

The World of Ramona

A Teaching Guide for Beverly Cleary's Ramona Books

**“Ramona is one of the funniest
little sisters in fiction.”**
—*New York Times*



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THE WORLD OF RAMONA TEACHING GUIDE

Ramona's Lasting Appeal

Ramona Quimby has been a favorite character for several generations of readers. The stories about Ramona continue to appeal to children because they provide comfort, humor, and insight as well as entertainment. Many people feel that they, or someone they know, have a little—or maybe a whole lot—of Ramona in them. Readers of all ages can relate to Ramona because she experiences the same emotions—fear, disappointment, anger, confusion, and joy—that all children experience. Knowing that children and adults enjoy spending time with her in the world that Beverly Cleary created would undoubtedly bring Ramona the same deep satisfaction that we derive from reading her books.

About The Ramona Books

Beverly Cleary presents five years of Ramona's life in eight delightful chapter books:

Beezus and Ramona

In *Beezus and Ramona*, Beezus, who is just turning ten, finds four-year-old Ramona to be an exasperating little sister—one who invites her nursery school friends to an unplanned party, takes one bite out of each apple in the box, and spoils her birthday cake—twice.

Ramona the Pest

Ramona becomes the focus of Beverly Cleary's next book, *Ramona and the Pest*, in which Ramona goes to kindergarten. She is disappointed when they do not learn to read on the first day. Getting new red rain boots helps her feel better, as does being the "baddest witch in the world" for Halloween, but Ramona becomes a temporary kindergarten dropout when she succumbs to temptation and pulls Susan's enticingly springy curls.

Ramona the Brave

First grade gets off to a bad start in *Ramona the Brave* when the class teases Ramona for exaggerating about the hole "chopped" in her house for the extension that will be her new room. This year she must adjust to her mother working part-time, and, as it turns out, the fear of sleeping alone in her new room. However, learning to read excites Ramona, making first grade worthwhile after all.

Ramona and Her Father

In the Newbery Honor Book *Ramona and Her Father*, Ramona is starting second grade when Mr. Quimby loses his job. Ramona worries because her unemployed father is often cross, her mother is anxious about money, and Beezus, who has reached a difficult age, is frequently disagreeable. Ramona is determined to save her father's life by helping him quit smoking. When Mr. Quimby finds another job, Ramona's family seems to be returning to normal.

Ramona and Her Mother

Ramona and Her Mother begins on New Year's Day with a celebration of Mr. Quimby's new job. Mrs. Quimby continues to work, so Howie's grandmother looks after Ramona. Ramona longs to be her mother's girl, as people say Beezus is. She decides to run away from home, but when her mother tells her that she could not get along without her, Ramona's hurt feelings dissolve.

Ramona Quimby, Age 8

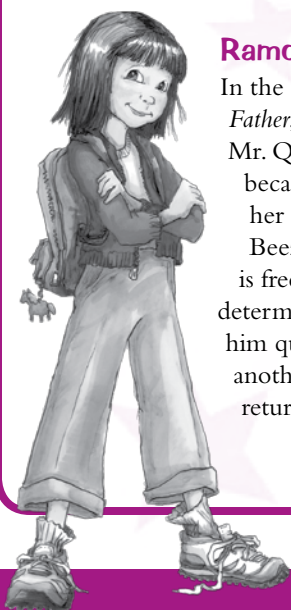
Ramona starts third grade in the Newbery Honor Book *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. This year she rides the bus across town to Cedarhurst Primary School. Anxious for her father to find a job that he likes, Ramona is happy when he returns to college to become an art teacher. She tries to uphold her responsibility to the family by being nice to Willa Jean while Howie's grandmother watches them after school.

Ramona Forever

Ramona's resolve to be helpful with Willa Jean crumbles in *Ramona Forever* when she realizes that Howie's grandmother, Mrs. Kemp, does not like her. The Quimbys decide that Beezus and Ramona can stay by themselves after school. Ramona is dismayed when Howie's uncle Hobart and her aunt Beatrice announce their marriage plans. At the wedding, Ramona and Uncle Hobart make their peace, and she warms to Mrs. Kemp. The birth of the fifth Quimby, Roberta, expands Ramona's happy family.

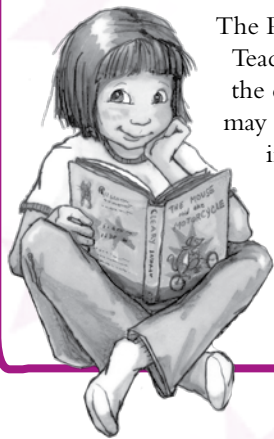
Ramona's World

Beverly Cleary brings Ramona's life full circle in *Ramona's World*. Ramona is now an older sister, and she is the same age that Beezus was in the first book. Beezus, who is in high school, continues to provide Ramona with glimpses of what lies ahead. Their father, although not an art teacher, has a job that supports his family and is once again good-natured. With a baby in the house, Ramona's mother no longer works outside the home, which allows Ramona more of the mother-daughter moments she cherishes. Ramona is happy and eager to enter the tenth, or zeroteenth, year of her exciting life.



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Suggestions for Classroom Use



Read-Alouds

The Ramona books are wonderful read-alouds. Teachers may want to read all eight books to the class over the course of the year, or they may decide to select the books that take place in the same grade that their students are in. Parents interested in reading to their children at home may want to follow the teacher's lead and make sharing the Ramona books a family activity.

Independent Reading

Mrs. Whaley, Ramona's third-grade teacher in *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*, gives the class DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time. Ramona enjoys reading independently without having to write summaries or list vocabulary words. Encourage students to read the Ramona books during DEAR periods in their classes.

Literature Circles

Arrange for four to six students to meet as a literature circle to discuss the Ramona books. By sharing their reactions, opinions, and feelings with their classmates, students will better be able to understand and appreciate Ramona's experiences. Each literature circle should prepare a project based on its book(s) to present to the class.

Extension Activities

Reading

"I can't read and it isn't fair," protests Ramona in *Beezus and Ramona*. Throughout the series, Ramona's love affair with books grows. As a preschooler, her favorite picture books are about steam shovels with lots of noises and fairy tales with witches, goblins, and ogres. At night, however, she prefers cozy stories about bears and bunnies. When Ramona daydreams about having her mother to herself in *Ramona and Her Mother*, she imagines her mother selecting books from her bookcase that she enjoyed hearing as a child. Using the descriptions Beverly Cleary provides in the various Ramona books, ask students to figure out which books might be in Ramona's bookcase. Set up a Ramona bookcase in the classroom and invite students to read the books that Ramona loves.

In *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*, Ramona is pleased that she can now read chapter books and is delighted to discover that she can read the menu at Whopperburger without relying on the pictures. Have students reflect upon their experiences learning to read. Ask them to write journal entries in which they try to remember what it was like not knowing how to make sense of the printed word.

Spelling

In fourth grade, Ramona is faced with the daunting task of improving her spelling. She finds it tedious to look up words and appreciates people who know what she means and let misspelled words pass. Unfortunately, Mrs. Meacham demands correct spelling and precision of language. She is proud of Ramona and Daisy when they reprimand an accountant for using "gonna" and "shoulda" in an advertisement. Challenge students to bring in examples of misspelled or nonexistent words that they find in newspapers, magazines, books, and elsewhere.

Creative Writing

In *Ramona and Her Father*, Beezus, who dreads creative writing because she does not believe she is imaginative, is relieved when the assignment is: "interview some old person and ask questions about something they did when they were our age." The interviews written by Beezus's classmates are to be compiled into a class book. Help your students enter Beverly Cleary's world by giving them this same assignment.

Throughout the books, Mr. Quimby spouts wise sayings he learned from his grandmother. Ask students to compile the wise sayings of Mr. Quimby's grandmother and discuss what they mean. Encourage students to add some of their family sayings to the collection and also to write some of their own.

Art

Ramona enjoys crayoning because it makes her troubles fade. She and her father work on drawing the longest picture in the world on a roll of shelf paper. They draw the state of Oregon by choosing important landmarks, such as the interstate highway and Mount Hood. Assign pairs of students this same project using a different state. What landmarks do they select for their pictures?

Drama

Beginning in *Ramona the Pest*, Ramona notices many things about grown-ups. Her general observation is that most grown-ups don't understand children's feelings, and she is happy when she finds one who does—at least sometimes. Drawing on Ramona's running commentary about grown-ups throughout the eight books, have students make a list of Ramona's rules for how grown-ups should behave. Students should then create a dramatic presentation designed to inspire adults to behave better.

Teaching Guide created by Elizabeth Poe, West Virginia University.

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A Conversation with Beverly Cleary

Phillip Powell for BigTime Video Services, Monterey, CA



What inspired you to create the character of Ramona?

Well, she was really an accidental character. When I was writing *Henry Huggins*, it occurred to me that all the children appeared to be only children. I thought I should put somebody else in, so I was starting to put in a little sister

and someone called out to a neighbor who was named Ramona, so I called Beezus's little sister Ramona. She has continued to grow in the books, somewhat to my surprise. I hadn't really intended to write so much about her, but there she was. She kept hanging around, and I kept having Ramona ideas.

How do you approach writing a Ramona book?

Oh, very messily. I usually start with a couple of ideas, not necessarily at the beginning of the book, and I just write. Sometimes I have to go back and figure out how a character got to a particular part. In *Ramona and Her Father*, I wrote the part about the sheep costume last. Actually, I was asked to write a Christmas story about Ramona for one of the women's magazines. I did this, and called it "Ramona and the Three Wise Persons." But in writing the story, I was thinking how Ramona got to the point where she was wearing a sheep costume made from old pajamas. So after that story was published, I wrote how she got to that point. So in this case, I wrote the last chapter first.

Of course this is against everything people are taught about writing, but I don't believe that outlining works for fiction because if you have it all worked out, it becomes boring. So I just write. I really enjoy revising more than writing. I love to cross things out and cut a page down to one paragraph. I think sometimes beginning writers are so impressed with what they

have written that they can't really judge it. I know I wouldn't want to see anything published as I wrote it initially because it changes so much in the writing. I revise until a little light bulb clicks off and I know it's done. I just know when it feels right. My first editor told me I was an intuitive writer. I hadn't really thought about myself that way, but I guess she was right.

Were you taught creative writing in school?

Oh no, goodness no. I didn't have anything like creative writing until I was in the eighth grade, when the Portland School System changed to the platoon system, and we had some younger teachers who were more creative than those I'd had before. I'm surprised sometimes that I've written anything. We were always supposed to produce things exactly the same, but these younger teachers encouraged creativity. And the school librarian took a special interest in me. She encouraged me by saying that someday I should write for children. It seemed like a good idea.

There is a thirteen-year age gap between the time you wrote *Beezus and Ramona* and its first sequel, *Ramona and the Pest*. What made you decide to revisit Ramona?

Oh, I kept thinking about her. She was around in *Ribsy* and in several of the other books about Henry Huggins and his friends, and my editor had wanted me to write a book about her for years. But Ramona would be in kindergarten, and I hadn't gone to kindergarten and didn't know anything about kindergarten. But as the years passed, I had twins who went to kindergarten. Twins are a great advantage because they compare notes at the dinner table. I learned a lot about kindergarten that year and felt I had enough knowledge to write about it. Now the moment was right, so I did it.



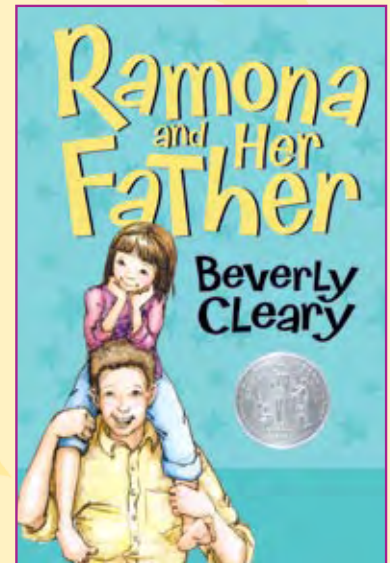
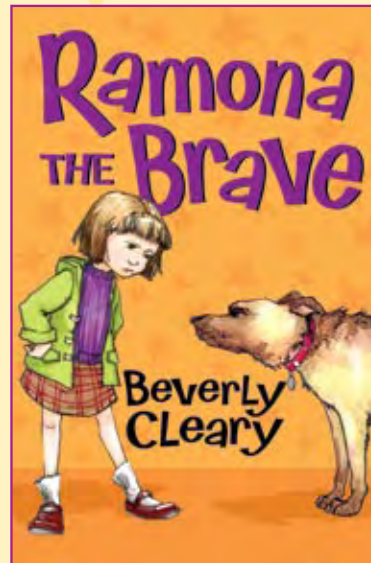
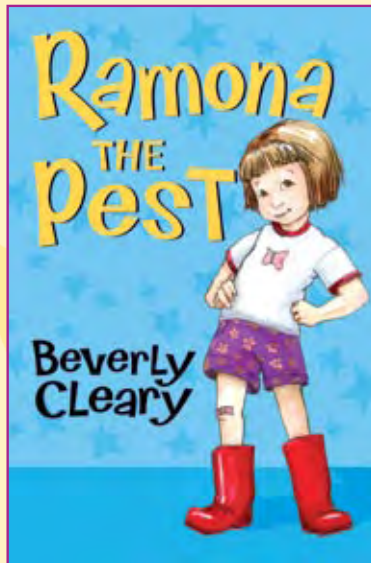
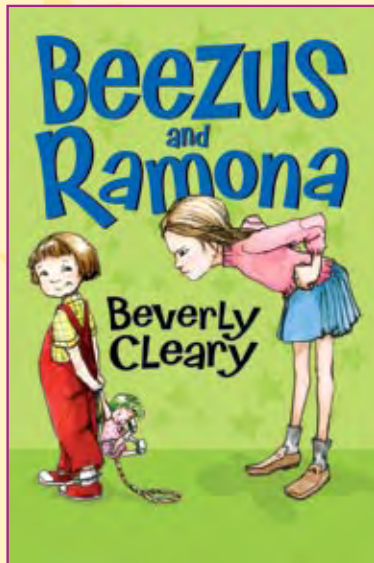
Acclaim for Beverly Cleary

Beverly Cleary, a perennial favorite among children, has received more than thirty-five state awards for her books—all based on the votes of young readers. Other awards for Beverly Cleary include:

- Newbery Honor for *Ramona and Her Father*
- Newbery Honor for *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*
- Newbery Medal for *Dear Mr. Henshaw*
- American Library Association's Laura Ingalls Wilder Award
- Catholic Library Association's Regina Medal
- University of Southern Mississippi's Silver Medallion
- Children's Book Council Everychild Award
- Library of Congress "Living Legend"

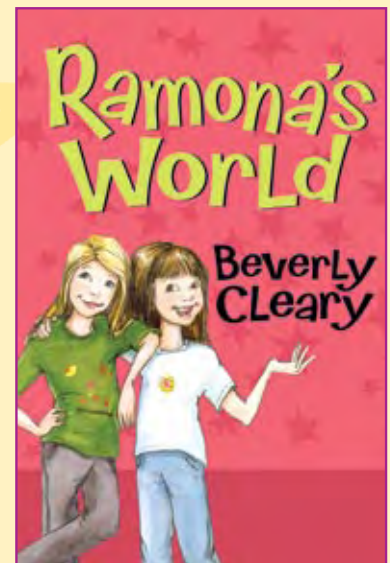
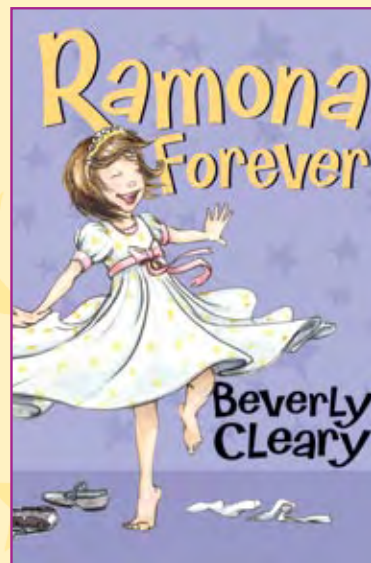
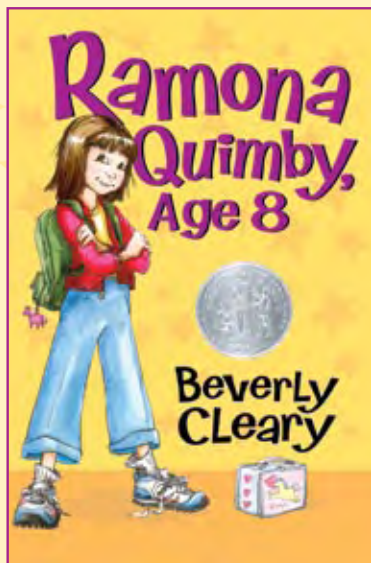
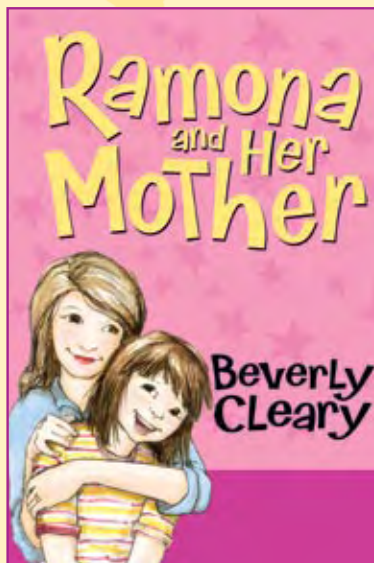
Read ALL of Ramona Quimby's Adventures!

Follow along from Ramona's days in nursery school to her "zeroteenth" birthday



"It's a rare thing to be hailed by audience and critics alike.
In Mrs. Cleary's case, everyone seems delighted."

—*New York Times*



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