



Just a Dream

Author: Chris Van Allsburg

Why This Book Matters

Just a Dream encourages students to think about how today's choices affect the future. Through imaginative storytelling, the book develops critical thinking while introducing themes of environmental responsibility, cause and effect, and personal responsibility. Students learn that even small actions can make a difference in protecting the world around them.

Comprehension Focus

- Author's message/theme
- Cause and effect
- Making predictions
- Drawing conclusions
- Identifying changes in character
- Understanding Environmental Responsibility

Before Reading

- Show the cover and ask: What do you think the title *Just a Dream* means?
- Ask: Have you ever had a dream that felt very real?
- Discuss: What are some ways people take care of—or sometimes harm—the environment?
- Introduce key vocabulary as needed (e.g., environment, pollution, conservation, recycle, responsibility, future).

During Reading

Pause strategically to promote active thinking:

- What do you notice about Walter's attitude at the beginning of the story?
- What clues tell you that Walter's thinking is beginning to change?
- What causes the future to look different in each dream?
- How are Walter's experiences helping him learn an important lesson?
- What predictions can you make about how Walter will act when he wakes up?

Encourage students to explain their thinking using evidence from both the illustrations and the text.

After Reading

- What is the main message Chris Van Allsburg wants readers to understand?
- How did Walter change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- What events caused Walter to change his thinking?
- Why is it important to think about how our actions affect the future?
- What are some things we can do every day to help care for our environment?

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Use Turn-and-Talk opportunities before whole-group discussion to encourage all students to participate and support oral language development.

Extension Activity

Students may:

- Draw and label a picture showing a healthy environment and one showing an unhealthy environment.
- Create a T-chart comparing Walter's actions before and after his dream.
- Write a paragraph explaining one thing they can do to help protect the environment.
- Design a classroom poster encouraging others to care for the Earth.

Writing Activity

- Imagine you had a dream that took you 50 years into the future. What would you see? Would the world be different? Describe your adventure and explain what happened.
- Pretend you are Walter after he wakes up. Write a letter to a friend explaining what happened in your dream and how it changed the way you think about taking care of the Earth.
- Write a persuasive paragraph convincing your classmates to help protect the Earth. Include at least three reasons.

Teacher Reflection

- Were students able to identify the author's central message using evidence from the text?
- Did students explain cause-and-effect relationships throughout the story?
- Were students able to describe how Walter changed and why?
- Did classroom discussions deepen students' understanding of personal responsibility and environmental stewardship?

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