

Teachers Notes: Squishy Taylor & the Bonus Sisters



About

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Tagline

An apartment full of questions on a street full of mysteries.

Blurb

1. Why does Squishy have to share everything with her new family?
2. Why is her next door neighbour the crankiest man in the world?
3. Why are green jelly snakes the yummiest?
4. Who's that hiding in the basement?

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Record any unfamiliar words and make a class dictionary
- Draw a story map
- Explore the way body language is used to tell a story
- Interview someone and reflect on understanding others
- Have a class discussion about secrets, and make a set of guidelines about which kinds of secrets you should keep, and which you should share

About the story

Squishy Taylor lives in an apartment with her dad and Alice, their baby, and her two stepsisters - Jessie and Vee. She's down in the garage getting baby wipes one day when she hears it - a rustling, scuttling noise made by something much bigger than a rat. What or who is hiding in the garage?

Squishy chases the noise and discovers a boy hiding in the old cleaning storeroom. She knows immediately that he's run away because his school backpack and sleeping bag are laid out on the floor behind him. The boy, John, tells Squishy that he'll be in big trouble if he goes home, maybe even sent to jail! Squishy promises not to tell anyone his secret, and says that she'll even bring him food down after dinner, as long as he promises to tell her what he's hiding from.

When everyone's in bed, Squishy tiptoes down to the garage, trying not to wake up any of the neighbours. John tells her his story while he eats leftover garlic bread and meatballs. His name is John Smith, and he's on the run from the

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police because he stole a tram and now they want to put him in prison! Squishy is horrified, and determined to help him. But when she opens the door to leave, Vee is standing on the other side.

Vee agrees to keep John a secret. Now Squishy and Vee have something in common – and Jessie isn't happy about it. She knows something's up, and so when Vee and Squishy go to take John food again, she worms her way into going with them. Squishy and Vee have to be super sneaky to get the food to John without giving him away. It's not all bad though, because as they arrive home, Squishy, Vee and Jessie catch their nasty neighbor Mr Hinkenbushel yelling at Alice. Now all three of them have something in common – they all want revenge on horrible Mr Hinkenbushel.

Squishy starts thinking that maybe her stepsisters aren't so bad. Maybe her dad's right, and it is more like having two bonus sisters. She even decides to let Jessie in on the John secret. But Jessie and John's first meeting doesn't go exactly as planned. As soon as Squishy introduces them, Jessie accuses John of lying about his name. Not only is she right, but it turns out that John (or Not-John) has been lying about everything! He hasn't stolen a tram, and the police aren't after him. Squishy is upset that he's lied, but still convinced that something horrible must have happened to make Not-John run away. Something like having Mr Hinkenbushel as a dad. Even when they get a missing poster at home, and Jessie and Vee both think they should tell their parents where Not-John is, Squishy wants to keep his secret.

Squishy, Jessie and Vee have a huge fight, and Vee tells Squishy's dad about their revenge on Mr Hinkenbushel – Squishy left a huge bag of dog poo on his doorstep! She's in big trouble, and miserable because Vee's betrayed her. Squishy's right back to hating her stepsisters, and seriously considering moving overseas to live with her mum.

Squishy realises that she needs to know the truth about what Not-John's really running away from. She begs Jessie to wait half an hour before she turns him in, and races downstairs to the garage. But when she explains her theory about Mr Hinkenbushel being Not-John's awful dad, he just looks at her like she's crazy. It turns out that Not-John has run away just because his dad has a girlfriend who's going to move in! Hearing Not-John talk about how much he hates the idea of a stepfamily makes Squishy realise how she feels about her own. She comes up with a plan. She tells Not-John to wait by the grate, and races back upstairs.

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Squishy gets her dad, Vee and Jessie, and asks Alice to meet them outside with Not-John's dad. She makes sure they're all standing on the bit of footpath near the grate that goes down into the garage. While they're waiting for Alice and Not-John's dad, Squishy apologises to Jessie and Vee – she tells them how upset she is that they were mean to each other, and explains why she loves having them in her family – not as stepsisters, but as bonus sisters. Alice arrives with Not-John's dad. It's definitely not Mr Hinkenbushel. Squishy turns to him and asks him how he feels about losing his son. They're right next to the grate, so Not-John hears how afraid and unhappy his dad is. It's enough to make him come out of hiding – Squishy's plan has worked! They say goodbye to Not-John and his dad and head back home – Squishy and her two bonus-sisters.

Themes: Family / Step families / Running away / Responsibility / Lying

Reading Questions

Chapter One

- What kind of noise does Squishy hear in the garage?
- How does it make her feel? What could it be?
- Where does the name Squishy come from? What is her real name?
- Who has a similar name? Why is this lucky?
- What do you know about the boy in the garage?

Chapter Two

- How are Jessie and Vee related to Squishy? How are they related to each other?

- What words does Squishy use to describe them? What does this tell you about how she feels about them?
- Who does Squishy have to hide from? Why is she afraid of being seen?
- Do you think John Smith is the boy's real name? Why/why not?
- What happens when Squishy leaves?

Chapter Three

- Why does Squishy agree to let Vee help her?
- What do Squishy and Vee promise John? How can you tell the promise is serious?
- How have Squishy and Vee's attitudes to each other changed since the last chapter?
- How did Vee find Squishy?

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Chapter Four

- Why does Jessie think that Squishy and Vee are lying to her?
- How do you think Jessie is feeling when she confronts Squishy and Vee about their secret? What makes you think this?
- What happens when they're cleaning the car that makes Squishy happy?

Chapter Five

- What weird thing is happening when Squishy and the twins arrive back upstairs?
- What does Mr Hinkenbushel say that makes Alice upset?
- Why does Squishy go to see John on his own that night?
- How does Squishy's mum feel about Alice?
- What is the mission of the Hinkenbushel Revenge Club? What could they do to get their revenge?
- How did John get into the garage?

Chapter Six

- Why might Jessie hate Vee and Squishy hanging out?
- What do the different colours mean on the wall at rock climbing?
- How does Squishy feel about climbing? Do her feelings change?
- What is Squishy's new favourite thing?
- What does Squishy want to talk to Vee about? Why is it important?

Chapter Seven

- What does HRC stand for?
- How does Jessie trick John? Why does it make Squishy angry?
- What has John lied about?
- Why did John run away? What might he and his dad have fought about?
- Who does Squishy think he ran away from?

Chapter Eight

- Is John's dad Mr Hinkenbushel? Why does Squishy think he is? Why does Jessie think he's not?
- What is Squishy's new monkey-bar trick? How does it impress Vee?
- What is Squishy's idea for revenge?

Chapter Nine

- What does Jessie look up to see if she can discover Not-John's identity? How else could she figure out who he is?
- How is the new normal different to the old normal?
- What do they discover from the MISSING poster put under their door?
- How must Not-John's dad feel?

Chapter Ten

- Should Squishy and the others tell their parents where Not-John is? Why?

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- Why doesn't Squishy want to tell her dad where Not-John is?
- What does it mean when Squishy does quote fingers around this sentence on page 97? 'I'm going down to grab my silver jumper out of the car'.

Chapter Eleven

- What evidence has Squishy collected that Mr Hinkenbushel is Not-John's dad?
- What makes her realise that she's wrong?
- What does Not-John imagine that Squishy's life is like? What is it really like?
- How does Squishy feel when she realises why Not-John has really run away? What does she do?

Chapter Twelve

- What does Squishy realise when she's apologising to Jessie and Vee?
- What are the bonus things Squishy thinks about when she's apologising?
- Who is Not-John's dad? How does Squishy feel when she meets him?
- How does Not-John's dad feel about Not-John's disappearance? How can you tell by the things he says, and also by the things he doesn't say?
- What does Squishy say about Mr Hinkenbushel at the end of the book?

Activities

- On page 46 Squishy says that Jessie likes big words. Make a list of unfamiliar words you come across in the book and look them up in the dictionary. Compile everyone's words and meanings into a classroom dictionary that you can add to with books you read in the future.

*This could be an illustrated activity – students could illustrate each entry for your classroom dictionary.

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- Based on the events in the book, draw a map of where Squishy lives. Mark where particular scenes take place, where each of the characters live, and the route Squishy takes to get down to the basement.
- There are a lot of scenes in this book where we learn just as much about a character's emotions or actions by their body language as by their words. Choose one of the following scenes and fill in the table below.
 1. o Jessie and Vee at the dinner table (p9-10)
 2. o Vee catching Squishy giving food to Not-John (p23-25)
 3. o Mr Hinkenbushel yelling at Alice (p39-41)
 4. o Not-John's dad talking to Squishy (p110-112)

What do they say?	What do they do?	What does this tell you?

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- Squishy discovers that she has a lot more in common with her bonus sisters than she expected, and by the end of the book they're friends. Choose someone you don't know very well (either in class or at home) and interview them about their life. Record the interview so that you can listen back to it, and share it with the class. After the interview, write a reflection on what you've learnt about this person and what they have in common with you – how does learning more about someone help you understand and get along with them better?
- Have a class discussion about secrets – share a time you've had a secret, or kept a secret with the class (you don't need to share the secret if you don't want).

Think about:

- o who the secret involved
- o who it would have hurt if anyone had found out
- o who else knew
- o whether someone was hurt by the secret
- o how you felt about keeping the secret

Make a set of guidelines (either individually or as a class) that you can use to decide whether keeping a secret is a good idea or not – talk in class about times when it might be a good idea to share someone else's secret.

