The Pigeon HAS to Go to School
Mo Willems
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Outline:

“There is no such thing as a bad Mo Willems book” The Times

The Pigeon is about to get SCHOOLED. Do YOU think he should go?

Why does the Pigeon have to go to school? He already knows everything! Well ... almost everything. And what if he doesn’t like it? What if the teacher doesn’t like him? I mean, what if he learns TOO MUCH?!?

Author/Illustrator Information:

Mo Willems is a three-time Caldecott Honor winner for Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!, Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale and Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity. His books have been translated into over 25 languages, and his celebrated Elephant & Piggie early-reader series has been awarded the Theodor Seuss Geisel Medal on two occasions as well as five Honors. Other favourites include That Is Not a Good Idea! and Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs. Before he turned to children’s books, Mo was a writer and animator on Sesame Street, where he won six Emmy Awards. Mo lives with his family in Massachusetts, USA. Find him online at mowillems.com and on Twitter as @The_Pigeon.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.
Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before Reading
View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:
• The title
• The author/illustrator
• The publisher
• The blurb.

What do you think the story might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover? Write your own story using the title The Pigeon HAS to go to School.

Exploring the story
Act out the book – have students up on their feet reading the text and emulating Pigeon’s movement and delivery. Ask students how the illustrations and text show how Pigeon is feeling. Encourage them to base their conclusions on punctuation, the size and position of text, facial expression, body language, and size of the pigeon on the page.

Read the book as a class and allow students to respond to the Pigeon on each page. Do the students side with the Pigeon, or with the authority figure (narrator) by telling the Pigeon he has to go to school?

With your group, compile a list of words that describe each of Pigeon’s emotions. Next, list words that describe Pigeon’s personality. They can draw a picture of the pigeon to go along with one or more of those words. Examine the illustrations and describe how the pigeon’s face was drawn to express each emotion.

Ask your group what happens when their parents tell them they have to go somewhere they don’t want to go. Is their response similar or different to Pigeon’s? What are some other arguments they have used? Did they work?

How does Pigeon react when he sees the bus? Why does he react this way? What changes when he sees the bus?

What are the reasons Pigeon is scared of going to school? What did you feel like before starting school? What advice would you give to kids starting school next year?

Visit your school library and find other books by Mo Willems. Read several as a class or individually and discuss how they are similar or different. Which is your favourite? Why?

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