

# Now I'm a Bird

A teacher's guide created by Marcie Colleen  
based upon the picture book  
written by Sue Ganz-Schmitt and illustrated by Renia Metallinou



Published by  
Albert Whitman & Co.

## **Meet the Author – Sue Ganz-Schmitt**

Sue Ganz-Schmitt was born on the Fourth of July and grew up in Sherman Oaks, California. She now lives in the mountains of Los Angeles with her husband, two daughters, and three dogs. She is the author of many picture books, including the popular *Planet Kindergarten* and *Planet Kindergarten: 100 Days in Orbit*, both illustrated by Shane Prigmore and *That Monster on the Block* illustrated by Luke Flowers. Sue is the cofounder of a children’s musical theater program, a philanthropist, and a space enthusiast. She has traveled to China to help medically challenged orphans and set up a birthing clinic in rural India. She holds an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Learn more at [www.sueganzschmitt.com](http://www.sueganzschmitt.com).

## **Renia Metallinou, Illustrator**

Renia Metallinou studied fashion design and graphic design and began her career working for major magazines in Greece. IN 2014 she began working full-time as an illustrator of books. She tends to employ pencils, ink, and digital media in her art, but she also enjoys using gouache, watercolor, and collage. She lives near Athens in a small house by the sea with her husband, their two kids, and a bunch of pets. Her website is [www.reniametallinouillustration.com](http://www.reniametallinouillustration.com).

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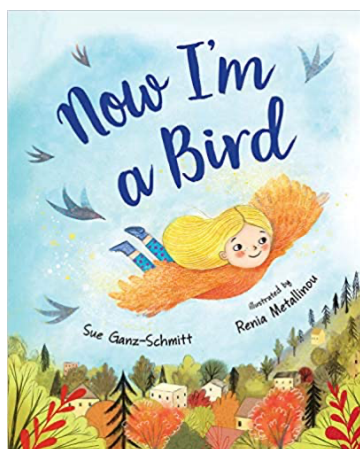
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## How to Use This Guide

This classroom guide for *Now I'm a Bird* is designed for students in kindergarten through third grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

It offers activities to help teachers integrate *Now I'm a Bird* into their curricula. All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in English Language Arts.

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**Title: Now I'm a Bird**

**Author: Sue Ganz-Schmitt**

**Illustrator: Renia Metallinou**

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**"Julianna tells her own tale in simple, accessible language that will warm readers to her plight...Metallinou's brightly hued illustrations lovingly convey Julianna's emotions, with touches of humor and compassion."—*Kirkus Reviews***

Julianna didn't mean to be a bird. It just happened, feather by feather. "It's a rare and beautiful condition," explains the note her mom sends to school, though it doesn't help with the teasing. But Julianna's wings take her to places she hadn't imagined, with a birds-eye view that gives her a new perspective and the courage to find a flock of her own. Told with kid-friendly humor and heart, this is a unique story about embracing the wild and wonderful parts of ourselves and others.

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# English Language Arts

## **Reading Comprehension**

Before reading *Now I'm a Bird*, help students identify the basic parts of a picture book: jacket, front cover, back cover, title page, spine, end papers, and jacket flap.

- Look at the cover illustration. Describe what you see.
- How many birds do you see?
- How would you describe the child on the cover?
- Looking closely at the child, how do you think she feels about flying? What makes you think that?
- Mimic what the child is doing. How does it make you feel?
- Read the text on the back cover. Who do you think might be saying these words? How do you think that person feels about flying?
- Can you guess what the story might be about? What are some clues you can find in the front and back cover illustrations?

Now read or listen to the book.

- What do you think Juliana means when she says, "I didn't mean to be a bird. It just happened?" Have you ever had something just happen to your body that you couldn't control? If so, what?
- Why do you think Juliana tries to hide her feathers from her mom?
- Why do you think Juliana calls her feathers "useless?"
- How do the other children treat her when they see Juliana's feathers?
  - Why do you think even her friends stay away from her?
  - How do other people make Juliana feel?
- How do her parents react?
  - What do they say to her?
  - Why do you think Juliana's mom sent a letter to the other parents at school?
- How does having wings prove helpful to Juliana?
- What does Juliana enjoy about being able to fly?
- What doesn't Juliana enjoy about being able to fly?
- When she is up in the tree, Juliana looks at the kids below. Why do they not look so big?
  - How does this new perspective help Juliana?
- How do Daphne and Geo react to Juliana's feathers differently than the kids of Room G?
- What do you think Juliana means when she says, "We're all something?"

Help students summarize in their own words what the book was about using the chart below.

Beginning	Middle	End
<p>"I didn't mean to be a bird. It just happened. Feather by feather."</p> <p>Introduce Juliana:</p>	<p>Working to solve the conflict.</p> <p>Describe the problems Juliana faces and how she and her parents work to solve these problems:</p>	<p>Resolution. How are things solved?</p> <p>"Stop it!" I said. "Birds are people, too."</p>
<p>Enter the conflict:</p> <p>"Soon everyone noticed."</p>	<p>The Climax, when everything changes or becomes out of control/heightened...</p> <p>"They teased me until my feathers shook."</p>	<p>The ending (How things have changed...)</p>

- **BONUS:** Using the basic plot structure above, students can create an original story about another child whose skin starts to transform into that of a specific animal. Students can work individually or as a class.
- **Art center** ~ Provide a variety of art materials including crayons, pencils, markers, paint, scissors, colored paper, old magazines, and glue for students to illustrate the scenes for their stories.
- **Drama center** ~ Provide puppets, costumes, and props so students can recreate *Now I'm a Bird* or their new stories.

Now look at the two names on the cover.

- Who is the author? What does an author do?
- Who is the illustrator? What does an illustrator do?
- Using Renia Metallinou's illustrations of Juliana and the other kids in the final illustration as inspiration, draw yourself with feathers and wings or with another animal's features.

## Who is Juliana? ~ Character Study

How a character acts and what a character says can tell readers a lot about who the character is.

Read *Now I'm a Bird* paying close attention to the character of Juliana. Scene by scene, record your thoughts, in a chart like the one below.

What she does	Why do you think she does what she does?	How would you describe her?	What might she say?
Example: Notices feathers forming on her skin. Tries to hide them.	She feels uncomfortable and thinks something is wrong with her.	Self-conscious, worried	"Why is this happening to me?"

After gathering information regarding Juliana's character, use the scenarios below to write a new scene for *Now I'm a Bird*. What would Juliana do and say in one of the following situations?

- One of Juliana's friends invites her to a pool party.
- Juliana sees the other kids teasing Daphne or Geo.
- There is a talent show at school.

## Critical Thinking

In fiction stories, a character usually changes in some way. Do you think Juliana changed in the story? How? (*analyzing, inferring, giving support to an idea*)

How would the story be different if Juliana had not stood up for herself? (*predicting, cause and effect*)

What do you think is the message of this story? (*empathy, kindness, friendship, it's ok to be different*)

## Writing Activities

### Now I'm a \_\_\_\_\_

Imagine you woke up one day and without meaning to, your features turning into that of an animal. Maybe a porcupine or a sea lion. Using the text of *Now I'm a Bird* as inspiration, write about your new life with animal skin.

Your story should include a beginning (when you discover your transformation), a middle (3 different ways this transformation effects your life) and an ending (when you finally embrace your new skin).

*Optional:* Create the story together as a class.

### In Someone Else's Skin ~ Point of View

Either as a class or individually, explore *Now I'm a Bird* from the point of view of some of the minor characters.

- Juliana's parents
- The children of Room G
- Principal Harrell
- Daphne and Geo

How would each of these characters tell *Now I'm a Bird* in their own words? Do these points of view change the way you feel about Juliana?

Advanced classes will be able to actually create *Now I'm a Bird* from another's point of view. However, if the class is less-advanced, create the story together.



## **Speaking and Listening Activities**

Picture books are written to be read aloud. Here are some other ways to bring *Now I'm a Bird* to life in your classroom and have fun with speaking and listening skills!

### **Talking About Feelings**

Juliana experiences many different feelings throughout the story. Look through the book, page by page, and ask how Juliana might be feeling at each particular moment. Keep track on a list of each emotion named.

Once the list is finished, have children choose one and make a sentence about that feeling.

Just like Juliana, we all feel various feelings at different times. It is ok to feel nervous or lonely or angry.

Ask children to share a time when they felt the same emotions as Juliana.

“Today I felt nervous when a big dog barked at me.”

“Last week I felt lonely because my best friend moved away.”

“Yesterday I felt angry when my brother broke my favorite toy.”

### **Mime/Charades**

Mime a feeling with gestures and facial expressions. Then have others try to guess that feeling. For a variation, have children draw the feeling from a “hat”—a basket/box/bag.

### **Mirroring**

Have students stand in pairs. One person will be the actor. The other will be the mirror. The actor will make different movements slowly; the mirror must try to do the exact same movements at the same time as the actor—just like a mirror. Then switch places.

Discuss the experience. Then change partners. Was the experience the same? different? How?

### **Drama**

Create a TV commercial to encourage people to read *Now I'm a Bird*.

## Language Activities

### Wordplay Fun

Wordplay is figurative language that uses words that have two or more meanings to create an alternate, sometimes humorous, interpretation. Sue Ganz-Schmitt uses lots of bird-related wordplay throughout *Now I'm a Bird*.

How many bird-related words can you find?

Example:

"You've got this," said Dad on the first day of school. "I know you can wing it!"

The wordplay in this example is the phrase "wing it" which means "trying to do something without much practice or preparation" and of course, also a bird-related word.

## Math

### Word Problems

*For younger students, the use of pictures or props can be helpful in figuring out word problems. Note to teachers: Use the word problems below as inspiration to write your own, based on the illustrations in Now I'm a Bird or any other book of study.*

The "and birthday parties" illustration:

- 1) How many balloons do you see?

On a piece of paper, draw 3 balloons.

Draw 2 more balloons.

How many balloons are there now?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

What if 4 balloons popped? How many balloons would you see?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

The "Then it wasn't so grand" illustration:

2) How many birds do you see?

On a piece of paper, draw 6 birds.

Draw 3 more birds.

How many birds do you have?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

What if 4 birds flew away? How many birds would be left?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

### **Find a Feather Scavenger Hunt**

This scavenger hunt will help students sharpen observational and counting skills.

- Create several copies of the paper cut-outs of feathers.
- Number each different feather from 1-5. You should have several of each number.
- If students want to, perhaps decorate each feather.
- Hide these cut-outs around the room.
- Ask students to find a set of feathers numbered 1-5. If a student sees a number they already have they must leave it for another student to find.
- The first student to find a 1-5 feather sequence wins.

Additional activity: This same game can be played with a set pattern of colors or pictures to teach sequencing.

## Science

### **If I Was a Bird Research Project**

If you had to turn into a bird which kind would you choose? A flamingo? A robin? A pelican? A peacock? Why?

Conduct research on your type of bird. Information to be gathered must include:

- Type of bird
- What it eats
- Where it lives
- Draw a picture of the bird

- Write 3 words that describe your bird
- Interesting fact #1
- Interesting fact #2
- Interesting fact #3
- Why you would want to be this bird

Students may use the Internet or the library to complete their research. Once their research is done, students can create a poster and present their findings to the class.

### **How Birds Fly**

When the kids of Room G chase Juliana, she learns that having feathers and wings is helpful and she is able to fly away. But how do wings actually help birds fly?

Guide students through their own discovery regarding flight.

Take a piece of paper. The best type of paper to use is the thin sheets used in magazines.

Hold the short edge of the paper up to your mouth using both hands.

What do you think will happen if you blow hard across the top of the paper? Will it go down or up?

In most cases a person would think the paper would go down and not lift up when they blow air across the top.

But this is not the case. Blowing faster-moving air above the sheet paper lowered the air pressure above the paper. Now the air pressure below the paper is higher and creates lift. Lift does exactly what it sounds like; it lifts objects off the ground when everything is just right.

While we can't fly like a bird as Juliana did, we can fly in airplanes. How do you think this information can help in wing creation for an airplane?

### **Build an Airplane**

Using what you know about wings, challenge yourself to build an airplane that really flies. Of course, a little imagination is going to go a long way here, too!

- Explain to students that they will be working to build an airplane that can fly.
- Provide the students with several craft items (paper, paperclips, stapler and staples, rubber bands, etc.)
- Each airplane must:
  - Be able to travel in the air from one point to another.
  - Be a construction, not merely a folded piece of paper.

- Each student must create a Design Notebook for their airplane and carefully document their use of the Engineering Design Process throughout the process of building their airplane.

Once all airplanes have been constructed, test them out one by one as a class. Did they work? Retest? If they didn't work, head back to the drawing board like a real inventor.

Often up awards to increase the competition.

- Longest Flight
- Highest Flight
- Most Materials Airplane
- Least Materials Airplane
- Best Looking Airplane

## Social Studies

### **Inclusion, Exclusion, and Building Empathy**

Do you think Juliana should be ashamed that she is different?

Look at the situation from Juliana's perspective.

- Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in like Juliana?
- What makes you feel better?
- How did Juliana's parents encourage her?
- How is Juliana different from the other kids?
- What makes you different from your friends or classmates?
- What makes you the same as your friends or classmates?
- Do you ever treat people differently because they look or act different than you? Why?
- Have you been treated differently because you look different than other people? Was this treatment positive or negative?
- How do you want to be treated by your classmates, friends and family?
- How should we act towards others?
- In what situations is it necessary to treat others differently than the way you want to be treated? (*others sometimes have different preferences than you*)
- Who do you think Juliana's friends are?
- What makes a good friend?
- What do you look for in a friend?
- What kinds of things do you do for your friends?
- Are you only kind to your friends?
- Do you help others even when they are not your friends?
- Provide an example of when you helped someone you didn't know. Did this make

you feel good?

- How do you expect others to respond when you complete an act of kindness for them?
- What obligation do you have to help others?

### **Finding Commonalities/Uniqueness**

Juliana is different from the other kids – she grows feathers and wings. But, although Juliana is the only kid who seems to have wings, she and her friends find they are alike in a lot of ways.

Finding what you have in common with other people is a good way to start a meaningful relationship. Here is a way to learn what you have in common with your classmates, while also celebrating what makes each of you unique.

Materials: A pen and two pieces of paper.

- This activity can be done as a whole class or in pairs.
- On one sheet of paper, you will have ten minutes to come up with a list of things in common. Completely obvious answers such as “we both have hair” or “we are both in \_\_\_\_\_ class” are not allowed!
- After ten minutes, switch to the other paper. You now have ten minutes to come up with a list of things that are unique to only one person.
- Share both lists with the class when finished.

### **Lifting Spirits**

Juliana doesn't like it when the kids of Room G stare at her and tease her. Even though Daphne does stare at Juliana's wings, she then says, “I really like them.” This makes Juliana feel good about her wings.

Have a class discussion about how compliments help make others feel better, as well as how put-downs make others feel unhappy.

- Identify and define compliments and put-downs.
- How do compliments and put-downs make people feel?
- How does giving compliments help others when they feel sad or angry?

### **The Compliment Relay**

- Sit in a circle in chairs or on the floor.
- The objective of the game is to pass compliments around the circle.
- One player will give a compliment to the player sitting to his or her right, who will say, “Thank you,” and pass a compliment to the next player, and so on.

**Tip:** Explain what a compliment is and give a couple of examples like, "I like the way you always hold the door open," "Thank you for\_\_\_\_," or "You're really good at\_\_\_\_." Many players will try to compliment physical characteristics, but try to steer them away from that and have players focus on complimenting actions.

The game ends when the relay has gone around the circle once. To do a second round, students should change seats.

### **Dealing with bullying**

The children of Room G chase and tease Juliana. Have a class discussion about bullying.

- What is bullying? What are some other words used in *Now I'm a Bird* that mean "bullying?"
- Is Juliana bullied in *Now I'm a Bird*? By who?
- How does Juliana respond to the bullying?
- What are some other ways Juliana could respond to the bullying?
- Have you ever been bullied? What happened?
- How did you respond to the bullying?
- What could you have done differently?
- Have you ever seen a friend or someone else be bullied? What could you do that in that situation to help?

### **My Flock**

This activity allows children to explore ways to diffuse a bully situation.

- Ask a few children to volunteer to be the children from *Now I'm a Bird*. Look at the text in the story for examples of ways the children bully Juliana.
- Another child is asked to play Juliana, who is being bullied by the other children. (NOTE: no physical contact should be allowed during this activity).
- The rest of the class are the "bystanders" or witnesses to the bullying.

Act out a situation in which Juliana is being bullied and unable to stand up for herself. It might be important to mention that waiting to see if the person being bullied is able to handle it themselves is a good idea. If not, then bystanders should intervene.

Once the bullying begins, ask the bystanders if they want to swoop over and rescue Juliana. Ask, "swoop?"

Gather the group together like they are a flock of birds. Walk towards Juliana and take their hand or lock arms and pull them into the flock. Pull the Juliana away from the ugly situation by moving to another part of the room.

This surprise element will defuse the situation.

Then if they want, the group can do a second swoop. Ask, "second swoop?"

If they agree, go back to the children and catch them up in the swoop! And say, "No more of that stuff, get it?" to let them know that mean behavior is not acceptable.

It is best to continue this practice until everyone has had the opportunity to be the children and be Juliana.

This action makes a statement that people are to be treated with respect despite their differences.

It's the group energy of the flock that scatters the bullying behavior. People who try to intimidate others by mean words or actions fall apart when they face a force bigger than their own. Band together to make the school a safer place to be!