

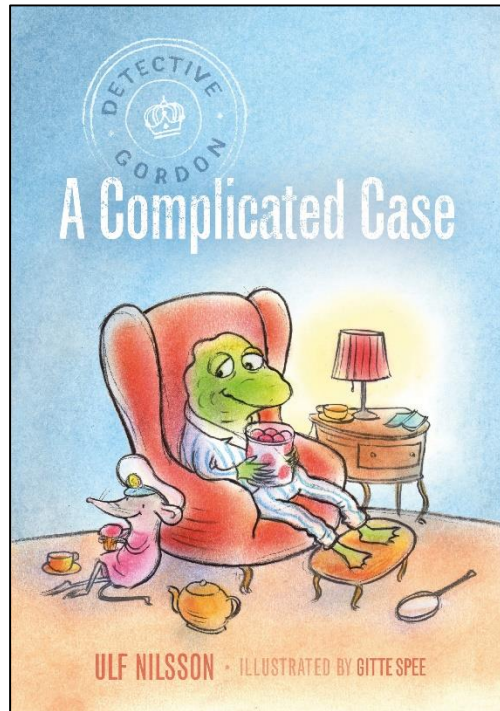


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Teaching Notes

Detective Gordon: A Complicated Case

Written by Ulf Nilsson and illustrated by Gitte Spee



Synopsis

The detective lay in bed with his eyes closed. But he couldn't sleep. He was thinking. He always thought best in bed. Especially with his eyes closed. Something is going on in the forest. The animals are troubled. But no one dares make a statement to the police. Detective Gordon and his assistant Buffy must investigate! It is a complicated case. The two police officers split the workload: Buffy questions the suspects, while Gordon stays in bed to think. Will they discover and deal with the culprit? Or will the case prove to be too complicated for this duo?

The Author

Ulf Nilsson is a celebrated Swedish children's writer, who has written over twenty books for all ages. Ulf has received the prestigious August Award and the American Batchelder Award.

The Illustrator

Gitte Spee graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, a renowned academy of fine art and design in the Netherlands. She now works in Amsterdam as a children's book illustrator.



Themes

This warm and funny illustrated chapter book explores several themes. These include, friendship, bullying, kindness and exploring morals and values.

The first theme evident is that of friendship. Gordon and Buffy are not only colleagues, but also great friends. They admire and appreciate each other's personality traits and talents and use these in order to work as a dynamic investigative police team.

Another theme illustrated is that of the importance of a safe and happy environment in which to live. Gordon and Buffy are determined to make the forest that they police a nice place for them and the other animals to inhabit.

Bullying is a major theme. It is evident to Gordon and Buffy that the animals are troubled, and despite the animals being unwilling to talk to them, with some clever police work including the help of tasty cakes, they soon discover that someone in the forest is bullying the other animals, teasing and mocking and thus creating unhappiness and a bad atmosphere.

A further theme explored is that of ethics and morals. The episodes of bullying lead Gordon and Buffy to endeavour to find ways in which all animals can live in harmony. With empathy and the 'Book of Law' on hand, Gordon and Buffy delve into the ethics of the importance of being nice rather than nasty, which actions should be forbidden, and how to implement the tools to reach the ultimate goal of having a forest in which all animals can happily live and play together. Gordon and Buffy become living examples for all the animals as they personify the values that they hold dear throughout their investigation.

Determination, bravery and embracing your emotions are other themes that are illustrated. In their mission to find the bullying culprit, Buffy and Gordon are faced with frightening and uncomfortable situations, such as when Gordon interviews the snake and Buffy is bullied by the crow. They find that they must grapple with all of the accompanying emotions that arise from these interactions. Although they are brave, they realise that they are also normal and therefore fallible and susceptible to feeling a wide range of emotions. In the course of the book they deal with jealousy, anger, embarrassment, empathy, pride and finally the happiness that they so desire for all of the animals they police.

Two further themes in the book are those of humour and the joy and power of delicious cakes. Both are helpful during cross-examinations and their investigation of the complicated case.

Activities

1. Look at the cover image and title. What do you think this story might be about?
2. Anthropomorphism is when gods, animals or things are depicted with human attributes and behaviours. Find five examples of this from the book. Find other books where animals are depicted in this way, for example, *Wolf and Dog* (Gecko, 2013), *The Day No one was Angry* (Gecko, 2015) or *Travels of an Extraordinary Hamster* (Gecko, 2015).



3. After reading the book, choose and discuss your favourite moment in the book. Then write a plot summary of the events leading up to, or following on from, this moment.
4. There are many language features in the book, for example, similes, onomatopoeia, alliteration and idioms. Find the definition of each, match each with the following examples from the book and then find more examples for each from the book:
 - 'full of beans' (p. 9)
 - 'answers were like tufts of wool' (p. 36)
 - 'stomp, clomp, clump, and whoops' (p. 85)
 - 'grumble and gripe' (p. 87)
5. Gordon and Buffy have very distinct personalities? Do you like them as characters? Why/why not? Write a character study on either Gordon or Buffy. Think about their physical appearance and character traits, such as Gordon's 'flat feet' (p. 6) and his empathy (p. 87) or 'small and clever' Buffy (p. 8).
6. Examine the illustrations in the book. Do you like the style? What colours are used? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Choose your favourite illustration from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it, for example, a painting, drawing, photograph, model, poem, etc. Or, design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
7. In pairs, discuss what you think are the most humorous elements in this book and how they succeed in being funny and entertaining.
8. Choose and complete one of the following creative tasks:
 - Gordon and Buffy enjoy using the official police stamp (p. 13). Design your own official stamp.
 - Buffy uses her strong sense of smell to evoke places, such as the scent of a vanilla cake which 'smelled of wind, flowers and big, faraway mountains' (p. 13) and also to help solve the case when she sniffs out the rabbit droppings that 'smell of wool, carrots, and grass' (p. 96). Use either smell, or one of the other five senses, as inspiration to write an illustrated descriptive paragraph or poem.
 - Choose another character from the book, other than Gordon and Buffy. Use it as the main character and inspiration for a short story about the complicated case taken from your chosen character's point of view, for example the crow or magpie. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your own children's picture book of your story.
 - Gordon summarizes the 'Book of Law' (p. 46). Think of five rules that would feature if you were to write a 'Book of Law' for your class.
 - Gordon enjoys sleeping and dreaming (p. 51). Write a descriptive paragraph about a dream you have had.
 - Gordon feels bad about teasing the goose (p. 78) and writes a letter to ask the goose to forgive him (p. 81). Write this letter from Gordon to the goose.
 - Many of the animals are being bullied in the forest. As a class, discuss what you think bullying involves, and different types of bullying. Decide



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which events in the book are examples of bullying. Then, in groups, design an anti-bullying campaign for your age group. The campaign could include elements such as pamphlets, scripts for school talks, radio jingles, posters, slogans, etc.

9. Gordon states that morally: “everyone knows inside them what is right and wrong. The ‘Book of Law’ is already written in the heart” (p. 75). As a class, divide into debating groups and debate this statement as a moot.
10. In groups, adapt an episode or chapter from the book for a performance in your classroom. Devise a script, create scenery, choose music and make costumes or puppets to represent each character. Act your adaptation out for your class. If you have access to a video camera, film it.
11. Review the book for your favourite magazine, website or blog. What do you like about it? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten.
12. Detective Gordon also features in the book *The First Case* (Gecko, 2015). If you have not done so already, find and read this book.