



TEACHER'S GUIDE



This guide was written by Beth Knees. Beth has taught language arts in grades three through six, including gifted and talented. She is currently working on her M.A. in English.

About the Book

Summer is drawing to a close, and the Zelnicks travel to the family farm in Minnesota for their vacation. Aldo's mom is eager for him to experience the things she loved as a girl...shucking sweet corn, milking cows, gathering eggs. A week of FRESH AIR and living off the land!

But Aldo suspects that farm life isn't all it's cracked up to be...and it's worse than he feared. The rooster wakes him at dawn, the chores nearly do him in, and the cousins—identical twin pranksters—are in cahoots against him. Plus, the creepy old portrait of his great-grandfather Aldo (the very one he's named after) seems to be watching him from his frame on the wall...

All this without the comforts of TV or computer—because the Anderson farm is (gasp!) technology-free.

In addition to an engaging cartoon story, *Cahoots* includes an illustrated glossary of fun C words used throughout the book, such as cagey, connoption, and copacetic.

About the Author

Karla is the author of the Aldo Zelnick comic novel series, which has been honored with a Book of the Year award (Foreword Reviews), a Colorado Book Award, and a Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Regional Book Award, among others. She has worked as a writer and editor for more than twenty years and has ghostwritten dozens of books. Karla and her husband, Scott, live in Colorado with their three tween and teenage boys in a house strewn with Legos, hockey gear, Pokémon cards, video games, books, and dirty socks.

About the Illustrator

Kendra divides her time between being "a writer who illustrates" and "an illustrator who writes." She is currently in cahoots with Karla on the clever, collaborative Aldo Zelnick comic novel series for middle-grade readers. When she invents spare time for herself to fill, Kendra enjoys skiing, cycling, exploring, discovering new music, watching trains go by, decorating cakes with her sister, and making faces in the mirror.

Activities to use in the classroom

BEFORE READING

Word Cloud Predictions

Students may already be familiar with word clouds, or visual representations of text that depict the frequency of words by their size. The more often a word occurs, the larger its font. Teachers sometimes use word clouds as an analytical tool in the classroom. For example, analyzing the high-frequency words in a passage of text may provide insight into important concepts. This activity takes the analysis in a different direction by asking students to make predictions based on the words—and the sizes of the words—in the word cloud.

The following word cloud was created using Wordle™ and is based on Chapter 1 of *Cahoots*. Wordle™ has a feature that allows the user to

choose the number of words displayed in the word cloud. This word cloud has only 90 words in order to reduce visual clutter by eliminating most of the words that only appear once.



Possible Prediction Questions

Who are some of the main characters?

What do the characters like to do?

When and where will this story be set?

Are there any words that seem to be different from each other, or in conflict? Can they help us think

about what the overall conflict might be?

Are there any important words that need to be defined?

Does the word cloud raise any questions?

Either of the “Before Reading” activities can be used alone, or the following activity can be used after the word cloud activity.

Activities to use in the classroom

BEFORE READING

First Impressions from the Cover: Making Predictions

If this is used with the word cloud activity, students can confirm and extend their predictions.

Primary Students: Read the title and examine the cover illustration with your students. Ask students what they notice about the cover, from specific pictures to doodles to stuck-on objects. Be sure students support their impressions and predictions with examples from the cover.

Intermediate Students: Read the title and examine the cover illustration with your students. Ask students what they notice about the cover, from specific pictures to doodles to words to stuck-on objects to the colors and typeface. What impressions do students have about the book? What do they think it might be about? Be sure students support their impressions and predictions with examples from the cover. After discussing a couple examples as a model, allow students to work in pairs.

They should record their first impressions and predictions and their evidence in a table. For example:

First Impression and Predictions	Evidence
Aldo is on a farm.	He is holding a pitchfork and has a chick in his bib overalls.
Aldo isn't happy about being on the farm.	He's frowning. He also wrote, "HELP! If you can read this—SEND INTERNET!"
There is a mystery.	There are two silhouettes watching from upstairs.
Somebody gets kidnapped.	The letters in the title are cut out of newspapers and magazines, like in a ransom note.

After reading, come back to these predictions. How many were spot on? How many had some basis in the story?

Activities to use in the classroom

Re-entering the Story

Students need a bridge between the previous day's reading and the reading or discussion (or both) that will take place on the current day. Giving students questions to respond to at the beginning of a lesson helps them re-enter the world of the story. Questions can derive from the text and relate to big ideas in the text. Text-dependent questions check that students have read an assignment, and text-independent questions get kids thinking about what they have read or will read/discuss.

Imagine that students read "Green Acres" for homework. They will read "I Butter Not Tell You" and "Mister Ed" for homework tonight. Examples of text-dependent and text-independent questions follow:

Why does Chaz tell Aldo to taste the chicken feed?

What does Chaz tell Timothy that causes him to drop four of the five eggs he's juggling?

How does Aldo feel after he and Timothy agree to stick together and then shake hands?

How would you react if someone played a trick on you?

Is it better to seek reconciliation or revenge?

DURING READING

Dialogue Debate

Aldo deals with many typical childhood conflicts and emotions, including arguing with his mom about how much time he gets to spend playing electronic games, avoiding chores, fighting with his brother (and, in *Cahoots*, forming an alliance with him), being bored on a long car trip, being scared at night—especially in an unfamiliar room, and being the victim of pranks.

In addition to providing many occasions to make connections, *Cahoots* also provides an opportunity for students to discuss how the characters deal with conflict. One way to do this is through "dialogue debates."

First, choose a conflict that is dealt with in a way that is debatable—that is, students may disagree with the solution. Next, write the beginning of a dialogue, representing different points of view, between two characters. The points of view should be consistent with the character's personalities. Then, share the dialogue with students before discussing that part of the book.

For example, before discussing the "conspiracy" that Aldo's mother concocted, you might construct the following dialogue starter:

Aldo:

"I can't believe it—my own mother in cahoots against me. This no-technology conspiracy of hers went too far."

Goosy:

"Hmmm. Have you considered, Aldo, that maybe she was conniving because she cares so much?"

Students continue writing the dialogue for five to ten minutes. They should strive to write several exchanges between the characters, ending with the character they agree with.

Ask for a show of hands—in this example, who agrees with Aldo, and who agrees with Goosy. Students can either read one of their lines of dialogue or explain why they agree with a particular character.

Activities to use in the classroom

Word Play

Primary Students: In *Cahoots*, Aldo makes learning about language completely copacetic. Have younger students find the C words in the pictures. It may be the crayons (or cards, clouds, or cats) on Aldo's underwear, the clam on Timothy's t-shirt, or even Goosy's cat-shaped motorcycle helmet! If students are up for the challenge, have them write definitions a la Aldo. Here's an example:

clam:
an animal that lives in the water, inside two shells stuck together. Some people eat them, but I don't think they would taste good, even wrapped in bacon and stuck on a toothpick.

DURING READING

Word Play

Intermediate Students: *Cahoots* is full of literary devices. Introduce and reinforce these concepts, and have students look for examples as they read.

allusion:

a reference to a literary or artistic work, event, person, or place; familiarity with the significance of the reference gives the reader insight into the current work.

Examples: The twins' names, Charles and Almanzo (Laura Ingalls Wilder characters), the pale green pants (Dr. Seuss's "What Was I Scared Of?" in *The Sneetches and Other Stories*), "Our days are all filled with an easy country charm" and "Life on the farm is kinda laid back" (John Denver's "Thank God I'm a Country Boy")

hyperbole:

extreme exaggeration

Examples: "the place we've been seeing a billion signs for" (34), "I was at least 20 feet up in the air" (70)

pun:

a play on words, usually for humorous effect, that makes use of multiple meanings of a single word or similar sounding words

Examples: "I'm udderly awesome!" (21), "I Butter Not Tell You" (57)

simile:

comparing two unlike things using like or as

Examples: "Bacon as thick as 10 Pokémon cards stacked together" (42), "people who supposedly love you the most can gang up on you like a vicious swarm of mosquitoes" (123)

situational irony:

the outcome is different from the expected outcome; it may be more positive or more negative than anticipated.

Example: Aldo smears butter on the stairs, hoping the twins will slip on it. Instead, Aldo slips on the butter.

Activities to use in the classroom

Map It

This activity can be adapted for any grade level and can align with social studies standards, if desired.

Students make a map similar to the one Aldo draws, showing his route from his home in “Colorful Colorado” to his destination in Minnesota, including attractions along the way. Younger students can make maps of attractions in their house or neighborhood. (Also see the map of Great-Grandfather Aldo’s Farm on p. 152 of *Cahoots*.) Older students can map their city, state, etc. Early in the year, students could map a vacation. Students studying state history could map attractions around different cities in their state (or groups could take different parts of a large state map). Students studying continents could map a trip to significant landmarks, and students studying world geography could choose countries. Like Aldo, students could map significant geological, architectural, and cultural landmarks, focusing on places tourists might visit, as well as interesting facts about each place.

AFTER READING

On the Other Hand... (Conflict and Solution)

Aldo is not amused when he and Timothy discover their family’s... conniving? collaboration? It all depends on the perspective. Aldo’s dad thinks it’s “nifty” (123), his Aunt Caroline says the family was “working together for” him (124), and Goosy laughs her “belly-laugh” (132).

The point of this exercise is to help students think more critically when they evaluate solutions. Have students draw a two-column chart. On the left side, they should describe how Aldo feels about conflicts in the story. On the right side, they should describe how other characters perceive the same events.

Story Event

Aldo is annoyed that his mother wants him to stop playing with electronics and go outside (11).

Aldo is really steamed that Chaz and Al are “ganging up” on him (56).

Aldo feels betrayed that everyone was in cahoots against him and Timothy (124).

On the Other Hand...

Aldo’s mom is annoyed that Aldo and Timothy aren’t helping out around the house. Aldo isn’t even keeping his room picked up or walking Max. She is also concerned that Aldo isn’t getting fresh air and exercise (12).

Chaz and Al aren’t being very nice, but they usually don’t have to do farm chores. They may resent the double insult of giving up their electronics and doing chores, and take it out on Aldo and Timothy.

Everyone is inconvenienced by the plan. For example, the twins miss their electronics and sneak into the attic during the day and late at night (127). Their aunt and uncle take off work and do extra chores, often without modern equipment (125). The plan is probably hard for everybody.

There are other approaches to this, too. One example is to write things that Aldo thinks he won’t like on the left side, and how they really turn out on the right side. For example, Aldo sarcastically thinks, “Oh great,” when his Uncle Odin suggests whittling on the front porch (75). Aldo ends up with a jar of fireflies, though, and thinks, “How cool is that?” (77). Aldo has lots of experiences that are much cooler than he first expects, and he wouldn’t have had most of them if his family hadn’t gone into cahoots to plan this special electronics-free vacation.



Aldo and his two grandmothers.
What are the grandmas saying—and what is Aldo thinking?



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