



THE PLOT CHICKENS

MARY JANE AND HERM AUCH

GRADES
PREK–3

About the Book

This hilarious picture book, which offers an egg-cellent overview of the creative writing process for anyone who's ever wanted to peck out a story, brings back the beloved protagonist of Souperchicken.

Henrietta loves to read so much she decides to write a book of her own. With the help of her three old aunts, she hatches a plot, gives her character lots of problems, and writes what she knows. But when Henrietta publishes her story, the critics say she's laid an egg! Is this the end of Henrietta's career as an author?

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature

Analyzing Stories—Henrietta followed eight rules when writing her story, *The Perils of Maxine*. Students can use many of these rules to analyze other stories they read. They can identify the main character and the problem, pinpoint the places in the story where there is suspense, mention places where the five senses come into play, and cite the moment when the main character solves the problem. They can begin to recognize that these are qualities of excellent fiction.

Comparing Stories—Henrietta's story is based loosely on "Little Red Riding Hood." Students can obtain various versions of this well-known tale in their school or public library, and after reading them they can compare them with one another and with Henrietta's version.

Art

Colors—The authors present a very brief description of how yellow, magenta, cyan, and black are superimposed upon one another in the color printing process. Students can experiment using crayons or watercolor paints to see what happens when they create mixtures of various combinations of the three primary colors and then add black for details.

Humor—There are many humorous moments in the story. Children can select the parts they thought were funny and explain why those particular plot incidents made them laugh. They may also want to read other humorous books about chickens by the same author.

Fiction vs. Nonfiction—Henrietta and the other chickens in the story talk, read, write, wear clothing, etc. Can chickens really do these things? Discuss with students that this story is fiction. It is not true and could never really happen. Students can read nonfiction books about chickens to learn how real chickens actually behave. Are there any similarities between real chickens and Henrietta and her aunts?

Students can also create their own color wheels. (See Online Resources below.)

Drawing Chickens—The illustrations in *The Plot Chickens* are cartoons, complete with dialogue balloons. Students may enjoy creating their own cartoon chickens to illustrate moments in the story.

Language Arts

Creative Writing—A list of Henrietta’s rules for writing can be posted in the classroom for use in future writing projects. Students can begin by writing a class story. First they can brainstorm to choose a character, then decide on a plot, and then continue with the other elements of a story. Once they have gone through the process as a whole class, they can repeat it either in small groups or as individuals. They can share their completed stories with the class.

Plays on Words—The authors use humorous original words in the story, including *eggstasy* (ecstasy), *buk, buk, buk* (chicken sound/book), *eggshilarating* (exhilarating), and *eggsitedly* (excitedly). They also use several words that pertain

specifically to chickens: clucked, peck out a story, hatch a plot, gizzard, brood, lays an egg. The book Henrietta reads, *Writing Rules!* by Reed Moore is also a play on words. Students can use dictionaries to locate definitions of unfamiliar words and then discuss the authors’ use of them and their meaning in *The Plot Chickens*. (They can include the choice of words for the title.)

Rejection—Henrietta receives a rejection letter when she sends her book to a publisher. How does she feel? What does she do to improve the situation? Students can discuss these questions and can discuss or write about times when they were feeling rejected and what actions they took to make things better.

Online Resources

Interactive Color Wheel

www.r0k.us/graphics/SIHwheel.html

This interactive color wheel shows cyan, magenta, and yellow, and how each color blends into the next. This can give students an idea of how the color printing process works using these three main colors plus black.

Photographs and Illustrations of Chickens

www.images.google.com/images

Students can type in “chickens” and see many photographs of real chickens. They can also click on “cartoon chickens” to see how different artists have interpreted chickens in humorous ways.

How to Draw Chickens

www.how-to-draw-funny-cartoons.com/cartoon-chicken.html

Presents step-by-step directions (which can be printed out) for drawing cartoon chickens. Students can also click on other animals for additional drawing directions.

**Check out these Poultry Parodies and more books
online at www.holidayhouse.com**

*Beauty and the Beaks, Chickerella, Peeping Beauty, Poultrygeist,
Souperchicken*

About the Creators

Mary Jane and **Herm Auch** have great fun collaborating on their poultry parodies. They have combined their literary and artistic talents on more than nine stories. In *The Plot Chickens*, they merged Mary Jane’s oil paintings with Herm’s digital techniques. The Auchs live near Rochester, New York. Visit them online at www.mjauch.com.

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Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.