

Main
Street
Theater

The hilarious sequel to *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*
Barbara Robinson

The Best School Year Ever



THEATER FOR ^{ALL} [^]
YOUTH
Study Guide



YOU THINK YOUR SCHOOL IS WILD?

Welcome to Woodrow Wilson Elementary, where one school year is about to be turned completely upside down— thanks to the Herdmans.

The Best School Year Ever bursts onto the stage with non-stop laughs, unexpected lessons, and the most unforgettable kids you'll ever meet. The Herdmans are loud, wild, totally out of control, and nobody knows what to do with them. Teachers panic. Parents hide. And their classmates? Well... they're just trying to survive until summer.

But when the class is given an assignment to say something nice about everyone, things take a surprising turn. Can anything good be said about the Herdmans?

Get ready for a heartwarming and hilarious journey through a year of mischief, mayhem, and maybe even a little redemption.

GUIDE CREDITS

Vivienne St. John, *Theater for Youth Artistic Director*

Jenn Wigle, *Guide Creator*

Melanie O'Neill, *Graphic Designer*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Barbara Robinson

Barbara Robinson grew up in the small town of Portsmouth, Ohio, where everyone knew everyone. From the local blacksmith to the mailman and the stories practically told themselves! Her mom was a teacher for 49 years and loved books more than anything, so Barbara learned early on that reading was the best way to fill every spare moment.

She started writing poems, plays, and stories as a kid and never stopped. In fact, she loved books and the stage so much that she went to Allegheny College to study both. After writing dozens of short stories for magazines, Barbara found her favorite kind of writing: books for kids!

She's best known for creating the wild, hilarious, and totally unforgettable Herdman kids in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* and its sequels, including *The Best School Year Ever*. Her stories are full of laughter, heart, and just the right amount of chaos because she knew the best readers in the world are kids who want stories that are exciting, funny, and real.

Barbara lived near Philadelphia with her two daughters, Carolyn and Marjorie, and her grandchildren, Tomas and Marcos and they all love to read just as much as she did!

ABOUT THE SHOW

LENGTH: AT THE MATCH: APPROXIMATELY 75 MINUTES INCLUDING A SHORT TALK BACK WITH ACTORS

Audio Description is available at all school performances with advance notice. Using a single earpiece connected to an infrared headset, patrons who are blind or have low vision can listen to trained audio describers give live, verbal descriptions of actions, costumes, scenery, and other visual elements of a performance.

The theater is equipped with Listening Technologies to help patrons who require additional audio support in performances. Patrons can request use of an assisted hearing device.

THE ACTORS LOVE TO RECEIVE FAN MAIL FROM THE CHILDREN!

(send to)

Main Street Theater // Attn: School Bookings
3400 Main Street, Suite 283, Houston, TX 77002

CAST OF CHARACTERS

IMOGENE HERDMAN

The loud, bossy leader of the Herdmans. She's tough, fearless, and always has a sharp comeback. But every now and then, she surprises people with a flash of heart.

RALPH HERDMAN

Big, quiet, and always hungry. Ralph doesn't say much, but he's always at the center of the action - especially if food is involved.

LEROY HERDMAN

Sneaky and full of wild ideas. Leroy is the kind of kid who can turn a science project into an explosion on purpose.

CLAUDE HERDMAN

Loves destruction more than anything. If something's broken or blowing up, Claude probably had something to do with it.

OLLIE HERDMAN

A younger Herdman who tags along in the chaos. He's small, scrappy, and always ready to follow his brothers' lead.

GLADYS HERDMAN

The tiniest and fiercest Herdman. Gladys is all energy and attitude and never backs down from a fight.

BETH BRADLEY

The narrator of the story, a classmate of the Herdmans. She's smart, observant, honest, and just trying to make sense of a school year that keeps getting stranger.

ALICE WENDELKEN

A rule-follower and class perfectionist. Alice always has neat handwriting, a sharp eye, and something to say about the Herdmans.

MISS KEMP

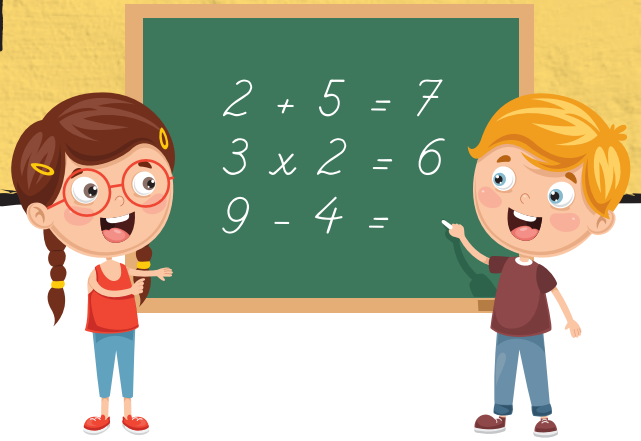
The class teacher with a big heart and even bigger patience. She believes every student has something good inside.

PRINCIPAL ROONEY

The school principal who's just trying to survive another year with the Herdmans. He's seen it all... almost.



MATH MISCHIEF WITH THE HERDMANS



This math challenge is based on our wild adventures with the Herdmans in *The Best School Year Ever!* Use your math brain to solve these Herdman-inspired word problems. No chaos allowed! (Well, maybe just a little.)

1. IMOGENE BROUGHT SOMETHING CHAOTIC TO SHOW-AND-TELL (AGAIN). OUT OF 24 STUDENTS:

- 6 students brought in “typical” items
- 10 students forgot
- The rest were too scared to go after Imogene

a. How many students were too afraid to go?

b. What fraction of the class brought in “typical” items?

2. RECESS STARTED AT 10:30 AM. THE HERDMANS SPENT

- 5 minutes arguing
- 7 minutes hiding under the slide
- 3 minutes chasing each other
- 5 minutes in the principal’s office

a. How many total minutes of recess did they use up?

b. What time did they finally return to class?

MATH MISCHIEF WITH THE HERDMANS (CONT'D)



This math challenge is based on our wild adventures with the Herdmans in *The Best School Year Ever!* Use your math brain to solve these Herdman-inspired word problems. No chaos allowed! (Well, maybe just a little.)

1. THE SCHOOL SOLD TICKETS TO THE TALENT SHOW

- 34 adults bought tickets at \$2 each
- 46 kids bought tickets at \$1 each

a. How much money did the school raise in total?

b. If Miss Kemp used \$25 for snacks, how much was left?

2. CLAUDE HERDMAN BROKE 3 ZIPPERS ON HIS BACKPACK IN THE FIRST WEEK

a. How many zippers will he have broken after 4 weeks?

b. If a new backpack costs \$15, and he needs one every 3 weeks, how much would it cost for 9 weeks?

THE COMPLIMENT CHALLENGE

In *The Best School Year Ever*, Miss Kemp gave the class a very special assignment: Write something nice about every single classmate — even the Herdmans! Now it's your turn!

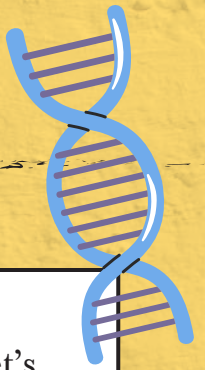
Write a thoughtful compliment to at least 3 people. It can be for classmates, family, or friends. Be specific with sentences like, "They always include others at recess."

Why do you think Miss Kemp gave this assignment?





HERDMAN APPROVED SCIENCE

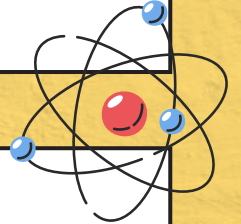


OBJECTIVE

Inspired by the time the Herdmans caused a sticky mess in school... again. Let's try to understand what makes something sticky!

MATERIALS

- 1 tbs corn syrup, honey, water, cooking oil, soda (like cola)
- Spoon or dropper
- Paper or cardboard (test surface)
- Timer or clock
- Ruler (optional)
- Pen or pencil for notes



INSTRUCTIONS

- Label 5 spots on your paper/cardboard: Syrup, Honey, Water, Oil, Soda
- Use a spoon or dropper to place a small puddle of each liquid in the labeled spots.
- Let all liquids dry overnight.
- The next day, gently touch each dried spot and observe: which is stickiest and which is not stick at all?
- (Optional) Try to measure how far a cotton ball sticks when pressed and lifted – or just describe the stickiness in words.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- Which liquid was the stickiest? Why do you think that is?
- If Imogene were trying to make a giant mess at school, which liquid would she pick and why?
- Predict what might happen if we tried this same experiment on a hot day vs. a cold day?

DESIGN YOUR OWN HERDMAN EXPERIMENT

Use the scientific method to create a simple, classroom-safe experiment inspired by the Herdmans.

EXAMPLE

Gladys spills an unknown sticky substance in the hallway.

- Experiment Question: *Which household liquid makes the stickiest mess when dried?*
- Hypothesis: *Corn syrup will be stickier than soda or juice.*
- Test: *Let equal amounts of each dry overnight on paper and test their stickiness the next day!*

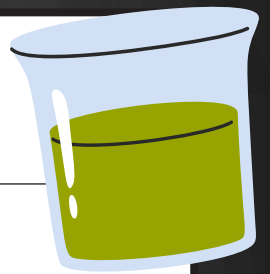
Question: What do you want to find out?

Hypothesis: What do you think will happen? Why?

Materials: List the items you would need.

Procedure: Describe step-by-step what you would do.

Results: What is the outcome of the experiment? Did it match your hypothesis?

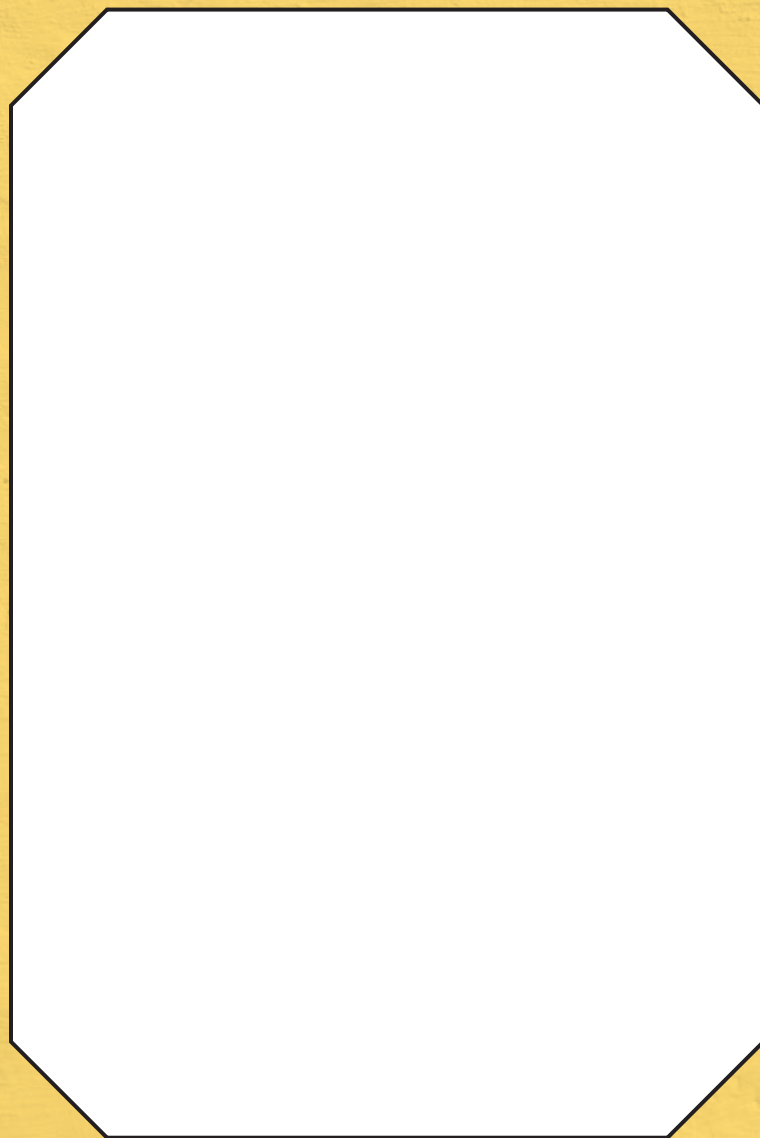


WOODROW WILSON ELEMENTARY



Each of the Herdmans had their own wild personality and stories. Imagine your school let you create a yearbook page just for one of the Herdmans.

In this activity, draw a yearbook photo and fill out the information below.



YEARBOOK PHOTO

NAME OF STUDENT:

BEST KNOWN FOR:

MOST LIKELY TO:

**FAVORITE QUOTE (MAKE UP
SOMETHING FUNNY THAT THEY
MIGHT SAY):**

CLASS SUPERPOWER:

STORY ANALYSIS



PROBLEM

What was the main problem in *The Best School Year Ever*?

SOLUTION

How did the problem get solved?

FEELINGS

How did the play make you feel

CHAT WITH A CHARACTER

If you could talk to one of the characters, what would you say or ask? Can you relate to any of the characters? Explain how and why.

HERDMANS IN ESPAÑOL



Even the Herdmans need to learn a little Spanish... eventually. Let's help Miss Kemp out by matching these Spanish school words to their English meanings! Draw a line from the Spanish word to the English word.

SPANISH WORD

1. la escuela
2. el maestro
3. el libro
4. la tarea
5. el lápiz
6. el estudiante
7. la mochila
8. la clase

ENGLISH WORD

- A. homework
- B. student
- C. teacher (male)
- D. school
- E. classroom
- F. pencil
- G. backpack
- H. book

If you had to teach Spanish to the Herdmans, what do you think would happen? Write 1-2 silly sentences below.

COVER TO COVER: REDESIGN THE BEST SCHOOL YEAR EVER

Design a brand-new book cover for *The Best School Year Ever* by Barbara Robinson. Think about the wildest, funniest, or most surprising part of the story. What scene, character, or moment deserves to be front and center?

Your cover should include: a new illustration that represents the story, the title, the author's name, and a tagline or short phrase that describes the book.



SCHOOL THEN AND NOW

In this activity, you'll compare what school was like "back then" (as shown in the book) with what school is like today. You'll answer a few questions that ask you to think about changes in technology, behavior, rules, and classroom life. You can use examples from the book, your own experience, or what you've learned from others.

What tools or materials do students use in the book or play (like chalkboards, pencils, etc.)? What do students use in classrooms today?

What do students do for fun or during breaks in the book or play? How does that compare to your school experience?

Is there any mention of computers, phones, or other technology in the book or play? How is technology used in school today?

Do the students in the book follow clear rules? How do today's classroom rules compare?



HERDMAN HUNT: WORD SEARCH MAYHEM

The Herdmans have caused chaos again—but this time, it's in your word search! Hidden in the puzzle are words related to *The Best School Year Ever*, including characters, places, and events from the story. Look up, down, across and diagonally to find all the hidden words. Circle each word once you find it.



B	A	S	C	C	H	A	R	L	I	E	I	E	A
D	A	L	L	C	L	A	U	D	E	I	O	A	I
G	M	L	E	M	O	O	R	S	S	A	L	C	D
L	R	I	Y	R	H	Y	R	T	A	S	L	A	C
A	U	I	S	T	O	O	E	K	I	O	I	H	H
D	D	N	E	S	O	Y	C	L	I	A	E	E	A
Y	C	B	B	D	K	E	A	M	I	H	S	R	L
S	L	R	M	C	I	E	R	C	H	C	M	D	K
A	E	E	E	O	R	O	M	H	S	E	A	M	B
C	T	A	L	E	N	T	Y	P	N	I	E	A	O
E	A	E	V	I	T	A	E	R	C	L	C	N	A
I	L	R	U	L	A	L	I	B	R	A	R	Y	R
L	A	P	I	C	N	I	R	P	C	T	L	R	D
M	E	U	T	B	L	T	I	M	O	G	E	N	E



CLAUDE

CREATIVE

OLLIE

CHAOS

TALENT

LEROY

HERDMAN

PRINCIPAL

BETH

MISS KEMP

CLASSROOM

IMOGENE

CHARLIE

CHALKBOARD

GLADYS

LIBRARY

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

In *The Best School Year Ever*, the Herdman kids shake up the school with their wild and sometimes unkind behavior. This activity helps us think about how to treat others kindly.

You will see a list of different actions that students might do. For each kind action, explain why it is kind. For each action that needs work, explain how you could instead do it in a kind way.

1. Saying “thank you” when someone helps

2. Shoving to be first in line

3. Ignoring someone on purpose

4. Taking turns in a game

5. Listening while someone is talking

6. Laughing when someone messes up

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES LESSONS FROM THE HERDMANS



In *The Best School Year Ever*, the Herdman kids are different from the other students. At first, everyone thinks they are troublemakers, but by the end, the class learns to understand and appreciate them more. This story can help us think about how we treat people who seem different from us – including people from different cultures.

Pick a culture that is different from yours:

What is one thing about that culture that you find interesting?

How is it different from what you are used to?

What kind of food is popular in the other culture?

What types of clothing or dress are traditional in the culture?

What holidays are celebrated in that culture that are different from yours?



CLASSROOM CONSTITUTION

Inspired by the Herdmans (who probably never read the real rules), let's create a set of fair, kind, and respectful classroom guidelines that help everyone feel safe and valued—without total chaos!

What rules should every classroom have to help people feel safe and respected?

How should students treat each other, even if they're very different (like the Herdmans)?

What are some examples of kind behavior that should be encouraged every day?

If someone breaks a rule, how can the class help them do better next time?

What should we do if someone is being left out, teased, or treated unfairly?

What's one fun or creative rule that makes our classroom a happy place?

PUZZLE KEY

PAGE 12

1. la escuela → D. school
2. el maestro → C. teacher (male)
3. el libro → H. book
4. la tarea → A. homework
5. el lápiz → F. pencil
6. el estudiante → B. student
7. la mochila → G. backpack
8. la clase → E. class

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B	A	S	C	C	H	A	R	L	I	E	I	E	A
D	A	L	L	C	L	A	U	D	E	I	O	A	I
G	M	L	E	M	O	O	R	S	S	A	L	C	D
L	R	I	Y	R	H	Y	R	T	A	S	L	A	C
A	U	I	S	T	O	O	E	K	I	O	I	H	H
D	D	N	E	S	O	Y	C	L	I	A	E	E	A
Y	C	B	B	D	K	E	A	M	I	H	S	R	L
S	L	R	M	C	I	E	R	C	H	C	M	D	K
A	E	E	E	O	R	O	M	H	S	E	A	M	B
C	T	A	L	E	N	T	Y	P	N	I	E	A	O
E	A	E	V	I	T	A	E	R	C	L	C	N	A
I	L	R	U	L	A	L	I	B	R	A	R	Y	R
L	A	P	I	C	N	I	R	P	C	T	L	R	D
M	E	U	T	B	L	T	I	M	O	G	E	N	E



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