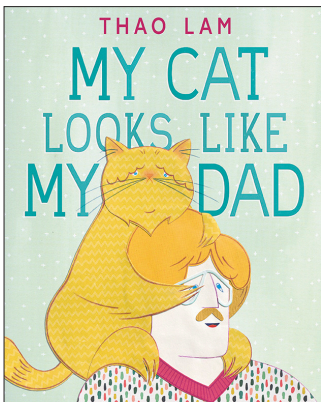


My Cat Looks Like My Dad

A Guide for Teachers: Grades 1-4

Guide by Emily Jones, Primary/Junior Teacher, Durham District School Board, Ontario



About the Book

My Cat Looks Like My Dad is the third book by author/illustrator Thao Lam. It playfully and thoughtfully discusses nontraditional and diverse families. The book provokes readers to consider the assumptions they have about the components of a family, and offers educators a unique, funny, and accessible entry point to conversations about modern families. As stated on the last page, **“Family is what you make it.”** Lam welcomes readers from all familial backgrounds to recognize the similarities and celebrate the differences present in all families.

Thao Lam is also the author/illustrator of two other books, *Skunk on a String* and *Wallpaper*. Both stories are wordless and require readers to interpret using their imaginations. Both books also explore themes of identity and belonging in a playful way. Opportunities to connect to both of these books will be presented throughout this guide.

About This Guide

Educators have the opportunity to work with students from all familial backgrounds. Every student deserves to have their personal narrative valued, heard, appreciated, and acknowledged. Most young students will only have an understanding of their own lived experience; therefore, it is important to help students develop respect and acknowledgement for families that are different from their own.

The goal of this guide is to help students engage with the book and, with a spirit of inquiry, arrive at the idea that though families may look different, act differently, and function differently, they all aim to provide love and support for their members. This goal can be achieved in almost any familial configuration. The final page of the book states, **“Family is what you make it”** and includes a portrait of the family from the story. If students were to imagine their own family portraits, each would be unique. A student's portrait could include anything from one parent to several, or a family united through adoption or foster care. They may have parents who are married or parents who are not. Students may have two moms, two dads, or parents who are gender non-binary. There may be grandparents, older siblings, or aunts and uncles who play the primary caregiving role. A student's picture might be filled with the members of a blended family with step-siblings or they may be the only child in the portrait. Their picture could include support workers, service animals, or cherished pets—ultimately the possibilities are as unique as the students in your class.

When speaking to students, the topic of nontraditional and diverse families naturally must be treated with compassion, flexibility, and patience. The book's humorous approach should provide a warm and inviting lens. No student should feel ashamed or alienated due to their familial support system. This guide aims to support teachers in their dialogue with students before, during, and after reading this book and is composed of fourteen discussion questions to encourage meaningful and authentic discussion. There are opportunities throughout for teachers to extend the conversation based on the sensitivities and comfort levels in their classroom. The questions begin as observation-based and are designed to gradually move students to deeper thinking and reflection.

ISBN: 978-1-77147-351-4

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Language Arts: Reading
Comprehension
Social Studies: Families

READING LEVELS:

Fountas & Pinnell: J
Reading Recovery: 17
Lexile® Measure: 360L
Common Core: RL, W, SL, RF, L



Watch the video interview:
OwlkidsBooks.com/ThaoLam



Owlkids Books 2019

My Cat Looks Like My Dad Guide for Teachers
made possible with the support of Ontario Creates.

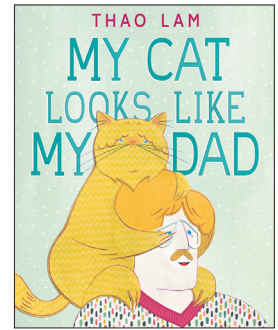
Discussion Topics & Activities for Students

Before Reading the Book

1. **Ask students:** Let's predict what this story will be about. Using the title and the illustration on the cover, what guesses can we make about the story?

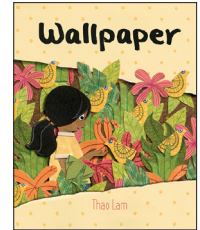
Sample student responses:

- The book is about a man and a cat
- The book is about a family
- The book is funny
- The book is about a man and a cat who look alike



2. **Connections to other books by Thao Lam:**

After reading *Wallpaper* and *Skunk on a String* as a class, ask students to recall what those books were about, compared to what they initially thought by looking at the covers. Ask students: How are those books similar to, and different from, *My Cat Looks Like My Dad*? (Answers may include: same style of collage artwork, same author, different topics, animal characters vs. human characters, etc.)



While Reading the Book

3. **Ask students:** What are some similarities we are already seeing between the cat and the dad in our story?

Sample student responses:

- They both have yellow hair/fur
- They both have blue eyes
- They both love milk
- They both love belly rubs
- They take naps in the afternoon
- They are both brave

Extending the conversation:

Divide student answers into categories: physical similarities (hair and eye colour) and similarities in their personalities or preferences (both enjoy milk and afternoon naps). Ask students if they notice any differences between the cat and the dad. Many may say that one is a human and one is a cat. Reinforce that they don't have to look the same (or be the same species) to have a positive and meaningful relationship.

4. **Ask students:** Who do you think is narrating the story?

Sample student responses:

- The dad's daughter
- The dad's son
- A little boy
- A little girl
- The cat's owner
- A child in the family

Extending the conversation:

Ask students to provide examples or a rationale as to why they suspect the narrator is a child.

5. **Connections to other books by Thao Lam:**

In *Skunk on a String*, what relationship does the skunk have to the people in the book? In *Wallpaper*, what relationship does the girl have to the other children in the book? Do these relationships change over the course of the book? How are these relationships similar to or different than family relationships?

After Reading the Book

6. **Ask students:** Who was the narrator in our story?

Sample student response:

- A bird!

7. **Ask students:** Why did none of us guess the narrator was a bird?

Sample student responses:

- Lots of families have kids. I assumed the mom and dad in this book were the parents of human children.
- Birds can't speak to humans.

8. **Ask students:** Do you have pets you consider part of your family? What traits do your pets have that make them part of your family?

Sample student responses:

- My pet cheers me up when I am sad
- My pet and I play together
- Caring for my pet has taught me responsibility

9. **Ask students:** What is a family?

Sample student responses:

- Any group that loves each other
- Anyone who you are very close with
- Anyone who takes care of you

Teacher Note: Gently correct misconceptions students may have (i.e., families always have a mom and a dad, families live in the same house, or families have to look the same).

10. **Ask students:** Does the family in this story look exactly like your family?

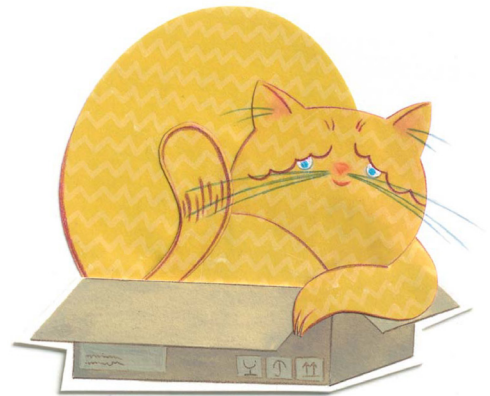
Sample student responses:

- No, my family has kids!
- No, we don't have any animals like cats or birds in our family
- No, my family has two moms/two dads
- No, my family is just my mom and me/my dad and me

Extending the conversation:

Turn to the last page of the book and read the final line to students again: **"Family is what you make it."** Point to the portrait of the family in the story and ask students: If your family was to take a picture like this, who would be in it? Depending on the comfort level of students, they could share their answers aloud. Alternatively, they could just picture their family portrait in their mind. Reinforce that every family portrait will look different and there is no correct way a family should look.

Invite students to draw these portraits. If you have materials such as old magazines and construction paper, ask students to create a collage illustration of their family, in the style of the book.



11. Ask students: What are some similarities between you and members of your family? Encourage them to think beyond physical traits.

Sample student responses:

- My sister and I have brown hair
- My grandmother and I like to cook
- My dad and I enjoy painting
- My dog and I love to go for hikes

12. Ask students: What in the book made you laugh? How does humour help us understand what the author is trying to tell us?

Sample student responses:

- When the cat and the dad are both scared of the skunk
- When the dad and cat stretch together
- The funny moments showed similarities between my family and the family in the book



13. Ask students: All families look different and may act differently, but what are some things they all do?

Sample student responses:

- They all take care of each other
- They all love each other
- They try to make the best decisions for each other

Extending the conversation:

Have students think of one adjective that describes their family (i.e., caring, loving, funny, adventurous, connected, artistic, etc.). Provide a list of options on the board as a starting point. Ask students to share with a partner or with the group.

Emphasize that the words students have chosen are as distinctive as they are. All families are different but no one family type is the best.

Have students add these words to their family portraits, and hang them up in the classroom. Maybe even consider inviting the children's families for a family portrait "gallery opening."



14. Connections to other books by Thao Lam:

In *Wallpaper*, the whole story is told from the point of view of a child, with no parents present. Why do you think that is?

About Emily Jones

Emily Jones, B.A., B.Ed., is a primary/junior teacher from the Durham District School Board in Ontario, Canada. Emily's focus for the last decade has been working to engage students in meaningful and courageous conversations. Emily facilitates professional development workshops for teachers on the topic of Experiential Learning. Her aim is to engage all learners in authentic experiences that encourage them to participate, reflect, and apply their knowledge.