

Synopsis

Everyone has had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day—including Alexander! His day starts off as he awakens with gum in his hair. His bad day continues at school, with everything from singing too loud to not having dessert in his lunch. After school, he must go to the dentist. Throughout the story, Alexander thinks he should move to Australia—but then realizes that even people in Australia can have bad days.

Timeline

Morning

Alexander wakes up with gum in his hair because he fell asleep with gum in his mouth. Things go from bad to worse. Alexander decides to move to Australia.

At school

Alexander can't catch a break: the teacher doesn't like his drawing or his singing, his best friend says he's not his best friend anymore, there's no dessert at lunch.

After school

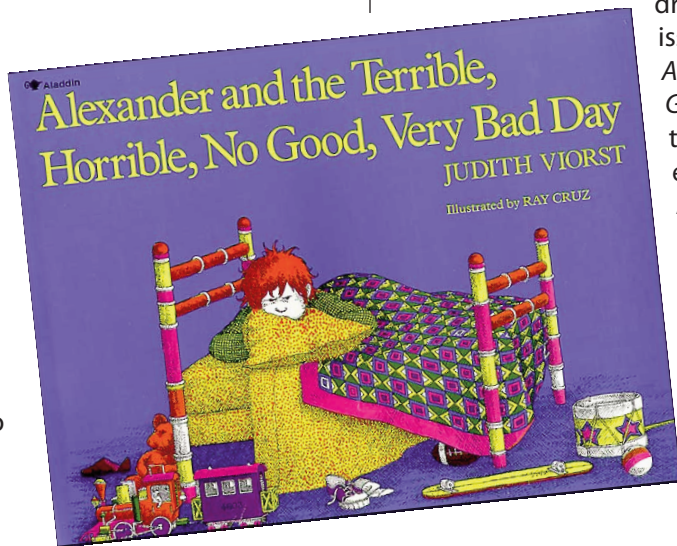
Alexander has to go to the dentist, gets in a fight with his brothers, and has to buy plain white sneakers instead of the kind he wants. He gets in trouble, has to eat lima beans for dinner, and his bath is too hot.

At night

Finally, it is bedtime. Alexander goes to sleep in his least-favorite pajamas; the cat won't sleep on his bed; and he reflects that Mom says everyone has bad days—even in Australia.

Author Sketch

Judith Viorst was born in Newark, New Jersey. She received her B.A. from Rutgers University in 1952, and graduated from the Washington Psychoanalytical Institute in 1981. The prolific, award-winning journalist and author began writing when she was seven years old, and her writings include poetry, juvenile fiction and nonfiction books. She is known for her humorous writing based on her own family life. Her books for children often focus on common issues or problems kids face: *Alexander and the Terrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* was based on the sometimes-stormy life experiences of her youngest son, Alexander. Viorst and her husband, Milton, a political writer, have three grown sons (including Alexander) and live in Washington, D.C.



Critic's Corner

Like most of Judith Viorst's children's books, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* focuses on an issue or problem children face:

in this case, coping when things go wrong and bad moods occur. Viorst's books for adults also often explore psychological themes, a natural for this Freudian-trained, best-selling author known for using her family as story subjects. *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* was the first in a series of books about Alexander; it won a *School Library Journal* citation and a Georgia Children's Picture Book Award, and has sold more than 4 million copies since it was published in 1972.

Selected Other Works by Judith Viorst

For Children

- I'll Fix Anthony* (1969)
- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (1971)
- My Mama Says There Aren't Any Zombies, Ghosts,*

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Vampires, Creatures, Demons, Monsters, Fiends, Goblins or Things (1973)
Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday (1978)
Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move (1995)
Rosie and Michael (1998)
Super-Completely and Totally the Messiest (2001)

For Adults

Necessary Losses (1986)
Grown-Up Marriage (2003)
I'm Too Young to Be Seventy: And Other Delusions (2005)

Bibliography

"Alexander, Mom, and the Very Messy Stay," New York Times, October 25, 2007,
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/25/garden/25viorst.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>
"Judith Viorst," <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Viorst>

Cross-Curricular Resources

"Lesson Plans for *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*," <
www.webenglishteacher.com/viorst.html>

Themes and Motifs

- self-esteem
- feelings
- problem solving
- community

Meaning Study

Skills and Strategies

- Identifying compound words
 - Determining the sequence of events
 - Analyzing character traits
- The following suggested plans and activities can be used with this book. You may choose to select and modify these to best meet the needs and interests of your students.*

Initiating the Reading Experience

1. Have a class discussion about being in a bad mood. Ask the children to share a time when they were in a bad mood. List these on a chalkboard or chart.
2. Initiate a discussion of "bad" days. Follow this with a discussion of "good" days. Create a chart of these "good" days and "bad" days. Example:

*

| <u>Good Days</u> | <u>Bad Days</u> |
|--|---|
| having a birthday party playing with my friend going to the park | losing a quarter falling down having to eat spinach |

Introducing the Book

Present the book to the students. Have the students look at the cover and identify the title, the author and the illustrator. As the students observe the cover, generate responses concerning the character, setting and story content. Have the children make predictions about the story based on the title and the illustration. Record their responses so that the students can confirm their predictions after hearing the story.

Reading the Book

- Prereading: Setting the purpose for reading.
Have the children read to confirm their predictions and gain the meaning of the story.
Post Reading: Confirming, analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating the reading.
1. Encourage the children to share their feelings about the story.
 2. Allow the students to confirm any predictions they might have made prior to reading the story.
 3. Initiate small group or whole class discussion of the story. Some of the following questions may help to start and/or guide this process:
 - What made Alexander's day so horrible?
 - How could he have made his day better?
 - What do you think was the worst thing that happened to Alexander during his' bad day?
 - Why do you think Alexander wants to go to Australia on his bad day?
 - When you have a bad start early in the day, how can you turn it into a good day?

Teaching Skills and Strategies in Context

Identifying compound words:

Have the students revisit the book to find all of the compound words.

Have them list these and then show how they can be

divided into two separate words.

Example:

| <u>Compound Word</u> | <u>Word 1</u> | <u>Word 2</u> |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| skateboard | skate | board |
| Undercover | Under | cover |
| carsick | car | sick |

Discuss the meaning of the two separate words and how they affect the meaning of the compound word.

Determining the sequence of events:

Discuss the sequence of events in the story. If needed, return to the book to verify the proper sequence. Have the students use 12-inch construction paper circles to create a circle sequence story. Begin by dividing the paper circles into three equal parts. Label these sections: beginning, middle, end. In each section, have the students list or illustrate the events in sequential order. This may be completed in a group situation, or you may wish to use the handout at the end of the guide for completion by individual students.

Analyzing character traits:

Have the students write the name "Alexander" or draw a picture of him in the center square. On either side, have them write six adjectives that describe Alexander. Underneath, have them write a short character description of Alexander. These may be shared with a partner or a small group.

This may be completed in a group situation or you may wish to use the handout at the end of the guide for completion by individual students.

Across the Curriculum

The following activities may be introduced after the story, integrated into the appropriate content areas or used as learning center activities.

Writing

1. Encourage the students to write a sequel to this story. Have this new story center around a wonderful, magnificent, not bad, very good day.
2. Share examples of well-written personal letters. Explain the proper format and type of content

usually found in this form. Supply various types of writing materials: paper, stationary, postcards, pencils, pens, etc. Have the students each write a letter to a friend or relative explaining a very good or a very bad day experienced recently.

3. Have students list Alexander's problems in one column, and possible solutions in another. This may be completed in a group situation on a black-board,, using the handout at the end of this guide for completion by individual students. The completed forms can be shared with the class.

Math

1. Survey the students to determine their favorite desserts. Make a bar graph of the students preferences.
2. Give each of the students a 5 in.-by-7 in. index card or piece of cardboard. Have the students recall Alexander's problem in math class. Have them each write a story problem containing the number "16" on one side of the card or cardboard. On the other side, have them illustrate the answer. When these are completed, have the students exchange cards, problem-side up. They may then work each other's problems and self-correct them by turning the card over to check the illustrated answer on the back. Example problem: There were 16 students in the class. Eight had books. How many did not have books?

Social Studies

1. Initiate a discussion of friendships and feelings involved. Have each student write and illustrate a short story about his/her best friend. These can be shared with the class or placed in a class booklet entitled, "Our Best Friends."
2. Assist the students in locating Australia on a map or globe. Compute the distance from your location to Australia. Bring in books and pictures about Australia to allow the children an opportunity to become familiar with the country. Have them share their findings.
3. Discuss playground safety, including playground rules and why these are necessary. Have the students brainstorm a list of rules that apply to their playground. Post these in the classroom for future reference.
4. Let the children discuss other places they might go

on a bad day. Assist them in locating these on a map or globe.

Health

1. Discuss dental health and proper care of the teeth. Bring in a model of a tooth or draw one on a sheet of butcher paper to aid in this discussion. Guide the students in the development of a chart containing good dental health routines. This is also an excellent time to have the school nurse or a local dentist visit the class to speak to the children about dental health.
2. Have the students revisit the book to note the foods mentioned throughout the story. List these on a chart. Introduce the four food groups to the class. Have them categorize the foods mentioned in the story. Following this, the students can list other foods that belong in each of the four groups.

Science

Refer to the picture at the end of the book that shows the boys' bedroom. Have the students examine the items on the bulletin board. Ask them what the word "ecology" means. Record their responses. This can be expanded by having the students select an ecological issue to research and present to the class.

Art

1. Supply the students with paper plates. Have each student select a feeling to illustrate by creating a face on the paper plate with crayons and/or markers. Yarn may be added for hair. Display these on a bulletin board. Add labels and an explanation of the feeling and when it occurs.
2. Give each of the students a large sheet of drawing paper. Instruct them to fold the paper in half. On one side they can draw a picture of a good day they've had. On the other side, they can illustrate a bad day. This activity can be extended by having the students write a short paragraph about each of these experiences.
3. Reread the page in the story that describes Alexander's experience at the shoe store. Initiate a discussion of sneakers. Have the children list other names for this type of shoe. Provide the students with a sheet of 12 in.-by-18 in. drawing paper and markers, crayons and/or paint and brushes. Give them an opportunity to draw their favorite pair of

sneakers or design a pair they'd like to have.

4. Explain to the students that they will be creating a diorama of their bedrooms. (You may wish to show an example of one.) Have each of the students bring a shoe box or a box of similar size to school. Provide small pieces of cardboard and/or tag board, small boxes, construction paper, scraps of fabric, markers, crayons and/or paint and brushes and any other art media appropriate for this project. Allow time for the students to complete their dioramas.

Drama

Have the students reread the story. Students can choose character parts and pantomime the story as a reader reads the book.

Related Reading

Alexander, Martha, *Nobody Asked Me If I Wanted a Baby Sister*
When the New Baby Comes I'm Moving Out
Aliko, *Feelings*
Blume, Judy, *The One in the Middle Is the Green Kangaroo*
Bradman, Tony, *Bad Week for the Three Bears*
Kellogg, Steven, *Won't Somebody Play With Me?*
Murphy, Joanne Brisson, *Feelings*
Sendak, Maurice, *Where the Wild Things Are*
Viorst, Judith, *Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday*
Alphabet from Z to A
Earrings!
Good-Bye Book
If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries
I'll Fix Anthony
My Mama Says There Aren't Any Zombies, Ghosts, Vampires, Creatures, Demons, Monsters, Fiends, Goblins or Things
Rosie and Michael
Sunday Morning
Tenth Good Thing About Barney
Waber, Bernard, *Ira Sleeps Over*
Wells, Rosemary, *Noisy Nora*
Zolotow, Charlotte, *Hating Book*
Quarreling Book
Someday

Student Name _____ Date _____

List or draw pictures of the events in the story which take place at the beginning, middle, and end.

| Beginning | Middle | End |
|------------------|---------------|------------|
| | | |

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Student Name _____ Date _____

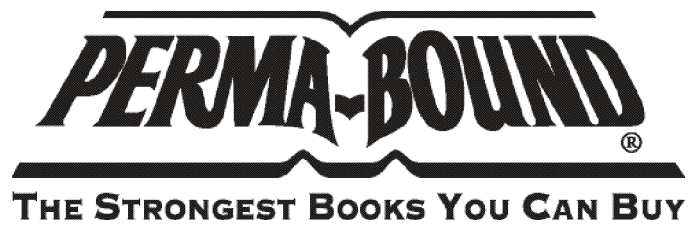
Draw a picture of Alexander in the center square. On the lines on each side of the picture, write words that describe Alexander. On the lines under the picture, write about Alexander, using the words you choose.

| | | |
|-----------------|--|--|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| Character _____ | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Student Name _____ **Date** _____

List Alexander's problems and tell how you think he might solve each problem.

| <u>Alexander's Problems</u> | <u>Possible Solutions</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | |



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