

Candlewick Press Teachers' Guide

THE **Mercy
Watson** BOOKS



by Kate DiCamillo

illustrated by Chris Van Dusen



Mercy Watson

Have Mercy!

Mercy Watson, the porcine wonder, is an adorable pig who lives with the doting Mr. and Mrs. Watson. Each fun-filled book in Kate DiCamillo's Mercy Watson series showcases Mercy's single-minded love for buttered toast, a good chase, and the antics that ensue. Tap into Mercy's adventurous spirit while engaging children with language arts lessons in vocabulary, creative writing, character studies, and more.

A Toasty Tale

It's no secret that Mercy loves to eat—or that her favorite food is hot buttered toast. In honor of Mercy, create a class book in the shape of a stack of toast.

Preparation:

- On a piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper, draw an outline of a piece of toast. Make two copies. On one, write *Mercy Watson's favorite food is hot buttered toast. What's yours?* This will be page 1 of your book. On the other copy, write the sentence starter *My favorite foods are . . .* Make a copy of the sentence-starter page for each student.
- Make two covers by cutting toast shapes from oak tag or beige construction paper. Write or print the title "A Toasty Tale" on the front cover.

Distribute one sentence-starter page to each student. Ask each student to cut out the piece of toast, complete the sentence, and illustrate his or her sheet. When students are finished, bind all the student pages between the covers using heavy-duty staples or a hole punch and loose rings. Your book will look like a stack of deliciously topped toast to savor in the reading area.



Hanging on the Plot Line

This exercise is a fun way to introduce or review the concept of plot your students. Each Mercy Watson book is structured along with a similar plot line: Mercy follows the scent of butter, gets into mischief in the process, and ends up indirectly saving the day.

Preparation:

- Hang a clothesline in the classroom. The line should be long enough to accommodate thirty-five 5 x 7 index cards (to be hung with clothespins; see below).

Read *Mercy Watson to the Rescue* with students. Ask the class to recall four or five main story points. As each is suggested, write a sentence or phrase describing each story point on a separate 5 x 7 index card. Then ask student volunteers to place the cards in order and attach them to the clothesline using spring-type clothespins.

Next, break the class into five groups—one for each of the other Mercy Watson books in the series. Assign a book to each group and ask students to repeat the exercise of writing and/or illustrating the main plot points from their title, placing the cards in order, and hanging them on the "plot line."

When Beds Sigh: Figures of Speech, Part 1

Read aloud this sentence from page 50 of *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*:

The Watsons' bed sighed loudly and crashed all the way through the floor.

Ask students:

- Can a bed really sigh?
- If the bed *could* sigh, why do you think it would?
- What does the sentence mean?
- What might the author have been trying to convey by this choice of wording?

Explain that the author chose to make her sentence more interesting (and funny) by imagining that the bed sighed like a person carrying a heavy load. Ask students to practice using figurative language by replacing *sighed* in the sentence above with other words. (You may wish to write the sentence on a sentence strip or chalkboard.) Ask the class for substitute words that would retain the basic meaning of the sentence (such as *moaned*, *whimpered*, or *groaned*). Then ask them for words that might change the meaning (such as *sang*, *whistled*, or *laughed*).



When Pigs Fly: Figures of Speech, Part 2

In *Mercy Watson: Something Wonky This Way Comes*, Eugenia tries to explain that the expression “when pigs fly” is a figure of speech (page 8).

Talk with the students about figures of speech—words used in an unusual way in order to produce a different meaning.

Ask students:

- Can pigs really fly?
- What does the expression mean?
- Which is more fun to say and read: “That will never happen” or “When pigs fly”?

Review a list of popular figures of speech and discuss their meanings. Here are a few:

- Hit the road
- Dying of hunger
- Dog-tired
- Weighs a ton
- Over the hill
- Fish out of water
- Stay on your toes
- The pen is mightier than the sword.

Extension:

Invite students to choose a figure of speech and illustrate it as if the words meant what they usually do (an exhausted dog, for example, or a fish on dry land).

Fact Versus Opinion

Eugenia Lincoln has many opinions (see *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, page 26). As a class, discuss the difference between fact (truths) and opinion (beliefs).

Preparation:

- On chart paper, draw a T-table and write the heading **FACT** on the left and **OPINION** on the right.

Read the following sentences aloud to the class, and ask the group to determine whether each is fact or opinion.

- Pigs like to eat.
- Pigs do not sweat.
- Pigs are clean animals.
- Pigs should not live in houses.
- Pigs shouldn’t be kept as pets.
- Pigs ought to be put on leashes.

Write each sentence on the chart under the heading students believe to be correct.

Immerse children in research on pigs to find out whether they put each statement in the proper category. (You might wish to guide them through the search for information as a class, or assign individual research if students are old enough.) Use library books or the Internet. Allow an amount of time appropriate to the age group, and then come back together as a class to share results.

If any statements were incorrectly listed, rewrite them in the correct column.



Help Is on the Way

The fire and police departments are involved in many of the *Mercy Watson* books. Here are a few safety awareness activities you could use with *Mercy* books:

- Ask students how they would call the police or fire department in an emergency (dial 911).
- Discuss when to call and when *not* to call the fire or police departments. Which instances in the *Mercy* books were appropriate times to call, and which were not?
- Invite a local firefighter or police officer to come to the classroom and speak to the children about the role of the fire or police department in the community.
- As a homework assignment, have students work with their caregivers to complete an “In Case of Emergency” form. Information should include address, phone number, emergency contact, and so on.

Folly!

In *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride*, Eugenia Lincoln refers to Mr. Watson's Saturday drives with Mercy as folly (page 14).

Ask students:

- What does *folly* mean? After student ideas are put forward, check a dictionary (as a group or individually) and write the definition on a chalkboard.
- What are some synonyms for *folly*? List on the board.
- Why does Eugenia think the rides are folly, while Mr. Watson and Mercy think they are great fun?
- Baby thinks the rides are both folly and fun. Can this be true?

Assign each student to write and draw about one of their own follies (a time when they acted foolishly or recklessly). Optional: If this activity is done during the fall, have students write or draw on leaf-shaped paper. Post them on a class bulletin board entitled "Fall Follies."

Lingo Bingo

The *Mercy Watson* books contain many great vocabulary words for primary students. "Lingo Bingo" is a fun way to reinforce study of vocabulary, synonyms, and antonyms.

Preparation:

- On a piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper, create a large, simple bingo grid composed of three boxes across and three boxes down, totaling nine in all.
- Reproduce the empty Lingo Bingo sheets, one for each student.
- Write each of the *Mercy Watson* vocabulary words below on a slip of paper and place the slips in a container.
- Write each *Mercy Watson* vocabulary word on the chalkboard as well.

Vocabulary Words:

Book 1: *alert* (p. 19); *disappointment* (p. 20); *scowled* (p. 35)

Book 2: *displeased* (p. 12); *menace* (p. 12); *caromed* (p. 53); *prodigy* (p. 60)

Book 3: *refreshment* (p. 45); *snuffle* (p. 49); *sly* (p. 67); *reform(ing)* (p. 69)

Book 4: *splendid* (p. 3); *array* (p. 26); *pursuit* (p. 43); *potentially* (p. 67)

Book 5: *gracious* (p. 5); *extreme measures* (p. 24); *unmentionable* (p. 35)

Book 6: *inspiring* (p. 2); *faux* (p. 21); *investigate* (p. 36); *distress* (p. 53)

Distribute empty Lingo Bingo sheets to students. Instruct students to individualize their grids by looking at the board and choosing one word to write in each box. (Words should not be repeated.)

Choose what kind of Lingo Bingo to play (definitions, synonyms, or opposites).

Draw one slip at a time from the container and call out the definition, synonym, or antonym of the word on the slip. Students should place a marker on their grid if they have the correct word. (For example: if you're playing "Definition Lingo Bingo" and call out the definition "wide awake," students who have the word *alert* on their grid would place a marker on it.)

To further incorporate the theme of *Mercy Watson: Something Wonky This Way Comes*, consider using popcorn as bingo markers and having the first child to get three in a row yell, "Yippie-i-oh!" Then the whole class can celebrate the win by enjoying the rest of the popcorn together.



P is for "Pig, Porcine Wonder, and Popcorn"

In *Mercy Watson: Something Wonky This Way Comes*, Leroy Ninker sells bottomless buckets of popcorn at the drive-in. Begin a letter study by brainstorming some *P* words. Then have each student draw a large *P* on a piece of oak tag or construction paper and decorate it with as many *P* words as they can think of. For an extra pinch of *P*-ness, use purple or pink markers!

What a Character! Part 1

The characters in the *Mercy Watson* books are unique and funny. Begin a character study by copying the blank table below onto large chart paper.

Character Name	What does he/she like?	What does he/she do?	Favorite scene involving this character?

Fill in the chart together as a class, listing characters in the first column. Students can refer to any of the books in the Mercy Watson series to help complete the character study.

Extension: Ask each student to imagine a new character for a Mercy Watson story. Then they can create character studies for their new characters by copying the chart headings and filling in responses on a sheet of notebook paper.



What a Character! Part 2

To keep Mercy “hanging around” your classroom and in your students’ minds, use this mobile-making project. Each student will need:

- a hanger
- 4 2-foot lengths of yarn
- 4 oak-tag circles, 5 to 6 inches in diameter, with one hole punched in each

On the front of each circle, students should write the name of one character from the Mercy Watson books and draw a picture of him or her. On the back of the circle, they should write two facts about the character.

When all the circles are completed, students should tie one end of each string to a circle (through the punched hole) and the other to their hanger. Hang the mobiles throughout the classroom.



Think Like a Pig

In *Mercy Watson Thinks Like a Pig*, Francine Poulet tries to think like a pig in order to capture Mercy. Put yourself in Mercy’s hooves and think like a pig. The Mercy books are written in the third person—but what if they were written from Mercy’s perspective?

As a group, retell one of the Mercy Watson books from Mercy’s point of view instead of the narrator’s. Start off by reading a page or two of the book to students, then ask a volunteer to retell that part of the story from Mercy’s point of view. Proceed this way through the rest of the book.

This should be an activity in oral retelling rather than a written exercise. Children may even enjoy trying on their theatrical wings by acting out the different parts in the story as they retell.

The Great Pig Debate

Children love to argue, so here’s an activity to channel those argumentation muscles into effective debating skills.

Pose the following question to the class: Which makes a better pet: a pig or a dog? Divide the students into small groups and assign each group one side of the dispute. Ask each group to write at least five reasons defending their position.

Finally, stage a class debate. Have each group take turns sharing their reasons in front of the rest of the class. Continue until every group has had their turn.

When Pigs Fly: The Next Adventure

Ask students to imagine that they are the author of one more book in the Mercy Watson series. Invite students to imagine where Mercy and her friends might go. A toaster factory? A bakery? The moon?

As a class, brainstorm major events of the story. What trouble will Mercy get into? Which characters will be involved? How will it end?

If desired, write the story on pink or pig-shaped paper and bind as a class book, or have each student write and illustrate his or her own Mercy Watson story.

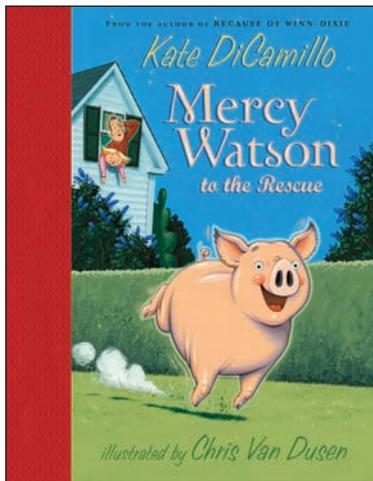
Students will no doubt enjoy exercising their creativity in this culmination of the Mercy Watson adventures!



Prepared by Karen Cardillo, educational consultant
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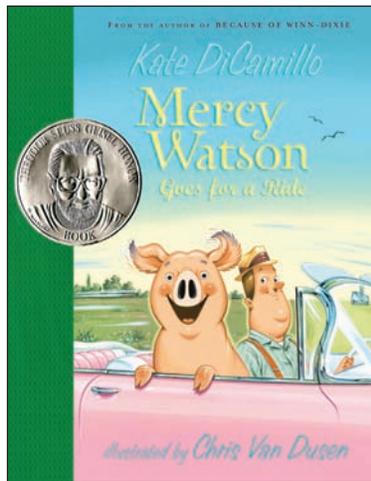
The Books



Mercy Watson to the Rescue

ISBN: 978-0-7636-2270-1

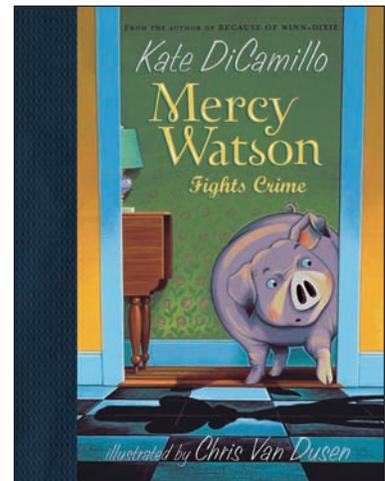
Is Mercy going for help, or does she have something else on her mind, such as her neighbors' sugar cookies?



Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride

ISBN: 978-0-7636-2332-6

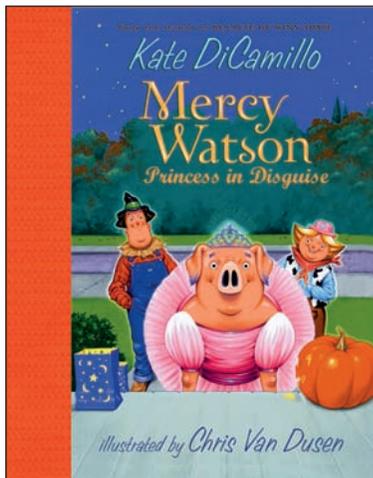
How is it that our porcine wonder finds herself behind the wheel instead of in the passenger seat?



Mercy Watson Fights Crime

ISBN: 978-0-7636-2590-0

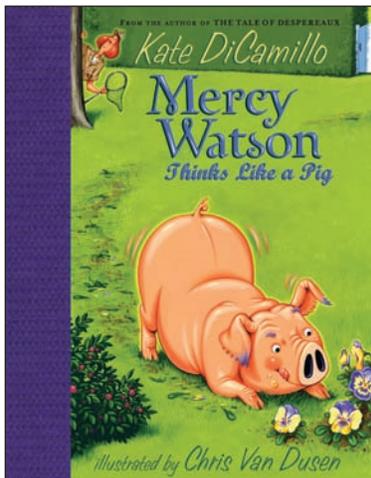
The beguiling Mercy turns bucking bronco to snare a robber about to steal—of all things—her toaster!



Mercy Watson: Princess in Disguise

ISBN: 978-0-7636-3014-0

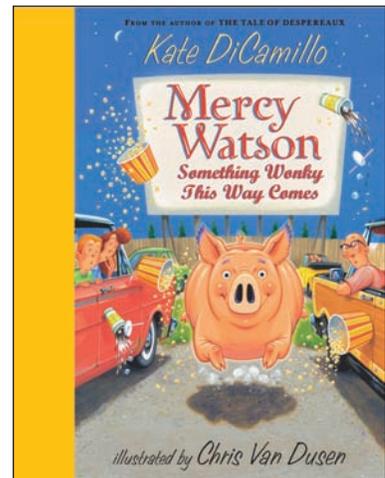
Can visions of treats entice a porcine wonder to wear her princess costume? Hold on for some Halloween havoc, Mercy Watson—style!



Mercy Watson Thinks Like a Pig

ISBN: 978-0-7636-3265-6

Can Mercy Watson outwit . . . Animal Control? This time the porcine wonder is on the lam in a wry and wily adventure!



Mercy Watson: Something Wonky This Way Comes

ISBN: 978-0-7636-3644-9

In her final story, the porcine wonder is off to the drive-in—and driven to follow that buttery smell—in a comic crescendo that reunites a familiar cast of characters.



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