



**Classroom Guide for**  
**RAINBOW JOE AND ME**  
by Maria Diaz Strom

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grade 2  
Interest Level: Grades K–3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 2.6/.5  
Lexile™ Measure:490RA

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Imagination, Sensory Perception, Friendship, Art and Music, Dealing with Disabilities (Blindness), African American Interest

Eloise loves to mix colors and paint. She also likes to describe her paintings to Rainbow Joe, an elderly neighbor who is blind. Despite his lack of sight, Joe insists he loves colors too and says that he can see them in his head. He tells Eloise that he can make the colors sing. He also describes colors with vivid images: “Yellow’s like butter melting on your tongue.” Green is “so soft you just want to lie down in it and take a nap.” Eloise doesn’t understand how Joe can know so much without vision. Then one day he appears with a saxophone and “mixes up a great big beautiful rainbow” by playing music. As they listen, Eloise and her mother can see every color.

### Background

Maria Diaz Strom was inspired to write *Rainbow Joe and Me* while she was teaching art at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She says that she had both art and the blind on her mind. In her free time, Strom was also traveling to New Orleans to soak up some of its regional culture including jazz. Says the author, “One night, after returning from New Orleans, the image of a musician with a rainbow coming out of his saxophone came to me so vividly that I knew I had to turn it into a story.” As Strom explains, people who are blind from birth know color through what others have told them. To help her relate how Rainbow Joe experiences color, Strom spoke with her students about their experiences, then added to that information.

### Teacher Tip

*Rainbow Joe and Me* is a good selection to use in your classroom during Disability History Week, which is observed during the third week of October.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book, share the background information with students. Then you may wish to set the stage for reading with questions such as the following.

1. What's your favorite color? Why do you like it so much?
2. What do you enjoy about painting pictures?
3. Have you ever tried to imagine something that you couldn't see? What was it? What helped you come up with the image in your head?
4. Do you have a special grown-up friend or relative? What are some things you talk about with that person?
5. What are the five senses? How do people use each sense? Why are they important to us?

**Exploring the Book**

Display the book and read aloud the title. Ask students what they notice about the colors used in the title.

Draw attention to Rainbow Joe on the cover. Ask students to tell what they notice about Rainbow Joe. Why do they think he is wearing dark glasses? What does he have in his hand?

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Have students read to find out: how Rainbow Joe got his name and what Rainbow Joe's special way with colors is.

**VOCABULARY**

Write the following words from the story on the chalkboard

bother	blind	sweat	reverend
imagination	olive	slithering	squiggle
special	maroon	spicy	squirm
dishwater	tongue	saxophone	believe

Assign partners and tell students they will go on a vocabulary hunt. As students encounter each word in the book, have them try to use context to figure out the meaning. Have one partner write down what the team thinks the meaning is while the other partner looks up the word in a dictionary. Partners can then compare definitions and make adjustments to the one they wrote as needed. As a follow-up, ask students to choose two of the words to illustrate.

**AFTER READING****Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, review comprehension, and deepen students' understanding. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations to support their responses.

1. Who is telling this story? How do you know?
2. How would you describe Eloise's imagination?
3. Why does Eloise call her friend Rainbow Joe?
4. How does Rainbow Joe feel about Eloise's paintings even though he can't see them?
5. What does Rainbow Joe mean when he says he sees the colors in his mind?
6. What does Rainbow Joe mean when he says he will make the colors sing?
7. Why does Rainbow Joe like blue best?
8. Why do Eloise and Rainbow Joe get along so well?
9. Why does Eloise have trouble understanding how Rainbow Joe mixes colors?
10. How does Rainbow Joe show Eloise how he mixes colors?
11. What does Eloise learn about seeing color?
12. How does Rainbow Joe treat his disability? How does Eloise treat it?

**Literature Circles**

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines that tell how Eloise and Rainbow Joe each think about colors.
- The **Illustrator** might paint a picture to show how the cat in the story sees colors.
- The **Connector** might find other books about color to share with the group.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might look for books and/or online materials on visual impairment and other disabilities.
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\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. Eloise hears colors when Rainbow Joe plays his saxophone. What sounds would you make to show different colors?
2. Why are the senses an important part of this story? How do you use your senses to understand things?
3. How else could you help someone understand colors?

### Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Suppose you were going to have a conversation with Rainbow Joe. What would you say? What do you think he would answer? Make notes highlighting things you would like to ask him.
2. Write a poem about a color. Use words to describe how the color looks, feels, sounds, tastes, and smells. (See the Language Arts suggestions in the Interdisciplinary Activities section of this guide.)
3. Eloise likes mixing colors and painting pictures. She spends a lot of time sharing her art with Rainbow Joe. Write a paragraph about something you like to do and tell how you share this interest with others.

### ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Use this book as an opportunity to teach basic color names. Make a chart such as the one shown here. Encourage students to add the color names in their native languages. Then post the chart as a reference.

English Color Words	Color Words in Other Languages
Red	
Green	
Blue	
Yellow	
Orange	
Purple	

2. As they work through the book, have ELL students dictate questions about the story. Set aside time to help explore these queries.

3. Preteach key English vocabulary to help keep these learners focused on the story. Post essential words on the board.
4. Have Spanish-speaking students use the Spanish edition, *Joe Arco Iris y yo*, for partner reading with a strong English reader.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, you might try some of the following activities.

#### Music

This book provides a good opportunity to introduce students to jazz and/or classical music. Bring a selection to class to play for students. (If you include the work of Beethoven, be sure to mention to students that he lost his hearing as a young man and yet was able to become one of the world's greatest composers.) Ask students to close their eyes and listen as you play a few passages. Then pass out drawing or painting materials and have students draw what they "see" as they listen to the pieces again. Display the finished artwork under the title of the music that inspired students.

#### Art

1. Remind students that Eloise likes to mix colors. Provide each student with red, yellow, and blue paint. Have them mix the colors that Eloise speaks of in the story. Point out that red, yellow, and blue are called primary colors, while orange, purple, and green are known as secondary colors.
2. Draw attention to the pages in the book that illustrate how Rainbow Joe sees yellow, red, and blue. Invite students to choose a color and illustrate it as Maria Diaz Strom does in *Rainbow Joe and Me*.

#### Science

1. In the story, Joe has the nickname Rainbow Joe. Explain to students that the colors of the rainbow are known as the spectrum. White light from the sun shines through water droplets which bend or refract the light and break it up into the different colors of the spectrum—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. (Note: Indigo was once considered part of the spectrum, but many scientists now regard indigo as a blend of blue and violet.)
2. Demonstrate the colors of the rainbow with the following experiment. You'll need a prism, flashlight, and white sheet of paper or white wall.
  - Shine the flashlight on the white paper or white wall.
  - Put a prism in the path of the light. Have students observe the colors of the rainbow.
3. Explain that each color has its own wavelength. Have students note that violet is bent the most and red the least because violet has the shortest wavelength and red has the longest.
4. Help students make a senses chart with headings for the five senses. Work with the class to fill in the chart with examples from the story that suggest each sense. Then have students add examples of their own.

Seeing	Hearing	Tasting	Smelling	Feeling
Crazy pink fish swimming across my paper.	He blows deep blue notes . . .	Red's so spicy . . .	Melted butter might smell.	That's a color so soft you just want to lie down . . .

### Language Arts

1. Use the book to launch a vocabulary lesson on color words. Obtain a large box of crayons (64 colors or more) and write the name of each color on a poster pad. Read a color name at random and have students sort through the crayons to find the corresponding crayon.
2. Share with students some of the many delightful poems written about colors. For example, read aloud "What Is Pink?" by Christina G. Rossetti or obtain a copy of *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* by Mary O'Neill (Doubleday, 1989) and share some of her poems.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

**Maria Diaz Strom** is a native of Portland, Oregon. She studied art at Portland State University and has illustrated several educational books for children. Strom began her career as a painter and then found that the childlike, whimsical quality of her work was perfect for children's book illustration. Strom also taught art at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where she was inspired to create *Rainbow Joe and Me* by her students and by her husband's love of jazz.

As a youngster, Strom enjoyed "quiet, reflective books, especially those by Ezra Jack Keats." She says that his books had a magical hold on her. Strom and her husband live in San Francisco.

*Rainbow Joe and Me* was selected for the Children's Books Means Business list by the Children's Book Council. *Booklist* noted that the book was an "exuberant debut" for Strom, and *Kirkus Reviews* said, "This exploration of sensory differences and similarities is enlightening and enchanting."

### RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about ***Rainbow Joe and Me***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/94/hc/rainbow\\_joe\\_and\\_me](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/94/hc/rainbow_joe_and_me)

***Rainbow Joe and Me*** in Spanish:

### Book Information

\$7.95, Paperback

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(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Interest Level: Grades K–3

Guided Reading Level: K

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