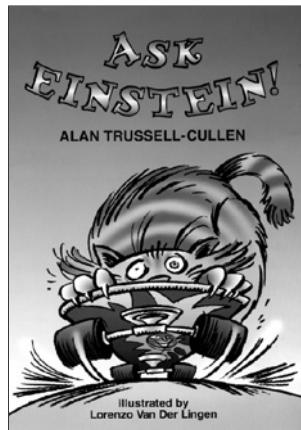


Ask Einstein!

by Alan Trussell-Cullen

illustrated by Lorenzo Van Der Lingen



Book Summary

Henry is writing to his teacher, Miss Wilson, to explain why he hasn't done his homework. The letter introduces the family's crazy cat, Einstein, and goes on to describe a series of disasters that Henry hopes will explain his missing homework.

Features of the Book

- A personal recount in letter form
- The tall tale genre
- Exaggerated illustrations for effect
- The use of caricature
- Text features – footnote, labels, speech bubbles, text in illustrations
- The use of puns – *He seems to be over his attack of the blues*
- The joke in calling the cat Einstein

Purpose

Ask Einstein! can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- expressing and supporting a response to a text;
- using illustrations as a source of information;
- describing the features of humorous writing;
- reading aloud with attention to phrasing and punctuation;
- predicting probable actions and outcomes.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- Expressing and supporting a response to a text
- Using illustrations as a source of information

Introducing the text

Discuss the students' own experiences with pets.

- Do your pets ever do silly things?
- Look at the cat on the cover of this book. Can you predict what kind of cat it might be? What things tell you this? (illustration style, facial expression)

Discuss the style of the illustration and ask for suggestions about the kind of story this might be.

- What kind of illustration is this?

The students may suggest the term "cartoon." If not, you could introduce the term and ask the students for examples of this style of illustration from TV or comic books. Explain who Albert Einstein was if the students can't offer this information themselves.

Now look together at the blurb on the back cover.

- What else can you find out about the story from this?
- Can you predict what might happen?

Ask the students to share their predictions with a partner. Some of these might be:

- It's a letter.
- The writer hasn't done his homework.
- Miss Wilson might be the teacher's name.
- The cat could be called Einstein.

Reading and discussing the text

Look at the title page and the first two pages of the story together.

- Does this confirm any of your predictions using the cover information?

Discuss the humorous features of the text and illustrations. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of comic books and TV to explain how the illustrator has used facial expression, text in the illustrations, and suggested movement to create humor.

- Would this book work with realistic illustrations?
Why/why not?
- Do you think Henry is telling the truth, or will the letter be just a big excuse?
- What makes you think that?

The pace of this story is fast and furious. Breaking the reading at any point may be frustrating for the students. Suggest that the students read the story right through.

- As you read, think about how Henry's teacher will react to this letter.

The students could use sticky notes to mark text or illustrations they want to refer to later.

When the students have finished reading, ask whether their predictions were correct.

- When did you begin to realize that Henry might be making up a story?
- Which parts of the letter do you think Henry's teacher would believe?

Ask the students to choose an incident from the story (text or illustrations) that they consider to be funny.

- What makes this funny?
- How have the writer and the illustrator worked together to make you laugh?
- Would the story be just as funny without the illustrations?

Ask the students to justify their responses.

Discuss the predictions that were made before the students began reading the text.

- Which predictions were correct? What evidence is there to support your ideas?

Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

S Describing the features of humorous writing

- Was this a funny book? What made it funny?

Gather and discuss the students' suggestions.

They may include:

- the way the pictures are drawn (exaggeration of features and movement)
- the expressions on the characters' faces (pages 22 and 23)
- the things that happen to the characters in the story (slapstick events, such as on page 27)
- the labels and diagrams that the illustrator has added. (for example, pages 4 and 26)

 Encourage the students to think about the character of Einstein the cat. Work with them to write a profile of Einstein. Discuss the characteristics that you would include, such as description, habits, likes and dislikes, and personality. They can use the blackline master on page 62 to record their ideas.

Ask the students to predict from this profile how Einstein might behave in the next story they read about him.

S Reading aloud with attention to phrasing and punctuation

Discuss the punctuation that the students need to be aware of to read with fluency and expression:

- quotation marks to show that someone is speaking
- exclamation points and bold type to indicate an increase in volume
- ellipses and long dashes to show pauses.

Now reread the text aloud together. Encourage the students to read with a pace that will keep an audience excited.

S Predicting probable actions and outcomes

 As a group, think about how the teacher might react to Henry's letter. The students could write a letter from Miss Wilson back to Henry in the same literary style – a tall tale in an exaggerated form. Model an opening to the letter for the group.