



We are all Superheroes: A Theatrical Unit on “El Deafo” by CeCe Bell



Lesson title: We are all Superheroes: A Theatrical Unit on “El Deafo” by Cece Bell

Subject and topic:

ELA

Grade level:

4-5

Duration:

9 Class periods with some homework

Lesson summary:

This lesson is a unit of 9 classes. “El Deafo” is a graphic novel about a young girl, Cece, who becomes deaf in elementary school. The book highlights how she adjusts to her new life as she navigates her new hearing aids, communication, teachers and friendships. In each class students will read the parts of each character like they are reading for a play rehearsal. Encourage students to really embody their characters, gesturing, facial expressions and standing up (if possible). This lesson encourages students to feel empathy because each discussion highlights the feelings of characters. Each class is split up into a discussion and a reading.

Standards:

- CC.1.2.4.A-Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
- CC.1.2.5.A-Determine two or more main ideas in a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- CC.1.2.4.C-Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
- CC.1.2.5.C-Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a text based on specific information in the text.
- CC.1.4.4.L-Demonstrate a grade-appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.



- CC.1.4.5.L-Demonstrate a grade-appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Objectives:

- SWBAT Gain perspective on communication and friendship building from a deaf perspective.
- SWBAT Learn practical skills and tips for interacting with people who are deaf.
- SWBAT work as a team to act out the story.

Essential Questions:

- EQ1: How can I interact with people who are deaf?
- EQ2: How can I use perspective taking skills in various situations throughout the play?
- EQ3: What are accessibility features and is my community inclusive and accessible?

Vocabulary:

- Deaf
- Audiologist
- Isolation
- Bully
- Accessibility

Materials:

- Copies of El Deafo by Cece Bell for each student
- Paper and pens
- Props for acting out the book
 - a cardboard TV
 - red cape
 - around the neck microphone



- curly pencil
- etc.

Lesson Preparation

1. Read through “El Deafo” to be well-versed in the themes and materials.
2. If possible, pre-assign students characters to save room in class for reading and acting.

Lesson procedures

Class 1: Intro and Begin Reading “El Deafo” pages 1-35

Start off the class by reviewing group agreements/ground rules with students. An example list is available in the lesson plan library if needed.

- This is important because students are going to be acting and the classroom should be a safe space for students to try out different characters. **(10 minutes)**

Now show students a picture of “El Deafo” (in Appendix A) projected onto smartboard or other type of projection screen.

Facilitate discussion: “I know usually we don’t judge a book by its cover, but what do you think this book is about?”

What do you think you are going to learn about while reading?

What does it mean to be deaf?

- **Possible answers:** You can’t hear! Some students may have deaf family members or friends, so they may already be aware.

Explain to students: Deaf can mean someone who can’t hear anything or someone who is hearing impaired. Some people are born deaf and other people lose their hearing later. Some deaf people use hearing aids, which can help them to hear.

We are going to journey with Cece! Through her life as a deaf person!

Assign students the different characters: Encourage students to act out their characters with enthusiasm! Ask students to imagine they are reading for a very



important playwright and they are practicing for the big show. They can stand up if they choose or walk around the room. (10 minutes)

Character list: Cece (continuous), mom (continuous), dad (continuous), doctor (page 3-4), nurse (page 3-5), audiologist (page 14-21), Emma (24-25, 34), Wendy (page 27), Dorn the teacher (28-31)

The 35 pages of reading should take up an entire class period of about 45 minutes.

Class Period 2: Short Discussion and Review and Continue Reading “El Deafo” Pages 35-60

Discussion for first 35 pages.

What do we know about Cece?

What is an audiologist?

How did Cece feel about going to the audiologist?

How does she feel about seeing her friend Emma?

How did Cece feel when Emma said “Wow I didn’t know you’d still be able to talk!” What is she saying?

- Discussion: Every person who is deaf is different, so we can’t make assumptions about anyone. Emma had assumed Cece would not be able to talk.

(15 minutes)

Assign students characters: Cece/ El Deafo, group of kids (36-37), mom (continuous), bathroom noises (42-43), student (45), Laura (48-59), girl scouts (52)
(30 minutes)

Class 3: Review/Discussion and reading pages 60-102

Discussion and Review for pages 35-60:

Why does Cece feel lonely on page 37?

- Communication difficulties, when you can’t communicate like others it can be really isolating.



How did she feel on page 45?

- Othered, reminded she is different

Why does Cece start to feel uncomfortable about Laura?

- Laura started making decisions for Cece
- Laura laughed when her dog bit Cece
- Laura is not being kind

(15 minutes)

Assign characters for pages 60-102: Cece/El Deafo, Mr. Ridenhour (60), Laura (60, 63-65, 85-86), mom (88-Ginny (62-71, 85, 88), Neighborhood kid (78), Cece's sister and brother (79-83), Sleepover guests Carrie, Ellen and Missy (89-100)

Reading about **30 minutes**

Class 4: Review Discussion and Reading pages (102-117)

Review Questions for pages 60-102:

(This discussion is a bit longer to encompass more discussion about deaf etiquette and bullying with students)

Pg. 65 Why do you think Ginny was talking to Cece so loud and slow? And Cece feels uncomfortable, but still wants to be friends? Cece eventually blows up, but why?

Pg. 69 Cece where does Cece feel like she lives?

- Out on the moon, separate from everyone. That is the powerful thing about communication! How do you feel when you are trying to tell someone something and they just won't listen?

Pg. 84- What did you think of Cece claiming the word Deafo? How do you think she felt?



When Cece meets new people, she often gets a lot of questions. Why do you think people ask her questions about her hearing aids before they get to know her?

Pg. 92-98- the sleepover part was challenging for Cece, but why? Why didn't the girls listen to her? Was Cece ever able to say no?

Pg. 100-102 Cece imagines herself as El Deafo, what did you notice about her comments?

- Cece does not want to be called a deaf friend. She is a person who is deaf, but it is not all of who she is.
- Cece was upset about the lights being turned off.

What happens when the lights are off?

Cece does not have a chance to see their faces so she can be a part of the conversation. If you are interacting with a deaf person, it can be helpful to ask questions in order to make sure communication goes both ways! Of course, don't shame them or feel upset if they ask for something they need. Like Cece asking Ginny not to speak so slow or loud.

(30 minutes)

Assign students characters for pages (102-117): Cece/El Deafo, Cece's classmate (105), mom (106), Mrs. Blankenship (107-110)

Class 5: Review/Discussion and Reading Pages (118-140)

Discussion (102-117)

When Cece thinks she wants to pass as a hearing person (103). What does that mean and what do we know already that would cause her to feel that way?

- Have students list a couple reasons: For example she wants to just be a student like anyone else, she doesn't want people asking her a million questions....

So on page 104, what assumption did Cece's classmate make?

- She assumed Cece knew or wanted to communicate via sign language. Like we talked about earlier, all deaf people are different some speak only with sign language and others talk like Cece.



What happens when Cece's hearing aid batteries run out? (108)

- The speech bubbles are blank, because she is learning without sound she cannot lip read.

Why do you think Cece feels uncomfortable every time someone says she is special?

- Cece feels othered or weird, like many people with disabilities the word special also means separate and different, when in reality people with disabilities are just like everyone else. Their needs aren't special, they are just their needs. (20 minutes)

Assign characters to each student 118-140 and read through: Cece/EI Deafo, neighborhood kids on bus (118), Cece's mom (119 and 121), Martha (120-137), Martha's mom (124 and 126), Mike Miller (132, 133, 136, 139). Read the story out loud. **(25 minutes)**

Class 6: Review/Discussion and Reading Pages (141-166)

Discussion (118-140)

What is a sidekick?

- Many superheroes have sidekicks. They are always helping the hero in tough spots! Sidekicks are just as important as the hero!

What are some good qualities in a side kick and does Martha show any?

- Sidekicks are funny, they are interested in your life, when Cece shuts off her hearing aids Martha finds that hilarious! Martha is there for Cece! Sometimes sidekicks help the superhero get out of their comfort zone so they can experience something new.

On page 123, how is Cece feeling? What does Cece want to do?

- She just want to enjoy a sleepover out with a new friend and to avoid the awkward moments she had with some of her other friends. (10 minutes)

Assign each student characters for pages 141-166 and read through the section (25 minutes): Cece/EI Deafo, Martha (141-146, 148), Martha's mom (146,147), Cece's mom (144, 147, 150, 160-161), Ginny (151, 152), Mrs. Sinkleman (154, 155, 157,158)



Class 7: Review/Discussion and Reading Pages 167-192

What happened to Cece and Martha in this section? Why do you think Martha is avoiding Cece?

- Cece huts herself by accident and Martha doesn't want to play with her anymore.
- Martha feels guilty, but what does she have to be guilty about?

Cece feels uncomfortable about handing the microphone to the teacher, but how does it help her in class?

- So she can hear Mrs. Sinkleman's silly songs and interesting stories.

Define the words on page 156?

- Abolish: to end something, challenge: to take part in a competition, courteous: polite or respectful, jubilation: a feeling of great happiness or triumph.

Can you connect some or all of these words to parts of "El Deafo"?

(15 minutes)

Assign each student characters for pages 167-192 and read through the section (25 minutes): Cece/ El Deafo, 2 students talking in bubble (167), kids in gym (168), Mr. Potts (169-170, 172, 175, 177) Mrs. Sinkleman (172, 174, 189, 190) Cece's mom (173, 185) Ginny (174-175, 188), Cece's dad (178-179), kids (181-182), Mike Miller 182, 184, 186-187, 189, 190-191) Johnnie (182-183, 186)

Class 8: Discussion/Review and Reading Pages 193-233

Discussion of pages 167-192:

What happens on Page 171?

- Coach drops his microphone and it makes a really loud crack!

Why is Cece so upset?

- She needs the microphone for all of her teachers. Now she won't be able to understand them.



- When a teacher uses the microphone Cece can hear what they say, so she can access her class. So what do you think accessibility means?
 - Accessibility is used when talking about people with disabilities. Good accessibility is when a person with a disability can be involved and included. This can be done in many different ways. The microphone is only one example. Can you think of another example of accessibility?
 - Parking spaces with the wheelchair symbol or elevators! When stoplights make a beeping noise, sign language interpreters and the list goes on. (15 minutes)

Assign each student a character for pages 193-233: Cece/El Deafo, Cece's mom (193, 196), Mrs. Sinkleman 193-195, 212, 216, 220, 222-223) Ginny 195, 221-222 Mike Miller (196-197, 199-204, 208-211, 213-214, 226), Mike Miller's mom (196), Suzie (205-207), Martha (206, 208-209, 230-231), Class kids (217), Mrs. Catawba (223-224, 227-228) **(30 minutes)**

Class 9: Conclusion

Ask students to work with a partner to answer these questions:

1. Please summarize the book from beginning middle to end in 6 sentences or more.
2. What was your favorite part of the book? Please describe in 3-4 full sentences.
3. Were there any parts of the book that made you feel funny or uncomfortable? Please explain in 4-5 full sentences.

Go around the room and ask students to share one takeaway message from the book. (Educator can choose how to pick students. You can have students toss a light object like a kush ball or stuffed animal or you can just go in a circle. It is up to the educator).



Related materials:

- Documents below

Evaluation:

Ask your students this question related to this lesson to gauge how much they learned. **Did this lesson help you understand a lot about d/Deaf etiquette?**

Thank you for bringing the conversation about disability into your classroom. Help us evaluate this lesson plan by visiting [our evaluation page to assess this lesson.](#)



Appendix A

