

Mrs. Lunchroom Lady

by Bill Harley

In this story, Bill recounts his experience in the elementary school lunchroom trying to get “seconds” of hot bread and butter sandwiches. After repeated efforts to get by without cleaning their plates, Bill and his classmates succeed in getting the sandwiches, only to be caught and then discover something about “Mrs. Lunchroom Lady” - that she has a name.

The story is based on a real incident. As in many of his stories, Bill has put together many of his memories and observations about life in elementary school and woven them into a story. While most of the things happened, they did not all necessarily happen in the way described, or at the same time.

“Mrs. Lunchroom Lady” provides a lot of material for discussion. While children spend hours and hours in school, we often never talk about the culture of school - the people, rules and objects in a school that make it what it is. “Mrs. Lunchroom Lady” offers an opportunity for that discussion. The focus of the discussion might be observations about the way we relate to each other in school, or focus on how the story was put together. Questions for discussion might include:

- 1) In many stories there is a text, and a subtext. The “text” is what the story is about, the “subtext” is what the story is “really” about. What are the text and the subtext of the story? What is Bill trying to say about people?
- 2) What makes the story seem real? How is Bill’s lunchroom like yours? How is it different?
- 3) Bill talks about how children feel about food. What do you think of that? Was he right? Can you draw up “Kids’ rules for food”?
- 4) What did Bill and his classmates assume about Mrs. Lunchroom Lady? What people are in your school that you don’t think much about?
- 5) Character - why people do what they do - is what drives a story - what makes it go from one place to another. When people insist on being who they are, things are bound to happen. How does character - who Bill is, who is classmates are, who Mrs. Lunchroom Lady is - make the story happen?
- 6) Can you think of an incident that happened to you that could be the base for a story?

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