

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Hello, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle

by

### Betty MacDonald

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### Book Information

Betty MacDonald, Hello, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle  
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Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle cures a show-off, crybaby, bully, whisperer, and slowpoke.

**Topics:** Behavior, Misc./Other; Humor/Funny, Funny; Series, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle

### Main Characters

Betsy Wilt the frightened little girl whom Melody helps when the Ferris wheel is stuck

Carlotta Semicolon Nicky's doting mother, who is surprised to learn that her son is a bully

Constance Carmody (Connie) Phillip's older sister, who is embarrassed when he shows off

Cornelia Whitehouse the impoverished little girl whose second-hand clothing is ridiculed by Evelyn

Cornell and Harvard Foxglove Melody's older brothers, who are tired of her constant crying

Donald Quadrangle Harbin's father, who is late to work because of his son's dawdling

Dr. Tim Pillsbury the doctor who refers Melody's mother to Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle to solve Melody's problem

Edith Perriwinkle Phillip Carmody's teacher, who recommends that Mrs. Carmody seek Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's help in curing Phillip

Elizabeth Crackle Mary's kindhearted mother, who disapproves of Mary's whispering; she tries to help Cornelia

Emmy Foxglove Melody's younger sister, who talks with a lisp

Evelyn Rover the snobby little girl who takes pride in her sense of style and enjoys gossiping about other children

Forthright Semicolon Nicky's father, who unwisely gives Nicky the pair of thick heavy shoes that Nicky later uses to kick Roscoe

Georgie Wilcox the newspaper boy who lets Harbin help him on his paper route

Harbin Quadrangle the imaginative young boy whose excessive daydreaming makes him a habitual slowpoke

Hilton Eager Roscoe's father, who has a terrible temper

Janey Quadrangle Harbin's younger sister, who also starts to dawdle

Jimmy Gopher an acquaintance of Nicky who bullies a little girl as they work on the garden house

Jordan Carmody Phillip's father, who is frustrated with his son's behavior

Juniper Foxglove Melody's father, who is affectionate but firm with his daughter

Martha Foxglove Melody's practical mother, who worries about her daughter's crying

Mary Crackle Evelyn's best friend, who joins in Evelyn's cruel games despite her guilty conscience

Meg Carmody Phillip's patient mother, who gives Phillip Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's medicine after he has an accident while showing off on his bike

Melody Foxglove an eight-year-old girl who cries easily and frequently

Miss Weathervane the teacher who tries to stop Evelyn and Mary's cruelty toward Cornelia

Molly Quadrangle Harbin's worried mother, who initially believes her son's dawdling is due to illness

Mrs. Eager Roscoe's outraged mother, who calls Mrs. Semicolon to complain about Nicky's behavior

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle the good-natured local woman who loves children and keeps a chest of magical cures for common childhood behavioral problems

Mrs. Rover Evelyn's concerned mother, who helps Mrs. Crackle fix the girls' whispering problem

Nicholas Semicolon (Nicky) the ten-year-old bully who becomes a neighborhood leader with the help of Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Leadership Pills

Pergola Wingsproggie the little girl who brings Melody a kitten so that Melody will stop crying

Phillip Carmody the young boy who loves to be the center of attention until Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's medicine makes him invisible and inaudible when he shows off

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Robby and Billy Crackle Mary's younger brothers, who eagerly take care of a baby robin they find

Roscoe Eager the little boy whom Nicky kicks in the shins

Sylvia Crouch the spunky eight-year-old girl whom Nicky hits with a book after she confronts him for stealing her sister's apple

Sylvia Quadrangle Harbin's impatient older sister

Trent and Tansy Popsickle the twins who invite Melody and her siblings to their birthday party

Although at first reluctant to use the cure, Mrs. Carmody is convinced when Phillip barely escapes serious injury while showing off on his bicycle. The powder begins to work immediately. For the remainder of the evening, Phillip is unseen and unheard whenever he shows off for his family. The medicine continues to work at school, where Phillip is unable to get any attention from the school children by showing off. The story ends with the cure complete, as Phillip pities his friend, Billy, for being a dumb show-off.

### Vocabulary

**antics** silly or childish actions

**bellowed** shouted in a powerful voice

**bewilderment** confusion

**bureau** a chest of drawers

**pledge** a formal promise

**swaggering** walking in a very confident, overly proud way

"The Crybaby Cure" opens with Mrs. Foxglove baking brownies while awaiting her four children's return from school. The loud bawling of her eight-year-old daughter, Melody, can be heard as she nears the house. Although the other children enter the house, Melody makes only slow progress as her hysterical weeping continues. With help from her mother, Melody finally enters the house, complaining about slight injuries sustained from a fall. Her weeping continues so loudly that her siblings ridicule her, and Mrs. Foxglove is forced to send Melody to her room until she can be cheerful.

### Synopsis

*Hello, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle* is a collection of five stories about children who need a little magic to cure their bad habits. In "The Show-off Cure," Mrs. Carmody is fixing breakfast for her family when her daughter, Connie, complains that her brother, Phillip, embarrasses the family by constantly showing off. Mr. Carmody agrees, informing his wife that he is angry at Phillip's rude behavior in front of a business client. Phillip arrives for breakfast volunteering to perform additional feats but is silenced by his father.

After her family has left, Mrs. Carmody discovers a note from Phillip's teacher requesting a conference. During the phone conversation, Mrs. Carmody learns that Phillip has been disrupting the classroom by showing off. The teacher refers Mrs. Carmody to Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle, a local woman known for her love of children and her magical cures for their behavior problems. Following the teacher's advice, Mrs. Carmody contacts Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle, who prescribes a Show-off Powder that will make Phillip invisible and inaudible whenever he shows off.

Melody's habitual crying, in contrast to her siblings' usual cheerfulness, prompts Mrs. Foxglove to question Melody's health. After the doctor pronounces that Melody is in perfect health, he suggests that Mrs. Foxglove contact Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle. Melody's brothers pick up the Crybaby Tonic that Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle prescribes.

After taking the tonic, whenever Melody cries, she weeps so much that she creates a puddle around her chair at the dinner table that evening and floods the school courtyard at lunch the following day, leaving the girl wet and uncomfortable. Melody's cure is complete when she advises her friend, while they are stuck on a Ferris wheel, that crying never helps anything.

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's services are needed once again in "The Bully." Ten-year-old Nicky Semicolon, a healthy boy who is large for his age, has a reputation as a child who torments animals and other children. Nicky's parents are unaware of this

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behavior, and are proud that he has grown to be healthy, strong, and large since he was sickly as a youngster. It is not until Roscoe Eager's mother complains that Nicky has brutally kicked Roscoe that the Semicolons realize their son is a bully.

At her husband's suggestion, Mrs. Semicolon contacts Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle. Although Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle is aware of Nicky's behavior problem, she reassures the ashamed mother and gently suggests that Nicky needs Leadership Pills. Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle also recommends that Nicky be allowed to convert the Semicolons' storage shed into a meeting place for the boy and his friends.

After Nicky steals an apple from a small girl and torments a young child at the grocery store with a shopping cart, Mrs. Semicolon is anxious to give Nicky his first pill. The cure works more quickly than anticipated, as Nicky volunteers to take a gift basket to the injured Roscoe. Nicky returns from Roscoe's some time later, having apologized to his friend, accepted a scolding from Roscoe's stern father, and offered to give Roscoe a ride to school the next day. After school the next day, Nicky makes amends with the small girl and her sister, chastises another boy for his bully tactics, and forms a club to help people, using the shed as the clubhouse.

Miss Weathervane's fourth-grade class has a problem in "The Whisperer." Mary Crackle and Evelyn Rover are continually whispering in class, often including unkind comments about an impoverished, shabbily dressed student, Cornelia Whitehouse. Despite the efforts of Miss Weathervane, the whispered slurs about Cornelia's home life and clothing continue.

Mary and Evelyn continue their rude behavior on the way home while Cornelia walks behind them. Mrs. Crackle notices the whispering and chastises the girls. Mary's mother befriends Cornelia and is disgusted with her daughter's rudeness toward the fatherless girl. Evelyn's mother expresses a similar concern about Evelyn's rude whispering.

Mr. Crackle suggests that his wife contact Mrs.

Piggle-Wiggle about the problem. According to Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle, the girls would benefit from Whisper Sticks. Mrs. Crackle gives Whisper Sticks to Evelyn and Cornelia; Mary receives one when she returns from her music lesson. Unknown to the girls, the sticks reduce the girls' voices to mere whispers. Although each girl hears her own voice clearly, the voices of the others are barely audible. Confusion turns to irritation as each girl interprets the others' inattention as deliberate.

When Mary writes a note to her mother asking her to explain why the girls are having a problem, Mrs. Crackle responds that whispering has strained each girl's voice. The only cure for their voices is for each to pledge not to whisper. The girls agree and their voices return. They convert the Hush Hush Club into a Picnic Club that will include Cornelia and other children. Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's cure has worked again.

The last story, "The Slowpoke," involves a cure that is eventually used on the entire Quadrangle family. Harbin Quadrangle is an unrepentant dawdler. His daydreaming makes him late for breakfast, his father late for his train, and his siblings nearly late for school. Mrs. Quadrangle fears that Harbin's behavior is due to illness, so she prepares nutritious foods in great quantity for his after-school snack. When Harbin feels ill after eating his snack, Mrs. Quadrangle arranges for the doctor to examine the boy. The doctor finds no physical problem, so he tells her to call Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle.

Mr. Quadrangle speaks with Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle about Harbin's dawdling and is given a magic liquid spray for slowpokes. Mr. Quadrangle sprays Harbin's clothing and shoes with the liquid while Harbin sleeps. The cure works quickly, as the next day Harbin volunteers to walk Mr. Pierce, the family dog, in the rain. He returns promptly, volunteers to make French toast for the family's breakfast, and offers to help the paper boy, who is behind schedule.

When Harbin's sister, Janey, displays slowpoke symptoms, her mother sprays her clothing. Janey

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promptly readies herself for school and volunteers to prepare the baby's breakfast. As the family rides in the car to school and work, Mr. and Mrs. Quadrangle remark on their own unusually energetic pace that morning, only to discover that each had sprayed the other with Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's slowpoke cure.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

What is Roscoe's reaction to Nicky after Nicky kicks him?

*Roscoe quickly forgives Nicky for attacking him. He is willing to play with Nicky and accepts his help in getting to school. Later Roscoe joins Nicky's efforts to help the neighborhood children, and he is excited to be part of Nicky's club.*

#### Literary Analysis

What are common characteristics of families in this story?

*Nearly all of the families described in this book have the same structure: a stay-at-home mother whose time is spent attending to the needs of family and home, a father whose job supports the family, and more than one child. Exceptions to this structure suggest problems. Cornelia's family is struggling financially because her widowed mother must work at the local factory, and Nicky's intimidating personality may be a result of his being an only child. Parents in each of the stories share certain characteristics. They expect courteous behavior from their children. The parents show concern when their children act in an unacceptable fashion and accept responsibility for changing their children's behavior. They seek quick medical, not disciplinary, solutions that are safe for the children and minimally disruptive to the families.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

What are some reasons why Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle waits for the Semicolons to discover Nicky's problem rather than reporting it herself?

*Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle respects the roles parents play in their children's lives. She does not interfere with a child's upbringing, unless a parent asks for her advice. While she has a great understanding for children, she also understands parents. Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle knows that many parents might resent an outsider who gives them negative information about their children. Some parents may be disbelieving, like Phillip's mother. Other parents may be ashamed, like Nicky's mother. Still others may be worried, like Melody's mother. Before people can accept help, they often need to recognize the problem. Sometimes behaviors need to be very drastic before parents recognize that these actions are causing problems. It is difficult for parents to deal with their own reactions to the problem. In each case, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle is very gentle with parents. She does not lay blame, nor does she criticize the child.*

#### Constructing Meaning

How can the reader tell that Evelyn's mother does not value fashion as highly as Evelyn does?

*Even though Evelyn's mother buys her daughter nice clothing and has told her that she has "natural style," it is clear that Mrs. Rover does not mean that Evelyn should treat shabbily dressed children as if they were inferior. She is upset that Evelyn is being cruel to Cornelia and forces her daughter to invite Cornelia to her birthday party. She also considers canceling the birthday party if Evelyn does not stop gossiping. Mrs. Rover calls Evelyn "hateful" when she sees her walking down the street whispering mean things about Cornelia and agrees with Mrs. Crackle that the girls need to be taught a lesson. Finally she encourages the girls to form a Picnic Club and disband the Hush Hush Club.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Details** Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle helps

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children behave by giving them medicine that cures their problems in very unusual ways. For instance, Phillip cannot be seen or heard when he is showing off, and Melody is flooded by her own tears when she cries. Have the students create a catalog of medicines that can cure other types of bad behavior. Have the students describe in their catalog what each medicine looks like, how it is administered, what kind of behavior it is supposed to cure, and how the medicine cures the behavior.

**Responding to Literature** In the book, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle can magically cure bad behavior. In real life, however, misbehavior cannot be eliminated as easily. Have students identify several inappropriate behaviors that they have exhibited, like pouting, lying, throwing temper tantrums, being lazy, and refusing to share. Then have them create a plan for changing those behaviors using specific methods such as rewards, loss of privileges, etc.

**Making Predictions** Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle has a positive effect on her neighborhood by providing both cures for misbehaving children and a pleasant home for children to visit. Have the students think about what the neighborhood might be like without Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle. Then have them write a short story about the neighborhood either before or after Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle lived there.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Both Evelyn and Mary whisper mean things about Cornelia several times in "The Whisperer." In each case, an adult scolds the girls for their behavior. Although the girls are friends, they react differently to being reprimanded. Have each student write about three instances in which the girls were scolded for whispering. Their writing should include where the girls were whispering, what adult administered the reprimand, and how each girl reacted.