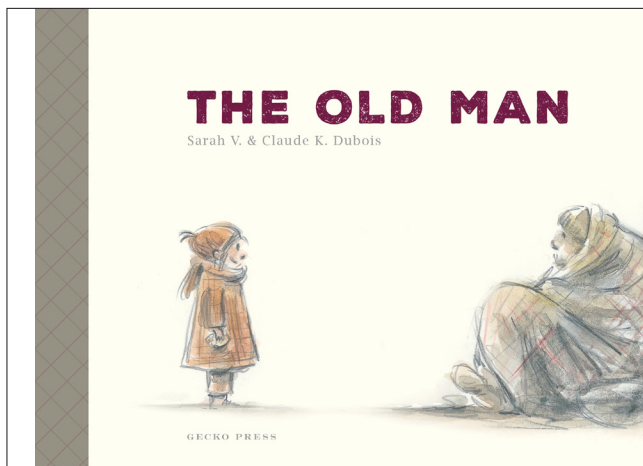


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Teaching Notes



The Old Man

Sarah V & Claude K Dubois

Synopsis

Day breaks over the town. Wake up, everybody! It's time to go to school. It's time for the old man to get up, too. The night was icy and he's hungry. His name? He no longer knows...

This is the story of a person with no job, no family, no home—a nobody, who can't even remember his name. But his day changes when he is noticed by a child.

This gentle, compelling book will appeal to children's sense of justice and to every reader's compassion.

The Author

Sarah V. was born in Belgium in 1985. Her parents were artists and she spent her childhood surrounded by books. This book grew from her work with homeless people.

The Illustrator

Claude K. Dubois was born in Belgium. She has published nearly eighty children's books for which she has received several awards. She is also a sculptor and painter.

Themes

Key themes in this compassionate and yet unsentimental story about homelessness include empathy (understanding others' feelings and experiences), social isolation, and inequality. The Old Man is an opportunity to learn about and consider how people are affected by adverse life events and how more fortunate people respond to this.

Activities

Level One – Text (Before and While Reading)

1. Before you read the book, look at the cover (front and back) of the book. What can you tell about the story from the title, font, illustrations, and blurb? Think about the colours and style of illustrations and what they might tell you about what sort of story this is.
2. Either on your own or in pairs find the definition of the following words that appear in the story and then use them in a new sentence:
 - Gurgling
 - Bothering
 - Radiator
3. As you read think about why Claude K. Dubois, the illustrator, has chosen not to show most characters' faces.

Level Two – Responding to the Text and Reading Between the Lines (While Reading)

1. Looking at the first picture and words, what clues are there about what sort of day it is? Weekday? Weekend? Work/School day or holiday? Aim for 2-3 clues.
2. In the first pages, what clues are there about the season and weather? When (what time of year) is the story set?
3. Look closely at the picture of the man holding the umbrella. What appears to be on the ground behind him? Do you think the man with the umbrella has noticed this? What feelings do you have looking at this picture?
4. What clues are there in the story that our main character is not the only homeless person in this town?
5. Why do you think the old man had a “hard night”? What would be “hard” about sleeping on the streets?
6. The old man doesn't remember his name. Why might this be?
7. What emotions do you think the old man feels when the child on the bus says that he stinks? What would you like to explain to the child?

Level Three – Creating Based on the Text

1. In pairs or on your own, create a guide for helping homeless people in your town/city. Think about health and safety issues. How can they keep themselves safe? Where can they access food, shelter, and medical support? Your guide could be a pamphlet or a poster and should include illustrations or other pictures.
2. Inequality is a big issue in the world today; some people have far more than they could ever need while others barely have enough to survive. Some organisations redistribute (share) quality, fresh food to people who need it that would otherwise be thrown out. In groups of 3-4, choose a resource that everyone needs to survive and/or for their health and safety. Next design a plan that would redistribute this resource from people who have more than they need to others who don't have enough.
3. The old man says, "It's the best sandwich in the whole world." Create your own best sandwich that you would want to give to someone who is cold and needs sustenance and good nutrition.

Level Four – Beyond the Text

1. In pairs or small groups, describe and discuss your morning routines. How do you feel when you first wake? How do you know if you've had a good or bad sleep? How important is your bed? The room where you sleep?
2. Homelessness. As a class discuss homelessness. Is it "normal"? Do you believe that there will always be homeless people? Do you see homeless people in your town/city? What are people's attitudes towards the homeless people? Are they ignored? Or are you aware of people trying to help homeless people?.
3. There are different reasons why people might be homeless. See if you can come up with at least four different reasons. Next, research someone's personal story about homelessness.
4. Think of four things that you can do right now that you couldn't if you were homeless. It might be making a packed lunch or having a safe place to store personal possessions. Share in small groups or with your class.

