

# *The Janitor's Boy*

by Andrew Clements

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

## A Reading and Discussion Guide

Prepared by Lauren Losaw  
Stockbridge Library Association, Stockbridge, MA

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### **SUMMARY:**

The teasing is relentless when Jack and his classmates must attend middle school in the old high school building, the place where Jack's father works as janitor. Jack plots revenge – a grand bubble-gum caper. But the plot is too transparent and Jack soon finds himself in a new role: his father's assistant. As his weeks of Bubble-Gum Removal Expert go by, Jack learns more about his father's job and his reasons for doing it. A few keys to intriguing niches lead to other windows in his father's real life, beyond the role of "Janitor."

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Jack did not want his friends to think of him as "just like his father," but did you find similarities between the two? Did Jack's dad show any similarities to his own dad? What similarities do you share with your dad or mom?
2. Jack chose two keys from the key cupboard. Which keys would you have chosen? Write about your investigations behind "the door."

### **ACTIVITIES:**

1. List five occupations you would consider for yourself. Why do they interest you? Does your father/mother do any of these jobs? Find out more about your chosen professions by going to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.

2. Investigate gum and gum chewing. After trying three brands of chewing gum, what conclusions can you draw? Which is most stretchy? Which holds its flavor longest? Which brand sticks the quickest? Which sticks hardest? What best removes the gum once it is stuck?
3. Is your sense of smell as highly developed as Jack's? What did you smell as you entered school this morning? What smells can you detect at this moment? Are there places that have a distinct smell? How do these smells make you feel?
4. Do you consider any of your other senses highly developed? – sight, touch, hearing, taste? Write a story in which one of your senses plays an important role – just as Eddie's gum chewing led Jack through the steam tunnel.
5. Jack felt closer to his dad when his dad shared stories of his own growing up. Ask a parent to share a story of "when I was 10-12 years old."
6. Investigate Andrew Clements. Read the interview on the web page: <http://www.ksu.edu/english/nelp/clements>. What aspects of Andrew Clements's life led him to be a writer? – led him to write *The Janitor's Boy*? Do you share any of Clements' interests?

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

*Excerpted from the author's website: <http://andrewclements.com>*

"I was born in Camden, New Jersey in 1949 and lived in Oaklyn and Cherry Hill until the middle of sixth grade. Then we moved to Springfield, Illinois. My parents were avid readers and they gave that love of books and reading to me and to all my brothers and sisters. I didn't think about being a writer at all back then, but I did love to read. I'm certain there's a link between reading good books and becoming a writer. I don't know a single writer who wasn't a reader first.

Before moving to Illinois, and even afterwards, our family spent summers at a cabin on a lake in Maine. There was no TV there, no phone, no doorbell—and email wasn't even invented. All day there was time to swim and fish and mess around outside, and every night, there was time to read. I know those quiet summers helped me begin to think like a writer.

After graduating from Northwestern I earned a Masters of Arts in Teaching at National Louis University, and then taught in the public schools north of Chicago for seven years—fourth grade for two years, eighth grade English for three years, and high school English for two years. Those were invaluable times. I loved getting to know so many people, having a year-long relationship with bright, funny kids, and also getting to read good books and think about big ideas together.

In 1990 I began trying to write a story about a boy who makes up a new word. That book eventually became my first novel, *Frindle*, published in 1996, and you can read the whole

story of how it developed on another web site, frindle.com. *Frindle* became popular, more popular than any of my books before or since—at least so far. And it had the eventual effect of turning me into a full-time writer.

Sometimes kids ask how I've been able to write so many books. The answer is simple: one word at a time. Which is a good lesson, I think. You don't have to do everything at once. You don't have to know how every story is going to end. You just have to take that next step, look for that next idea, write that next word. And growing up, it's the same way. We just have to go to that next class, read that next chapter, help that next person. You simply have to do that next good thing, and before you know it, you're living a good life.”

### **HELPFUL LINKS:**

Website for Andrew Clements: <http://andrewclements.com>

More questions and activities about *The Janitor's Boy*:  
<http://www.eduplace.com/readingscene/teacher/g56.html>

*New York Times Book Review*:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/18/reviews/000618.rv070831.html>



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