



Story Summary

Kayla isn't too sure about the first day of kindergarten. What if she misses her mom? What if she can't find the bathroom? But when Kayla meets Mrs. Muddle, it quickly becomes clear that Kayla's problems are nothing compared to her teacher's. Mrs. Muddle mixes up the kids' name tags, takes them to the library instead of the gym, and can't find the bathroom. She doesn't even know how to use a slide properly! Clearly somebody needs to take charge. Soon Kayla is much too busy teaching her teacher to think about her own worries.

Colleen Nelson is an author and junior high school teacher who also enjoyed many years of teaching kindergarten. Her previous works include the critically-acclaimed middle-grade novels *Harvey Comes Home* and *Harvey Holds His Own*; *Sadia*, which won the 2019 Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Award; and *Blood Brothers*, which was selected as the 2018 McNally Robinson Book of the Year for Young People. Colleen writes daily in between appearances at hockey rinks and soccer fields in support of her two sports-loving sons. The family's West Highland Terrier Rosie adds an extra-loveable dose of liveliness, squirrel-chasing, and shoe-chewing to their lives.

Alice Carter is an artist, illustrator, and storyteller with a passion for sharing her whimsical imagination. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design who now works with clients from all over the world, Alice is inspired by people watching, music, and every animal she comes across. Her picture books include *Angus All Aglow*, *Our New Kittens*, and *My Puppy Patch*. Alice lives in Ottawa, Ontario.

Links:

“‘A’ You’re Adorable” by Sharon, Lois & Bram:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr5YrkbwabY>

Pair this book with:

Lili Macaroni by Nicole Testa, illus. Annie Boulanger

Illustrated Book Ages 3–6 | ISBN: 978-1-77278-131-1 | Pages: 32

THEMES

First Day of School, Confidence, Acceptance, Empathy

BISAC CODES

JUV035000 JUVENILE FICTION / School & Education

JUV019000 JUVENILE FICTION / Humorous Stories

JUV039090 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / New Experience

READING LEVEL

Lexile Measure: AD500L | Fountas & Pinnell: L

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Early Literacy Skills—listen and respond, letter formation, sounds

Early Mapping Skills—reading and drawing maps, school orientation

Art—creating 2-D art

Social Skills—empathy, equity vs. equality

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS:

ACTIVITY	MAIN SUBJECT AREA	SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TOPICS
Read-Aloud	Early Literacy Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and respond • Predict • Concepts of print
Mapping	Awareness of Environment Early Mapping Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School orientation • Map reading and drawing
Paint with Pudding	Literacy Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter formation • Creating 2-D art
Reading the Alphabet	Literacy Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one matching • Letter formation, sounds • Creating 2-D art
Accepting Differences	Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Equity vs. equality

THE READ-ALOUD

Teaching Mrs. Muddle is the new definitive book to read to a kindergarten class on the first day of school. But it can be equally enjoyed by all students in junior kindergarten through second grade, any day of the year.

Learning expectations:

Students will:

- listen and respond to others in a variety of contexts (e.g., after read-alouds)
- make predictions regarding an unfamiliar text that is read aloud, using prior experience, knowledge of familiar texts, and general knowledge of the world around them
- demonstrate an interest in reading (e.g., expect to find meaning in pictures and text)

- demonstrate an awareness of basic book conventions and concepts of print

You Will Need

- *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*

How To:

Before Reading

Explain that this book is about Kayla’s first day at school. Ask, “How might Kayla be feeling?” Read the title, author, and illustrator. Comment on the title: “Mrs. *Muddle*?! I think ‘muddled’ means mixed up. That can’t be good!” Turn to the dedication page. Explain that the author (the lady who made the words) and the illustrator (the lady who made the pictures) dedicated the book to people they respect

or love. Students may notice Kayla’s picture on this page with some other children.

First Reading

With little or no discussion, read through the book expressively, for the sheer enjoyment of it. At the end, ask, “Do you think Kayla’s mom could be right? Let’s think about that until another day and then we’ll come back and have another look at *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*.”



Second Reading

Start by re-reading the last page. Discuss, “Why did Kayla wonder if Mrs. Muddle is ready to teach Kindergarten? Do you remember any of the problems she had? Why did Kayla’s mother think Mrs. Muddle knows just what she is doing? Is she saying Mrs. Muddle was doing those things on purpose? Why would she do that? Let’s have another look.” After reading each spread, ask these questions:

First spread: What is Kayla worried about? Why does she hold Mom’s hand even tighter?

Second spread: Did something good happen because Mrs. Muddle mixed up the name tags? What was it?

Third spread: Why did Mrs. Muddle say, “Your parents will be fine without you”? How might that make the kids feel?

Fourth spread: Direct students’ attention to the picture. What did Kayla notice about the way Mrs. Muddle was reading the book? How can you tell if you have a book right-way-up? Did Mrs. Muddle not realize she was reading the book wrong? What was she trying to do? Why?

Fifth spread: What’s a tour? What room does it sound like Mrs. Muddle is describing?

Sixth spread: Why would Mrs. Muddle pretend to be mixed up about the library?

Seventh spread: What good thing happened because of this “mistake”?

Eighth spread: What was the point of this mix-up?

Ninth spread: How is Kayla feeling here?

Tenth spread: What did the kids learn in the gym?

Eleventh spread: Some kids might have been confused or frightened if they didn’t know what the bell was for. How might Mrs. Muddle’s confusion make them feel better? How could anything good come out of missing recess?

Twelfth spread: Why did Mrs. Muddle pretend not to know what to do for a scrape?

Thirteenth spread: What do you think of Mrs. Muddle’s “pudding mistake”?

Fourteenth spread: Which words on this page explain what Mrs. Muddle was trying to do?

Fifteenth spread: Who do you agree with, Kayla or her mom?

AFTER READING

Take students on a tour of your school. At each location, ask, “What might Mrs. Muddle say here?”

On other days, read other books about starting school, such as *Lili Macaroni* by Nicole Testa, illustrated by Annie Boulanger.

ACTIVITY 1: MAPPING

Being able to navigate their surroundings with confidence helps children feel more positive about being at school.

Learning expectations:

Students will:

- recognize places within their community and talk about their functions
- analyze and construct simple maps

You Will Need

- *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*
- paper and drawing utensils
- small prizes

How To:

1. Turn to the final spread of the book and, with only as much prompting as necessary, establish that Kayla has drawn a map of her school as a record of what she did that day. What are some ways a person might use a map? (To talk about places they’ve been, to find their way around a new place.)
2. If you have not taken students on a tour of the school yet, take them now.
3. Provide a variety of art materials and invite students to draw the places in their school, as Kayla did. (Don’t worry if students’ work does not resemble maps. The important thing is that they try to represent at least one place they saw on their tour.)
4. *For 6–7-year-olds:* Produce a hand-made map similar to Kayla’s. Ask students if a visitor would know what it was. Guide students to the knowledge that a title is a helpful thing to add to a map. Refer to the first spread to find the name of Kayla’s school and write it on the top of the map as a title. Have students add a title (e.g. the name of your school) to their own maps.
5. Make maps of the classroom. Hide a small prize. Show its location on the map with an “X”. Challenge students to follow the map to find the treasure. Later, have students make their own maps of the classroom and take turns hiding a treasure for a partner to find, marking the location with an “X”.

ACTIVITY 2: PAINT WITH PUDDING

This activity makes a connection with the text and provides very young students with the opportunity to experiment with letter formation.

Learning expectations:

Students will:

- demonstrate knowledge of most letters of the alphabet in different contexts
- use problem-solving skills and their imagination to create visual art forms



You Will Need

- *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*
- instant chocolate pudding, prepared according to box, one box for every 8 students
- finger paint paper
- recorded music



How To:

1. Have students wash their hands **very well** before beginning.
2. Provide each student with a sheet of finger-painting paper or freezer paper (shiny side up) and a large dollop of prepared pudding.
3. Give students a few minutes to enjoy the sensory experience of making lines in the pudding with their fingers while listening to some instrumental music. Next, ask them to try making some letters; perhaps have them write their name or the whole alphabet. Then (if students have done the previous task easily), play a recording of “A’ You’re Adorable” by Sharon, Lois & Bram:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrsYrkbwabY>
Challenge students to “keep up,” writing letters as they listen to the song. If some students do not enjoy this sensory experience, provide rubber gloves or crafts sticks for them to use.
4. Finally, have students make a picture and write their name or their favorite letter(s), which you will allow to dry and display as art.
5. Wash hands again!

ACTIVITY 3: READING THE ALPHABET

The duration of this activity will depend very much on the previous alphabet knowledge of the students. For students just beginning to learn their letters, it may take several weeks.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- demonstrate knowledge of most letters of the alphabet in different contexts
- demonstrate literacy behaviors that enable beginning readers to make sense of a variety of texts
- use problem-solving skills and their imagination to create visual art forms

You Will Need

- *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*
- A copy of the alphabet page included below for each child, copied on both sides of a single sheet of paper; pencils, colored felt-tipped pens
- laminator
- A collection of alphabet books

How To:

1. Turn to the front endpapers of *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*.
2. Demonstrate how to read it like an alphabet book, pointing to each letter as you say, “Big A, little a, anteater, Big B, little b, bird,” etc.
3. Invite volunteers to each “read” a few letters as you point, until the whole alphabet has been read.
4. Place the book in the reading corner and encourage students to “read” the alphabet page during their free time (as well as re-telling/reading the story itself).
5. Give each student a copy of the Alphabet page included below. Ask them to write their name on the line at the top of the page. If any students are unable to write their name, do it for them and note this as a learning goal. Invite students to locate in the alphabet the first letter of their name (it might be on the back) and glue a small photo of themselves (or

draw a self-portrait) in the box for that letter. Let them choose a felt-tipped pen and trace the letter.

6. Ask if anyone knows a word that begins with the letter B (e.g. bus). On an enlarged copy of the alphabet page, draw a simple bus outline in the box for B. Affect great delight at filling in a box and say, “Thank you for helping me fill in a box. Now I get to trace the letter!” Make a big show of choosing the color and carefully trace the letter with a felt-tipped pen. Tell students that, much like Mrs. Muddle, *you* need some help, and are counting on *them* to come up with their *own* ideas. Do this with individuals, small groups, or the whole class, as is appropriate for your students. Invite them to choose a letter on their own page, draw a picture (using pencil) of something that begins with that letter, and then show it to you and tell you what it is. If their picture matches the letter, allow them to choose a color and trace the letter. Incorrect pictures can be erased. The goal would be for each child to complete at least one on this first day, but quick finishers could do more. If more than one or two students are having difficulty, collect the papers and try again another day in groups of 2–3 students or individuals while the rest of the class is doing independent activities.
7. Students with much knowledge about letters might complete their page in a few days. Beginners might take an entire term. The idea is that this will be a record of things each student knows, so telling them a word that begins with each letter would defeat the purpose. The reference sheet would not be helpful to the student, as it would be filled with too much unknown (and therefore abstract) information.
8. Once a student has finished their page, laminate it and keep it handy (e.g. in a browsing box) for the student to read independently. Encourage students to point to each letter as they say its name, and to the picture as they name it.
9. Gradually introduce students to different alphabet books and encourage them to read them in their free and/or independent reading time.



ACTIVITY 3: ACCEPTING DIFFERENCES

Although they need not understand the words equity and equality, children can understand the ideas behind them. Equality is when everyone is treated exactly the same. Equity is when everyone gets what they need to optimize their learning. Giving everyone a pair of glasses—that’s equality. Ensuring that everyone can see the board by giving a pair of glasses to students who need them—that’s equity. Students can understand this, and with guidance, they can extend the understanding to other situations, such as when one child is allowed a chair, a physio cushion, or a fidget toy at carpet time.

Learning Expectations

Students will:

- develop empathy for others, and acknowledge and respond to each other’s feelings
- demonstrate respect and consideration for individual differences and alternative points of view

You Will Need

- *Teaching Mrs. Muddle*

How To:

1. After reading *Teaching Mrs. Muddle* at least once, turn to the fourth spread. Invite students to point out children in the picture who are exhibiting generally accepted “school listening behavior.” Are there any children who are not? (E.g. the girl holding the stuffed elephant and the boy playing with the car). Briefly discuss why Mrs. Muddle might allow that behavior from a few kids, even though the others are able to sit, eyes on teacher, hands in lap. Would it be good if all the kids had toys at story time? What might happen? Why might those two children need a toy?
2. Have students re-tell the story from the perspective of the girl with the stuffed elephant. First, find her on the dedication page (her name is Molly). Next, leaf through the book, state what she is doing and how she might be feeling on each page. How do her feelings about the first day of school differ from Kayla’s? Help students understand that different perspectives and feelings are valid. Besides her comfort toy, what made her feel better? (note on the ninth spread, a classmate is holding her hand and she has a slight smile) How else can students show support and help their classmates feel better?
3. Discuss other accommodations that might be important for your students to understand, besides a comfort or fidget toy. They might see students wearing glasses or using a variety of assistive devices.

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Bibliography

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https://files.ontario.ca/books/edu_the_kindergarten_program_english_aoda_web_oct7.pdf



_____ 's Alphabet

Aa

Bb

Cc

Dd

Ee

Ff

Gg

Hh

Ii

Jj

Kk

Ll

Mm

Nn

Oo

Pp

Qq

Rr

Ss

Tt

Uu

Vv

Ww

Xx

Yy

Zz