

GRADE 8 English Language Arts
Reading and Responding: Lesson 17
(continued from lesson 16)

Read aloud to the students the material that is printed in **boldface type** inside the boxes. Information in regular type inside the boxes and all information outside the boxes should **not** be read to students. Possible student responses are included in parentheses after the questions.

Any directions that ask you to do something, such as to turn to a page or hand out materials to students, will have an arrow symbol (\Rightarrow) by them.

Optional: At some point during the lesson, you may read the passage aloud so students can hear fluent, expressive reading and the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words. You may read the passage aloud immediately before or after students have read it independently, or at another point during the lesson, as you feel appropriate. The decision to read the passage aloud should depend on student needs, the degree of text difficulty, and the particular lesson.

Purpose of Lesson 17:

In this lesson, the tutor and students will

- read and respond to a poem,
- identify the author’s purpose,
- connect literature to personal life,
- practice analytical thinking,
- write a response to the *Whatifs*, and
- write a poem.

Equipment/Materials Needed:

- Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-1 “Whatif”
- Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-2
- Pencils
- One or more copies of Shel Silverstein's books (optional)

Today we will do some writing activities that go along with Shel Silverstein’s poem “Whatif.” First I’d like a volunteer to read the poem aloud again so we can all enjoy it.

⇒ Distribute Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-1.
(This copy of the poem has spaces between the lines for students’ responses.)

I have found that one of the best ways to get rid of the *whatif* problem is to answer it.

Read aloud *Whatif I flunk the test?* (Response: **I’ll get some help before I take the next one.**)

Get a student to respond to *Whatif the fish won’t bite?* Ask one or two more students to volunteer a response to one of the *whatifs*.

Ask students to write responses to each *whatif* in the space provided. (If this activity seems to be too much writing, ask students to respond to any 10 *whatifs* they choose).

Allow 15-25 minutes as needed. After students have completed their responses, have some of them share.

Now that we have read and discussed the *Whatif* poem, let’s see whether you can answer a few questions about it.

⇒ Distribute Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-2.

1. Why do you think the *whatifs* in this poem come at night? When do your *whatifs* come? Before you answer this question, can anyone tell me what kind of answer will be needed? Pause. This question asks for an opinion; will all of you have the same answers? Pause. No, the key words *why do you think* mean that this question is not asking for facts, but an opinion. Your opinions are right if they can be supported.

I think *whatifs* come at night because that’s when we get still and are not doing other things that might keep us from worrying. My *whatifs* come at almost any time, if I let them.

2. What does the author mean by saying the *Whatifs pranced and partied all night long*? (This question may be difficult for 8th graders to answer, but encourage them to try.)

Maybe this *whatif* is about people who can't sleep because they worry so much. I'm not sure exactly what the author meant, but this *whatif* makes me think about people who worry so much it seems as if they enjoyed as much as attending an endless party. Do you know anyone who worries all the time and seems to enjoy worrying? Pause. Have students share.

3. Based on the *whatif* poem, what do you think the author believes about worrying? Circle each choice that you think the author believes. There can be more than one answer because the author can have many beliefs. Provide examples to support your answer.

Be careful about answering this question. It's a little different from other multiple choice questions you have had. This question is not asking for the best answer; instead it is asking for all answers that make sense. What are the key words? Pause. The key words are *author's beliefs about worrying*. When answering this kind of question, it is easy to get confused and begin responding as if the question asked for the reader's beliefs. Remember, this question is asking about what the author believes, not what you believe.

Response:

- A. All worries are very serious.
- B. We spend too much time worrying about things that won't happen.
- C. We should spend more time worrying and not just worry at night.
- D. When we are busy, we don't worry so much as when we are idle.
- E. Students worry a lot about what people think about them.
- F. Children are too young to have serious worries.
- G. Student worries are just as important as adults' worries.
- H. The *whatifs* visit only young people and never visit adults.

Allow students a few minutes to answer Number 3. Then go over each choice and discuss whether the author believes it and how we know it. Have students volunteer their answers and how explain they found them before providing the following answers and reasons underlying them.

The author's beliefs are B, D, E, G

- **Choice A is incorrect.** One example of a worry that is not very serious is on line 6: *Whatif they've closed the swimming pool.*
- **Choice B is correct.** The whole poem is about worries and how they bother people; the third line says the Whatifs *pranced and partied all night long.*
- **Choice C is incorrect.** Since so many of the worries are about things that probably won't happen, the author probably thinks we spend *too much time* worrying.
- **Choice D is correct.** The whatifs probably come at night because we are too busy to listen to them during the day.
- **Choice E is correct.** Examples of students' worries can be found in Lines 5 (*Whatif I'm dumb in school?*) and 11. (*Whatif I flunk the test?*)
- **Choice F is incorrect.** Several examples show that children have serious worries. One example is Line 19. (*Whatif my parents get divorced?*)
- **Choice G is correct.** Two examples are Lines 18 (*Whatif they start a war?*) and 19. (*What if my parents get a divorce?*)
- **Choice H is incorrect.** The poem seems to be about a child's worries (See Choice E.), but some of them could be adult worries also. (*Whatif they start a war?*) Nothing in the poem says that the author believes that only children have Whatifs.

Read each whatif line and ask the students to decide whether or not a grown person would have this particular worry. Share a few of your own whatifs as an adult.

For the last activity, students will write their own *whatif* poems. Explain that these poems don't have to be as long so Silverstein's poem and that they don't have to rhyme. Allow students a great degree of flexibility in writing their poems. This activity may take as much as 30 minutes. When most students have finished, ask volunteers to share their poems.

Optional: End the lesson by reading aloud or having a student read aloud a selection from one of Silverstein's books.

Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-1

WHATIF (Shel Silverstein)

1. Last night while I lay thinking here,
2. Some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
3. And pranced and partied all night long
4. And sang their same old Whatif song:

5. Whatif I'm dumb in school?
6. Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?
7. Whatif I get beat up?
8. Whatif there's poison in my cup?
9. Whatif I start to cry?
10. Whatif I get sick and die?
11. Whatif I flunk the test?
12. Whatif green hair grows on my chest?
13. Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?
14. Whatif I don't grow taller?
15. Whatif my head starts getting smaller?
16. Whatif the fish won't bite?
17. Whatif the wind tears up my kite?
18. Whatif they start a war?
19. Whatif my parents get divorced?
20. Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?
21. Whatif I tear my pants?

22. Everything seems swell, and then
23. The nighttime Whatifs strike again!

Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 17-2

NAME _____

1. Why do you think the *Whatifs* in this poem come at night? When do *your Whatifs* come?

2. What does the author mean by saying the *Whatifs pranced and partied all night long*?

3. Based on the *whatif* poem, what are the **author's beliefs** about worrying? ***There may be more than one answer.*** Provide examples to support your answer.
 - A. All worries are very serious.
 - B. We spend too much time worrying about things that won't happen.
 - C. We should spend more time worrying and not just worry at night.
 - D. When we are busy we don't worry so much as when we are idle.
 - E. Students worry a lot about what people think about them.
 - F. Children are too young to have serious worries.
 - G. Children's worries are just as important as adults' worries.
 - H. The *whatifs* visit only children and never visit adults.