miss Nelson is Missing!" is a musical. Several of the songs are written in very distinct musical styles. Research the musical styles of Waltz, March, Ragtime and Rock and Roll. In which time period did each style originate? Are the styles still popular today? Find examples of each style and share them with your class.

2. Pop Hanson likes to reminisce about the past. Interview a person older than you (for example, a teacher, cousin, uncle or aunt, neighbor, parent or grandparent) about what school was like when they were your age. How was school different back then? How was it the same?

3. Draw a map of the town Miss Nelson lives in. Include Horace B. Smedley Elementary School, Miss Nelson's house, the Police Station, and Lulu's Ice Cream Parlor.

4. Research and discuss the methods that real-life law enforcement officers use to solve cases.

5. Detective McSmogg sings about the exotic locations in which he will search for Miss Nelson. Choose one (or more) of the following and research the history, geography and culture of the historic location/area. Prepare a presentation for you class based on what you have learned.

SIBERIA
ANCIENT RUINS OF PERU
SEVEN SEAS
TIMBUKTU
EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS
CATACOMBS OF ROME
BAVARIAN CASTLES

ARABIA
HIMALAYAS OF TIBET
JUNGLES OF BOTSWANA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
ANTARCTICA
SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

SCIENCE

1. One of Room 207's favorite ways to disrupt class is by throwing paper airplanes. What is aerodynamics? Explore how different shapes move through the air by making several types of paper airplanes. Which airplanes fly the fastest or smoothest? What makes some fly more efficiently than others? Look at <http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/paper.htm> for different paper airplane designs.

2. Mr. Blandsworth demonstrates birdcalls for the students of Room 207. Go to the library or on the internet and research the calls of several different birds. Try to recreate the sounds yourself.

THEATRE/PERFORMANCE

1. Two actors in the show play multiple roles. How do they disguise themselves as new characters in a short amount of time? What do they change about their appearance (hair, makeup, costume)? What do they change physically (voice, movement, posture)? Try it yourself! How much can you change your appearance by changing your body movements, facial expression, and voice?

2. The play takes place in several different locations: the School, Miss Nelson's house, the Police Station, and Lulu's Ice Cream Parlor.

a) How does the set designer of the play change the scenery to show the audience that we have moved to a new location? This play makes use of set pieces called "periaktoi" which are revolving triangular prisms with a different setting painted on each side. The periaktoi are designed to complement the backdrop of the play and provide a fast and effective way to change the setting of the play. What are some other creative ways to change settings?

b) How does the scenery suggest each location? What sorts of moods do the design elements (such as color, line, texture, etc.) create?

c) Draw pictures of your own set for "Miss Nelson is Missing".

3. Several scenes in "Miss Nelson Is Missing!" begin with lively dialogue which establishes the scene, followed by a song which helps to drive the scene along. In what ways does music enhance these scenes and the story as a whole?

4. Put on your own musical! In small groups, choose a song to learn. Make up your own choreography (movement or dance) to go with your song and perform it for your class.

WRITE TO CTC!

After watching the play, write about it. Tell what you liked or disliked about the story, the characters, costumes, or set. Support your thoughts with examples and reasons. *Mail to:* CTC, P.O.Box 2007, Sunnyvale, CA 94087. Teacher's comments are appreciated!