

## Ava and Pip and Ava and Taco Cat

By Carol Weston

A Common Core State Standards-Aligned  
Educator's Guide for Grades 4-6



### About the Books

#### *Ava and Pip*

Meet Ava, a funny fifth grader with a passion for palindromes who wants to be a writer. Through her diary entries, we follow her adventures with her friends and her word-loving family—including her very shy older sister Pip. When a classmate named Bea hurts her sister's feelings, Ava takes her revenge by writing a satirical story about her for a contest. Things get complicated when Bea recognizes herself in the story and confronts Ava about it. But instead of being angry, Bea wants to help Pip. Full of puns, palindromes, and a love of writing, *Ava and Pip* is the first book in a charming new series for middle-grade readers.

#### *Ava and Taco Cat*

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When Ava Wren hears about an injured yellow tabby with mismatched ears, she becomes obsessed and wants to rescue him. She even picks out a perfect palindromic name: T-A-C-O-C-A-T. But when Taco joins the family, he doesn't snuggle or purr—all he does is hide. Worse, Ava's best friend starts hanging out with Zara, a new girl in fifth grade. Ava feels alone and writes an acclaimed story, "The Cat Who Wouldn't Purr." What begins as exciting news turns into a disaster. How can Ava make things right? And what about sweet, scared little Taco?



### About the Author

**Carol Weston** is the author of eleven books, including the bestselling *The Diary of Melanie Martin* and three other Melanie Martin novels. Her first book, *Girltalk: All the Stuff Your Sister Never Told You*, was published in a dozen languages. Since 1994, she has been the "Dear Carol" advice columnist at *Girls' Life* magazine. Carol kept diaries herself when she was a girl, growing up in a house with parents who were writer-editors. She lives in Manhattan with her husband, playwright Rob Ackerman. They have two daughters and one cat.

## Pre-Reading Questions and Activities

- Explain to students that the books they are about to read are written in a diary format. Have they read other books in this format? What do they like or dislike about a novel told in this way?
- On the first day of fifth grade, Ava, the main character, learns that her name is a palindrome. A palindrome is a word or phrase that reads the same backwards and forwards. Familiarize students with the concept by sharing some of the palindromes featured in the books—a list of all the palindromes used in book 1 is included at the end of it. Can students think of any words that are palindromes? Have students write their names backwards. Can they incorporate their names into any palindromes?
- The characters in the series enjoy playing with words. In the course of the stories, students will encounter many examples of wordplay and figurative speech. The following figures of speech are especially prominent in the books. Introduce students to these terms, their meanings, and discuss some examples of each.



**alliteration**  
**homonym**  
**metaphor**

**onomatopoeia**  
**palindrome**  
**simile**



## Discussion Questions and Activities

### *Book 1*

#### Growing Pains

One of the themes of this novel is personal growth. The most prominent example of character growth in this book is Pip, who begins to overcome her shyness. However, Ava also grows and changes. As a class, discuss how Pip changed over the course of the story, having students cite specific passages to support their statements. Then have students work individually and write about how Ava changed over the course of the story. How do the two character arcs compare? Do the characters grow steadily, or are there specific events that trigger changes?

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3  
W 4.1, 4.4, 4.10, 5.1, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.10  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

## Stepping Stones

Ava and Bea come up with five different exercises for Pip to help cope with her shyness. Have students locate these five “tips” in the text and write them down. Have each student select one of the exercises and list what reactions Pip got when she followed this piece of advice. Overall, did this method work? Ask students to cite examples from the text to support their claims.

\*As a bonus exercise, have students choose one of the “tips” and carry it out for a week and record what reactions they get. Were they surprised?

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3  
W 4.1, 4.4, 4.10, 5.1, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.10

## Dear Abby

When Bea confronts Ava about her story, “The Sting of the Queen Bee,” she tells the younger girl that she'd like to be an advice columnist and help people when she grows up. We know how Ava feels about what happened. But what about Pip and Bea? Have students write a letter to an imaginary advice columnist from one of these characters, discussing the event from her perspective. Instruct students to use specific passages from the text to identify what things the character knows and feels.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.6  
W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10

## A Metaphor Is Like a Simile

Ava discusses similes and metaphors, defining them in entries in her diary. As a class, review the sections of the book where Ava discusses similes and metaphors (diary entries: 10/23 After Dinner and 11/19). Discuss the definitions of these terms and how these figures of speech are used to make a text more interesting to read, and to convey an idea vividly and clearly. Working independently, have students locate three metaphors or similes used in the book. Have them rewrite these phrases removing the similes. For example: “Pip is quiet as a mouse,” could be rewritten as “Pip is quiet.” Then have students rewrite one of the phrases using a different simile to express the same idea. For example, “Pip is quiet as a mouse,” could be rewritten as “Pip is as quiet as a butterfly walking on marshmallows.”

RL 4.1, 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4  
L 4.5, 5.5, 6.5

## In Her Shoes

Throughout the book, Ava identifies ways in which her parents treat her and her sister differently. She feels that Pip receives more attention and more care from their parents. Working as a class, have students cite specific examples and events that reinforce this view. How might each event have been different if it had happened to the other sister? For example, how might the parents have reacted if Pip had gotten perfect scores on all her spelling tests or no one had come to Ava's birthday party?

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

## Books 1 or 2

### Vocabulary Bull's-eye

Give students a sheet of paper with a bull's-eye drawn on it. As they read the book, ask them to note interesting words. If they know the meaning of the word, have them write it in the center of the bull's-eye. Words that they might recognize or understand from the context of the story go in the middle ring. The outside ring is reserved for words they don't know. Ask them to "Think. Pair. Share." Think about what they're reading and the words they know. Pair up with another student and share their words. See if they can help each other with the word meanings. Use a dictionary to define the words they still cannot define. Periodically through the book, come together as a class and have students share their vocabulary words.

RL 4.4, 5.4, 6.4; RF 4.4, 5.4  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1  
L 4.4, 4.6, 5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6

### Every Pip-picture Tells a Story

Pip likes to draw more than write, so she keeps a sketchbook rather than a diary. Discuss with students how she might express events from the day by drawing what happened instead of writing what happened. Have students try to think like Pip, and create a comic strip/graphic novel-style treatment of a sequence of events from the book. What's different about this format as compared to Ava's diary entry? Have students present their comic strip to the class and explain what scene was illustrated, why that scene was chosen, and what details and elements were included. Create a display showcasing students' work.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5  
SL 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 6.2, 6.5

### Word Nerds

The entire Wren family loves word games, especially one they call "The Homonym Game." Ava explains it by saying, "It's when we make sentences with words that sound the same but mean different things, like NUN and NONE, and CHEWS and CHOOSE, and HAIR and HARE. And BEE and BEA and BE." Using the Internet, locate a list of homonyms. A good list can be found at:

[www.enchantedlearning.com/english/homonyms/](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/english/homonyms/)

Provide students with a list of words that have homonyms. Working independently, have students write a homonym for each word on the list. Break students into small groups and have them review their lists together to see how many homonym pairs they can complete. Then have them play the homonym game, making up sentences using the homonym pairs. Come back together and have students share their favorites with the rest of the class.

RL 4.4, 5.4, 6.4  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1  
L 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5

# Educator's Guide

## Who's On First...Person

Discuss the concept of the narrative voice (first person, third person, etc.), and the point of view character. Talk about how point of view shapes content and style. How would the story be different if told in the third person? Why do students think the author chose a diary format?

Discuss with students the problem of the “unreliable narrator,” and explore whether, since Ava is the narrator as well as a character, we can trust that the events are being reported objectively. Point out instances in the text where other characters confirm or refute Ava’s interpretation of events (e.g., her talk with her mother at the veterinarian in book one). Have students use examples from the text that support their view.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.6  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

## Yours Truly, A-V-A

Ava signs each diary entry in a way that reflects the content of that entry and how she feels. Sometimes she uses a different adjective to describe herself (“Ava the Appreciative”), sometimes a different style of signature (A-V-A). Ask students to pick three different signatures and write why Ava used this signature for this entry. Come together as a class and have students share their favorite signature used by Ava.

RL 4.1, 4.4, 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4; W 4.1, 4.4, 4.10, 5.1, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.10  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1  
L 4.5, 5.5, 6.5

## The Condensed Stories

While there is a great deal of wordplay and subplots, the main story line of this book can be summarized fairly quickly. Break the class into pairs and have them summarize the book in 10 sentences. Have students write neatly or type these summary sentences on separate strips of paper and trade them with another pair of students. Have each pair of students put the new set of summary strips in sequential order. When completed, have students discuss their solution with the pair who created the summary.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5  
SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

## Dramatis Personae

This book features a large cast of characters. Ask students to keep a list of all the characters in the book, and their relationships to Ava. Include a quote from the book that best describes the individual and something unique about them. Divide the list into “major” and “minor” characters.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1

## Two Peas in a Pod

Although Ava and Pip are sisters, growing up as members of the same family, they are very different people. Have students create a brief summary of each girl’s personality as described in the book. Then have them identify specific ways in which the girls are the same and specific ways in which they are different, using examples from the text.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1

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