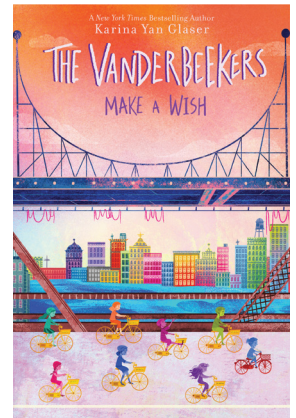
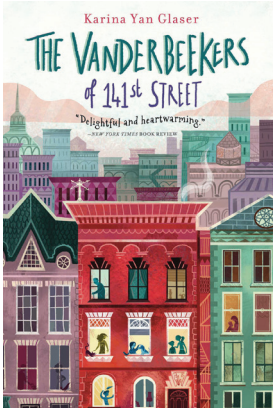


THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



In a brownstone in Harlem live the Vanderbeekers . . .

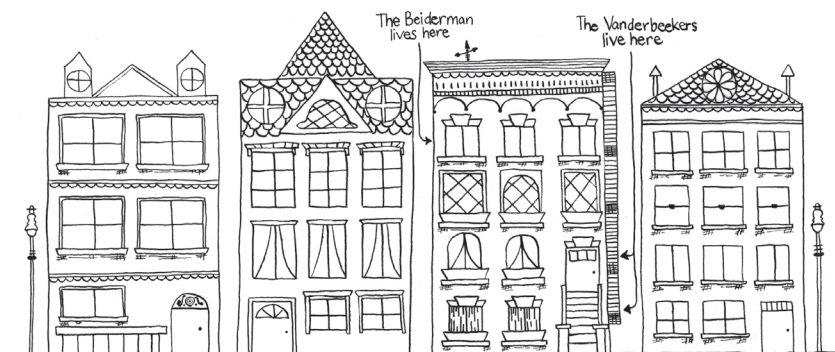
**And in that house, life is anything but calm, tidy, boring,
or predictable!**

“I’m in love with every single Vanderbeeker!”

—Linda Sue Park, best-selling author of *A Long Walk to Water*

“Few [families] in children’s literature are as engaging or amusing as the Vanderbeekers. . . . Wildly entertaining.” —*Booklist*

“Delightful and heartwarming.” —*New York Times*



CLARION BOOKS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



9780544876392 • HC
9781328499219 • PB

About *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street*

Told they will have to move out of their Harlem brownstone just after Christmas, the five Vanderbeeker children, ages four to twelve, decide to change their reclusive landlord's mind. The children initiate Operation Beiderman and plan a variety of kind things to do for their landlord, but one by one all of their best ideas fail. Will the Vanderbeekers be able to remain in their beloved home?

Pre-reading Activity

The Vanderbeeker children work together well and show respect and love to one another. Ask students to write a paragraph describing their relationships with their siblings or friends. Students should give an example of an interaction with one of them to illustrate their description of how they get along. Students can then share their paragraphs with the class.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Operation Beiderman? How do the Vanderbeeker children execute their plans?
2. What do the children learn about Mr. Beiderman from Mr. Jones? How does Angie help them discover additional information about Mr. Beiderman and his family?
3. Why does Jessie create the water wall? How does Isa react when she sees and hears the water wall?
4. How does Hyacinth attempt to prove her bravery? Why is she eventually successful?
5. What is the REP? Why do the children like to spend time there?
6. How do Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet feel about the Vanderbeekers moving out of the brownstone? How do the other neighbors respond?
7. Why doesn't Jessie want Isa to go to the eighth grade dance? What does Jessie tell Benny to discourage him from asking Isa?
8. Why does Hyacinth want to give Mr. Beiderman a kitten? Why does she think it will help him? What is Mr. Beiderman's initial reaction to the kitten?
9. What is Isa's reaction when she discovers what Jessie said to Benny about taking Isa to the dance? How does Jessie feel when Isa confronts her about what she said to Benny? How does Jessie fix the mess she made?
10. Why does Mr. Beiderman eventually change his mind about the Vanderbeekers moving out of the brownstone? Who benefits the most from Mr. Beiderman's change of heart?

The above questions correlate to CCSS ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1 and L.7.1. Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser

Writing and Research Activities

The Vanderbeeker Children

All five children have a close relationship with one another. Ask each student to select one of the children and develop a personality profile. The profile should include both a physical and a personality description. Students should use examples and quotes from the narrative to help support their descriptions. Then divide the students in groups based on the character they chose so that students can fully discuss each character and what makes them unique.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2.; ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2. ELA: Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.4.3, RL.5.3, RL.6.3, RL.7.3.

Operation Beiderman

With a partner, ask students to create a timeline of the ideas the children execute from the beginning of the story to the end and to focus on key events that help win Mr. Beiderman over. Students should write a description of the plan and the result of each plan executed by the Vanderbeeker children. Then, display the timelines on the classroom walls.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and RL.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

With a Little Help from Our Friends

Many people help the Vanderbeeker children as they attempt to convince Mr. Beiderman to allow them to stay in the brownstone. In groups of three, ask students to make a list of the neighbors that help along the way. Then ask students to explain what each neighbor has done to help the Vanderbeekers. Have students write a paragraph in the first-person voice of each neighbor explaining how that character helps. Have an oral reading where the different characters share their experience helping the Vanderbeekers.



THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



9781328770028 • HC
9780358117346 • PB

About *The Vanderbeekers and the Hidden Garden*

When catastrophe strikes their beloved upstairs neighbors, Mr. Jeet and Miss Josie, the Vanderbeeker children set out to build the most magical healing garden in Harlem. The children face setbacks with a locked fence, an abundance of thistles and trash, a lack of funding for plants and dirt, and a shady building developer who threatens to sell the land. But the children persevere because their motive behind the garden is love and hope for Mr. Jeet and Miss Josie.

Pre-reading Activity

Ask students to think about a park or play area in their community. Then discuss with them the types of events that occur in that area. Ask them to write a thank-you letter to the city for the development and upkeep of the area. Students should share an experience they had in the park in their letter.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Isa away for the summer? How are Jessie and Isa coping with being separated for the first time?
2. Why do the children finally agree to Miss Josie's suggestion to build a garden in the empty lot by the church?
3. How does Mr. Jeet help Laney with Paganini, her rabbit? What do they teach him to the surprise of everyone in the family?
4. Why is Mr. Jeet admitted to the hospital? What is the expected outcome of his stay in the hospital?
5. What is the purpose of the release form Jessie writes?
6. Why is it so important to Oliver to complete the garden?
7. Why is Oliver so surprised to discover that Hyacinth knows and likes Herman Huxley? Why doesn't Oliver like him?
8. Who is Orlando? Why is he moving to Harlem? What do he and Jessie have in common?
9. What do Laney and Hyacinth overhear that could destroy their plans for the garden?
10. Why does Mr. Beiderman leave his apartment for the first time in six years? Is his endeavor successful?
11. How do the children ruin Mr. Huxley's plan to sell the land where they are building their garden?

The above questions correlate to CCSS ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1 and L.7.1. Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.

THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser

Writing and Research Activities

The Magical Healing Garden

In small groups, ask students to review the garden plot on page 226, and then to research plants and flowers that would flourish in the Harlem climate. Each group should make a list of plants and flowers and then determine where each would be planted in the garden. Each group can then illustrate how their garden would look in bloom and write a paragraph or poem describing the garden. The illustrations can be displayed in the classroom or in the hallway.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and W.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2. ELA: Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.4.3, RL.5.3, RL.6.3, RL.7.3.

A Neighborhood Community

Many of the neighbors in the community wrote quotes about gardens and flowers and attached them to the fence around the garden. Ask students to research quotes about communities and neighbors that would fit the Harlem community where the Vanderbeekers live. Students should select a quote and write a paragraph explaining why they chose that particular quote. Students should use evidence from the text to provide support. The quotes can then be shared with the class.

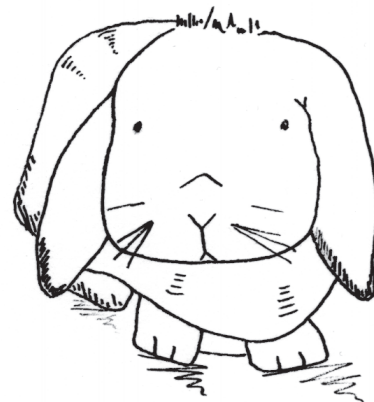
The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and RL.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Mr. Jeet and Miss Josie

When Mr. Jeet has his stroke and is taken to the hospital, Miss Josie refuses to leave his side. Fortunately, Mrs. Vanderbeeker willingly helps Miss Josie by bringing her clothes; the children water her plants; and Laney brings Paganini to cheer Mr. Jeet up. In small groups, ask students to plan a volunteer program for elderly people in their community or in

the local hospital that need help. Students should make a list of services they could offer and design a flyer they could post at the hospital, community center, library, or other public place.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and W.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2. ELA: Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.4.3, RL.5.3, RL.6.3, RL.7.3.



THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



9781328577573 • HC
9780358348245 • PB

About *The Vanderbeekers to the Rescue*

When Mama loses her license to bake in her home kitchen, she not only loses her income, but an opportunity to appear in a popular lifestyle magazine. The Vanderbeeker children are devastated that they have destroyed their mother's dream, so they set out to "fix" the problem they created. Their plan is sidetracked by mysterious packages left on their doorstep, Mr. Huxley refusing to work with them, and spring break plans that crumble. They'll have to band together to save the day before they're out of business.

Pre-reading Activity

Ask students to think about a time that they made a choice or they did something that hurt someone they love. Ask students to write a narrative in three paragraphs. The first paragraph explains the situation and their choice or action; the second paragraph explains who they hurt and the effects of their choice or action; and the third paragraph explains the ultimate outcome. Have students share their writing in small groups.

This activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and RL.7.3.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does *Perch Magazine* want to write a story about Mama? How do Papa and the children react to the news?
2. What are the children and Papa willing to do to help Mama prepare for the upcoming photo shoot and interview?
3. Why does Mama lose her home baking license? Why don't the children tell her about it?
4. Who is Cassandra? How does she help the Vanderbeeker children?
5. Who gives the children the paint they use to paint the living room? How do Papa and Mama react when they see the finished job?
6. What steps do the children take to try to prepare for the second home inspection? What happens during the inspection that causes Mama to permanently lose her license?
7. How do the Vanderbeekers deal with the animals left on their doorstep? Why would someone leave animals with someone else?
8. What does Mama do after she loses her license? How does she prepare for her new job?
9. What role does Mr. Beiderman play in helping the Vanderbeeker children put their plan for Mama's business into action? How does Mr. Huxley try to prevent the children from achieving their goal for Mama's business?
10. What field trip do the Vanderbeeker children undertake as research for Mama's new business? What do they learn during their field trip that helps them?
11. What do the children and Papa plan for Mama's birthday? Who attends her celebration?
12. Who is Shirley Adelaide Chester and how does she help Mama?

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The above questions correlate to CCSS ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1 and L.7.1. Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.

Writing and Research Activities

Spring Break with the Vanderbeekers

Each Vanderbeeker child has a plan for their spring break, but circumstances alter their plans. Ask students to design and complete a chart with the following columns: Child's Name, Original Plan, and Altered Outcome. Then, have students select one of the listed plans and write an explanation from the child's point of view. Have students write a poem about the effort including the child's thoughts and feelings about what occurred. Students can then share their poem with the class.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2; ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Animal Cafés

Animal cafés are becoming popular around the world. Some cafés feature dogs, cats, farm animals, and even woodland creatures. Ask students to research animal cafés; students should explain their purpose, list some menu items, research laws governing animals in cafés, and provide community reactions to the cafés. If there is a local animal café, ask for volunteers from the class to visit the café and report their experience to the class. Have students present their findings to the class in a digital format.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Animal Rescue

The Vanderbeekers love all animals, so when the abandoned animals start appearing at their back door, the children are determined to find homes for them. Ask students to make a list of the actions the children take to find homes for the animals. Then have students research local animal shelters and veterinary clinics to discover available programs and services for abandoned animals. Have students create flyers detailing those programs and services to post in community locations such as the post office, community center, public library, or even retail establishments.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and W.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.



THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



9780358256199 • HC

About *The Vanderbeekers Lost and Found*

It's autumn, and the Vanderbeekers of 141st Street are at it again: supporting Mr. Beiderman as he prepares for the New York City Marathon, assisting their friend Orlando through a difficult time, and saying goodbye to a longtime family friend. Along the way, they come to understand what it means to care for someone in an impossible situation. But with generous hearts and determination, the Vanderbeekers strive to make their neighborhood a better place, one friend, one need at a time.

Pre-reading Activity

The Vanderbeeker family members are kind and thoughtful to one another and to the people they love and admire. They embrace and support the members of their community and their friends. Ask students to think about a time when they made a kind, helpful gesture to a friend or member of their community. Then ask students to write a narrative in three paragraphs. The first paragraph should explain the situation thoroughly; the second paragraph

should explain how they helped and the effect of their action(s); and the third paragraph should explain the ultimate outcome. Have students share their writing in small groups.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Orlando hurt Jessie and their friendship? Why does Orlando act that way?
2. What ideas do Isa, Allegra, Oliver, Angie, and Jimmy L conceive to help convince Orlando to stay in Harlem?
3. What is Orlando's response to the ideas? What reasons does Orlando give for returning to Georgia?
4. The Vanderbeekers own several animals that they love. How does their love of their animals reflect their personalities?
5. How does Orlando help Mr. Beiderman train for the New York City Marathon?
6. What contribution does Laney make to Mr. Beiderman's marathon experience?
7. Why does Hyacinth dislike school? What does she want to change about herself so that school is no longer lonely for her?
8. How does Hyacinth's knitting help her make friends?
9. Why is Isa so confused about her feelings for Benny? How does their lack of communication contribute to their strained relationship?
10. How do the Vanderbeekers help Miss Josie when Mr. Jeet gets so sick?
11. What do you think about Orlando's final decision about where to live?

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The above questions correlate to CCSS ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1 and L.7.1. Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.

Writing and Research Activities

Moments Captured in Vignettes

In chapter 17, the author uses vignettes to highlight the events before Mr. Jeet's death. Using these vignettes as an example, ask students to write four to six vignettes to describe events that occurred before, during, or after an especially memorable time in their lives. Have students create illustrations to accompany their vignettes and share them with the class.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and RL.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Child Homelessness

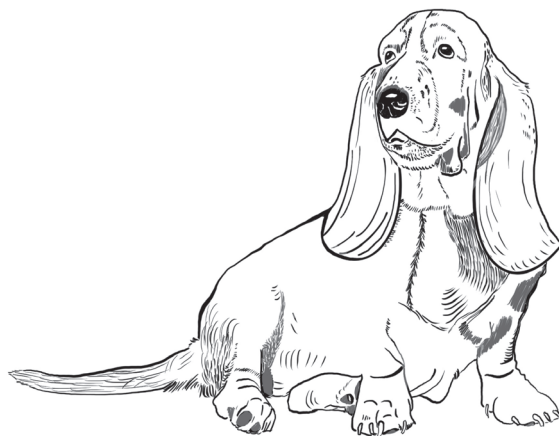
When Orlando finds himself homeless and living in the garden shed, he has friends and family to help him escape his situation. Sadly, that is not the case for many children who find themselves without a home. Ask students to research child homelessness in America. Have students research and cite reasons and statistics for child homelessness, programs that address the problem, and growth or decline in recent years in the child homeless population. Have students present their findings to the class in a digital format.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and RL.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Fun Runs and Marathons

The Vanderbeekers plan a Halloween 5K Fun Run to help Mr. Beiderman prepare for the New York City Marathon. Five kilometers is slightly more than three miles, and many people will walk for a fun run. Ask students to research marathons and/or fun run in their community and surrounding areas. Then ask students to select one event and create a flier detailing the event and its purpose. After obtaining permission, have students post it in community locations such as the post office, community center, public library, or even retail establishments.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.2, W.5.2, W.6.2 and W.7.2. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2. ELA: Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.4.3, RL.5.3, RL.6.3, RL.7.3.



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The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and W.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Family Addition

Ask students to consider the following questions as a brainstorming activity. Would you want to be a member of the Vanderbeeker family? Why or why not? How would you fit in with the family culture? Then have students write a narrative based on their responses to the questions and the idea of being a member of the Vanderbeeker family. Have students share their narratives in small groups.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3 and W.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Double Trouble

The Vanderbeeker children have a tendency to find themselves in frequent trouble. While they have great ideas and plans, they often do not think through the consequences of their actions. From any of the books, ask students to select one of the children's decisions that lands them in trouble and to write about that situation. Students should include what the Vanderbeekers could have done differently to avoid the stress of the problems they created. Then ask for student volunteers to conduct a panel discussion on their plans and the ways the children could have avoided the dilemmas confronting them.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

Friendship

The Vanderbeekers are friends with most everyone on the block, but the children each have a special friend. Ask students to list the common threads among the following relationships.

- Laney and Mr. Jeet
- Oliver and Angie

Series Discussion Questions

1. Since there is really no conversation among the family or the neighbors about the Vanderbeeker family being biracial, how does the reader know?
2. How do Mama and Papa teach their children to be honest, loving, thoughtful, and kind?
3. In what specific ways do the children show respect for one another and their parents?
4. How do the neighbors on 141st Street help one another? How can they be considered extended family?
5. What special talent does each of the Vanderbeeker children possess? How do they use those talents to enrich their family and neighbors?
6. What are the benefits of a close-knit family and strong friendships?

The above questions correlate to CCSS ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1 and L.7.1. Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.

Series Activities

Family Relationships

The Vanderbeeker family is loving and kind to one another. Ask students to select one of the relationships within the family and to write a poem for two voices that would exemplify the special connection between the two characters: a time one of the two provided support for the other, a time the two dealt with a conflict peacefully, or a time the two planned to do something special for the family. Have students practice and present their poems to the class.

THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser

- Isa and Benny
- Hyacinth and Herman
- Jessie and Orlando

Based on the list, have students write an essay on the keys to a solid friendship. Students should also include how they can incorporate these ideas into their own current or future friendships. Have students share their essays in small groups of four or five students. Post essays in the classroom.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.1, W.5.1, W.6.1 and RL.7.1. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2.

A Plot in Time

Each book in the series covers a specific time frame; *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* occurs the week before Christmas; *The Vanderbeekers and the Hidden Garden* occurs over nineteen days during the summer; and *The Vanderbeekers to the Rescue* occurs the week of spring break. Divide the class into groups of three or four students and assign one book to each group. Working together, students should create a large chart of the plot diagram of the story, identifying each element of the plot and explaining what occurs at each stage. Display the posters and have students do a gallery walk of the plot diagram charts. As students rotate through the stations, they should discuss and compare the plot diagrams of each book and draw conclusions about the effect of a short, specific time frame for each story.

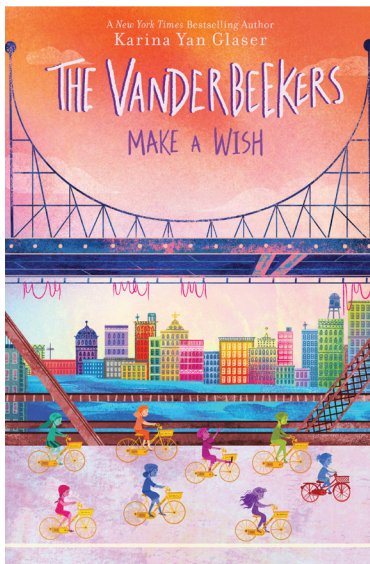
The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.1, W.5.1, W.6.1 and RL.7.1. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, L.7.2. Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1.



This guide was written by Susan Geye.

THE VANDERBEEKERS SERIES

by Karina Yan Glaser



9780358256205 • HC

About *The Vanderbeekers Make a Wish*

As summer comes to a close, Oliver and Papa are finalizing their preparations for a three-day camping adventure, and all the Vanderbeekers are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Papa's fortieth birthday party in five days. Unfortunately, bad news from Papa's best friend, Uncle Sylvester, requires Papa to go out of town for a few days, just as Grandma and Grandpa arrive extra early for his celebration. Grandma and Grandpa, who have had a strained relationship with their daughter and grandchildren at best, have never stayed for more than one night, and now they have announced that they plan to stay through Papa's birthday. Meanwhile, Papa's quick departure from town has unexpectedly laid bare a mystery about Pop-Pop, Papa's dad. Will the Vanderbeeker children survive the visit with their grandparents? Will the children unravel the mystery of Pop-Pop's planned trip? Maybe the week's surprises will result in the best fortieth birthday celebration ever for Papa and the family!

Pre-Reading Activity

On page 15, Isa reacts to seeing Pop-Pop's blazer: "I wish we had known him . . . I always love hearing stories about your dad." Have students think of a family member that has positively affected their lives in some way. Have students write a narrative about a personal experience with that individual, including what the individual did that impacted them positively and who they would like to share the story with in the future and why. Have students share their "stories" in small groups.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3, and W.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, and L.7.2.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the reader know that Papa treasures special family trips with his children? How do we know that his father also treasured special family trips?
2. What has been the nature of Uncle Sylvester and Papa's friendship over the years? Why was Uncle Sylvester's mom so special to Papa?
3. How do the Vanderbeeker children react through words and deeds to the unexpected visit from their grandparents? What do their reactions reveal about their relationship with their grandparents? How do they react when they see their aunt Penny?
4. How does Grandpa initially react when Grandma criticizes the children? How does he react when he ultimately sees the impact of her unsolicited comments?
5. Why is Grandma so hard on her daughter and her grandchildren? What does she hope to accomplish with her comments?
6. How does the letter the children find in Pop-Pop's blazer inspire them with an idea for Papa's birthday? How do they put their idea into action?

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7. Although Grandpa and Grandma are like strangers to the Vanderbeeker children, how do they each attempt to help around the house? How do they attempt to connect with the Vanderbeeker children?
8. Why was Laney originally reluctant to go to see the Brooklyn Bridge? How was her experience different this time? How did Grandpa and Laney bond on the Brooklyn Bridge?
9. On the way back from the Brooklyn Bridge, Laney wants to go to the bakery to show Mama her new bike. Why do their grandparents continue to opt out of visiting the bakery?
10. After working so hard to prepare breakfast for the Vanderbeeker grandchildren, why does Grandma leave her meal unfinished, clean up, and go upstairs?
11. Grandma has two experiences with strangers that significantly impact her—one on the subway and one at the New York Botanical Garden. What were the two experiences? How did each experience affect her?
12. The Vanderbeeker children often work together to handle everyday life and even crises. What evidence is there in the story that the children are used to being treated as responsible and trustworthy?
13. How does Grandpa connect with Laney in ways that he may not connect with the other children?
14. How does Hyacinth's blowup with Grandma eventually lead to true connections between the Vanderbeeker children and their grandparents? What does Grandma do when Hyacinth chastises her for her criticisms of the whole family? How do Mama and Hyacinth and Grandma come to terms?
15. Once the children have solved the mystery of Whalers Cove, Ludwig, and Joe, what inspired idea do they have? How do Grandpa and Grandma and the Vanderbeekers' friends help to make the idea a reality?

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.4.1, SL.5.1, SL.6.1, and SL.7.1. ELA: Knowledge of Language: L.4.3, L.5.3, L.6.3, and L.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1.

Writing and Research Activities

Grateful Voices from the Past

Throughout the book, the Vanderbeeker children, in their words and their actions, demonstrate that they wish they had known their papa's dad, Pop-Pop. By the end of the book—with the help of a cast of characters—they have actually learned that Pop-Pop made quite an impression on those he worked with, helped, and came into contact with in the community; they have heard many amazing stories of his curiosity, generosity, kindness, and devotion to Papa. Papa would love to hear those stories as a way to keep his father in his heart. Have each student select a character (e.g., Mrs. Castleman, Yardsy Loughy, Jamal) who was transformed by his/her interactions with Pop-Pop. Write a heartfelt recollection from that character's point of view explaining what Pop-Pop did, how he changed or impacted their life, and what they would say to him today if they could. Have students take turns reading their recollections as part of a Voices from the Past reading to Papa about Pop-Pop.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.3, W.5.3, W.6.3, and W.7.3. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, and L.7.2.

Telling Interviews

On page 286, Grandma says, "I watched you looking for information about your dad's father all week. You were so determined to find out about him. And I have been here all along and have not given you a good reason to know me." Have students select a family member to interview that may have been there "all along," but perhaps they really don't know their "story."

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Have students prepare a set of questions to use in the interview that will focus on the “story” of the life of the selected family member. Students should take notes during their interview, but also allow the interviewee to add new ideas and topics. Students should prepare a one- or two-page summary of their interview and their newfound insights to share in small groups and post in the classroom.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.4, W.5.4, W.6.4, and W.7.4. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, and L.7.2.

The Grandparent Bond

When the grandparents first arrive, the surprised Vanderbeeker children and Mama try to make the best of an awkward, inconvenient situation. But within just a few short days, the children no longer view Grandma and Grandpa as unwelcome bystanders. Laney, in particular, forms a special bond with Grandpa, and Hyacinth forms a special bond with Grandma. Have students choose one of these two connections—or another connection between one of the children or Mama and one of the grandparents—and write a Poem for Two Voices that reflects the changing attitudes of both the Vanderbeeker and the grandparent. Have students practice and present their Poems for Two Voices to the class.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.4, W.5.4, W.6.4, and W.7.4. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, and L.7.2.

Keystone Species

Aunt Penny shares the concept of “keystone species” (such as sea otters and sharks), animals that are vital because of their impact on their respective ecosystems; in fact, they are so important that their removal would drastically or irrevocably change their ecosystem. Ask students to work in groups of three to research the term and its origin and to select three “keystone species” to research. Each student in the group should select one species to research, identify what other species the keystone species impacts, and ascertain what the effect would be on the ecosystem if the keystone species was completely removed from it. Have groups create a digital presentation consolidating their research to share with the class.

The above activity correlates to CCSS ELA: Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.4.7, W.5.7, W.6.7, and W.7.7. ELA: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.4.1, L.5.1, L.6.1, L.7.1 and L.4.2, L.5.2, L.6.2, and L.7.2.

