



**Classroom Guide for**  
**RAYMOND'S PERFECT PRESENT**  
Written by **Therese On Louie**  
Illustrated by **Suling Wang**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grades 2

Interest Level: Grades K–3

Guided Reading Level: M

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.1/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Responsibility, Overcoming Obstacles, Animals (birds), Plants (flowers), Family life, Mothers, Illness, Empathy/Kindness, Optimism/Enthusiasm, Chinese American Interest, Asian/Asian American Interest

### Synopsis

One day Raymond sees a young woman smile with pleasure when she is given a gift of flowers. Maybe I could buy Mom some flowers, Raymond thinks, to help her feel better now that she is home from the hospital.

When Raymond realizes he doesn't have enough money to buy flowers, he decides to grow her some flowers from seeds, to help her feel better. But his mother returns to the hospital before the flowers bloom. As the flowers grow and then begin to wilt, Raymond thinks his present is ruined and fears his mother will never see his present after all. To Raymond's surprise, the seeds on the dying flowers attract a flock of colorful birds to his mother's bedroom window, bringing back fond memories of her childhood and providing a present more perfect than anything Raymond had planned.

Winner of Lee & Low Books' New Voices Award Honor, *Raymond's Perfect Present* captures the innocence of a child's love for his mother as he struggles through a difficult time. This heart-warming story reaches out to all readers who have sought to give those they love the "perfect present."

## BACKGROUND

*Single-parent households:* According to Kids Count Data Center, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, [35% of children](#)<sup>1</sup> in 2014 live in single-parent families and [22% of children](#)<sup>2</sup> in 2011 (most recent year analyzed) have experienced two or more adverse experiences (hardships such as parental incarceration, divorce or separation, and death). As Education Next explains in [“An International Look at the Single-Parent Family,”](#) “the vast majority of single-parent families are headed by single mothers. In the United States, the figure is 84 percent” (of single-parent families are headed by mothers).<sup>3</sup>

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Have you ever given someone a gift? What was the occasion? Did you make the gift or buy it in a store? How did the gift make the person feel? How did giving the gift make you feel? Why do people give gifts to each other?
2. What do plants need to be healthy and grow from a seed? Describe what you know about flowers, their life cycle, and their structure. Have you ever tried to grow a plant? How did it go? What challenges do you have?
3. What do you know about birds? What do birds eat? What challenges might birds have living in a city compared to living in nature?
4. Describe a time someone close to you was ill or sick. How did you feel during this time? How did you cope with your sadness, loneliness, or worry? What advice do you have for someone who has a family member who is ill?
5. Have you ever been worried about an adult (parent, grandparent, caregiver) in your life? Why? How did you make them, yourself, and other family members feel better?

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *Raymond's Perfect Present*, means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. Have students make a prediction: what might Raymond's “perfect present” be? What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, dedications, illustrations, and author and illustrator's bios.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- what Raymond's “perfect present” is
- how he copes with his mother's illness, his worries, and his loneliness
- how he solves his problems when they don't go according to plan

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<sup>1</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/106-children-in-single-parent-families?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/429,430>

<sup>2</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8820-children-who-have-experienced-two-or-more-adverse-experiences?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1021/any/17676,17677>

<sup>3</sup> <http://educationnext.org/international-look-single-parent-family/>

Encourage students to consider why the author, Therese On Louie, would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Reading Standards, Craft and Structure, Strand 4)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### CONTENT SPECIFIC

hospital	apartment	hardware store	soil	ledge	shoots
buds	armchair	scarlet	tongues	nectar	stalks
pigeon	windowsill				

### ACADEMIC

supposed to	dim	quiet	briskly	appeared	dazzling
noticed	exclaimed	displayed	instructions	sprouted	blur
emerged	strange	machines	insects	departed	cheerful
pleased	bloom	drooped	fluttered	scattered	awful
strutted	chattered	disappointment	bare		

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

<b>Literal Comprehension</b>
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(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

1. Why does Raymond look out the window everyday after school instead of playing outside?
2. Why does Raymond want to give his mother flowers? What is special about this gift?
3. Why doesn't Raymond buy flowers for his mother?
4. How does Raymond spend his time when his mother is away?
5. How does Raymond make himself feel better about his mother's illness?
6. Why do you think Raymond has to stay at the neighbors'?
7. Who takes care of Raymond when his mother is in the hospital?
8. How do you know Raymond feels lonely in the story?
9. How do you know Raymond is worried about his mother?
10. Who is Raymond's family? How does his mother's illness create family for Raymond?
11. Describe all the problems Raymond experiences in the story.
12. What does Raymond get to do on Saturdays?
13. Why doesn't Raymond's mother get to see the flowers in bloom?
14. Why do the flowers wilt?
15. What do the birds remind the mother of?
16. How does Raymond's mother react to her gift?
17. What causes Raymond to change his mind about the dying flowers?

18. Why does Raymond's mother feel joyful for Raymond's gift?
19. How does Raymond's gift bring him closer to his mother?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

1. How would you describe the Raymond's relationship with his mother? How is this relationship similar to and different from your relationship with your mother or grandmother?
2. Do you think Raymond fails on giving his mother a gift? Why or why not?
3. How does each family member in the book show they care for one another?
4. How do Mr. and Mrs. Silver help Raymond and his mother? Why do you think they help them even though they aren't Raymond's biological family? How do you define "family"?
5. Do you think Raymond makes a good use of his time after school? Why or why not?
6. Challenge students to retell the story (or an event in the story) from the mother's or Mrs. Silver's point of view.
7. What is kindness? Find all the examples of kindness in the story. How is kindness necessary for creating community?
8. Describe what you think Raymond is grateful for.
9. Do you think Raymond's mother should be proud of him? Why or why not?
10. What advice do you think Raymond would give someone who has an ill family member or friend?
11. How does Raymond's neighborhood play a role in his problem(s) and solution(s)?
12. Why doesn't Raymond tell his mother how he feels? Do you think Raymond should tell his mother how he feels when she is in the hospital? Why or why not?
13. What do the adults in the story learn from Raymond?
14. How does the illustrator, Suling Wang, use color to reflect/reveal Raymond's mood?
15. Have students discuss the role mothers, grandparents, or caregivers play in children's lives. How does this story connect to your experiences with your own mother, grandmother, or caregiver?
16. Do you think this story is realistic? Why or why not? Do you think Raymond is representative of a child in your generation? Why or why not?
17. If Raymond decided to steal the flowers from the shopkeeper instead of returning to just buy the seeds that he could afford, do you think he would have been justified? Why or why not?
18. Raymond shows a lot of maturity in managing his time, coming up with a gift for his mother, and taking care of his home. When do you think someone becomes an adult?
19. Compare Raymond's family to your own family. How are the two families similar and different?
20. Do you think someone is ever too young to help? Do you think a young person can help an adult or make an adult feel better? Why or why not?
21. What does Raymond learn by the end of the story?
22. Have students brainstorm what might happen after the end of the story.

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strand 1)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Which parts of *Raymond's Perfect Present* do you connect with the most? Why?
2. Describe your mother, grandmother, or mother figure in as much detail as possible. What does she like to do? What kind of music or games does she like? What is her favorite food? What do you know about her childhood? What do you do to make her laugh or feel better?
3. Although Raymond's mother organized for Raymond to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Silver when she is in the hospital, Raymond has a lot of time by himself after school. How much freedom should parents give their children?
4. Raymond's mother remembers her childhood growing up on a farm. Describe a place you remember warmly from your life.
5. Describe the best gift you have ever received. What makes it so special to you? Who gave you the gift and what was the occasion?
6. Raymond lives in a city and his mother grew up on a farm. Where would you most want to live: in a city, a suburb, or the country?
7. When you feel lonely, stressed, or sad, what are your coping or survival strategies? How do you manage stress? Write a letter to Raymond with ideas on how he can cope when his mother is in the hospital and he wants to help.
8. Despite Raymond's best efforts, his flowers wilt before his mother can see them. When have you ever failed at something and what did you learn as a result of that experience?
9. Mr. and Mrs. Silver step in to take care of Raymond. Who outside your family has made a difference in your life and what were the circumstances? How did you show appreciation?

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about one of the characters in the story.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### Science

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7 and 8)

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Display examples of the plants from the book and label the plant's structure, including the stem, root system, leaves, flower, and petals. Show students the NOVA video clip "[From Seed to Flower](http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/tdc02.sci.life.colt.plantsgrow/from-seed-to-flower/)"<sup>4</sup> and KET's video clip "[Plant Structure](http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/5dea21b4-6c92-46ff-982c-8650f9429c01/think-garden-plant-structure/)"<sup>5</sup> to learn about plant development and structure.
2. Have students investigate what a plant needs to grow and be healthy. Based on what they learn, ask students if they think their classroom would make a suitable environment for a plant. Consider a classroom plant where students can take turns each week monitoring its care along with other classroom duties. Alternatively, have students each try to grow a plant in class with the [Look at Those Seeds Grow! Lesson Plan](http://sciencenetlinks.com/lessons/look-at-those-seeds-grow/) from Science NetLinks, a project of American Association for the Advancement of Science.<sup>6</sup>
3. Take students outside to find some birds, flowers, or insects to observe. Allow students to bring a few sheets of paper or a notebook to observe and sketch what they see. Back inside, help students label the parts of the bird, flower, or insect. Students should write a paragraph describing what they observed, where they found it, and what it was doing.
4. Invite a local florist to the class to talk about flowers and plant care. Have students brainstorm questions to ask the speaking guest beforehand. Afterward, students should write a thank you letter to the guest.

### English Language Arts/Writing

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 & Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Read or have students read another story about young people helping adults, such as [Destiny's Gift](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2384),<sup>7</sup> [The Can Man](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2714),<sup>8</sup> [Under the Lemon Moon](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2463),<sup>9</sup> or [Goldfish and Chrysanthemums](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2398).<sup>10</sup> How do the young people help an adult in each story? What do the main characters learn about giving and taking care of someone else? Afterwards, encourage students to write a story where a young person helps an adult in some way.
2. What makes your family unique? What activities do you do or interests do you share with one member in your family? Describe a time you spent with a family member in your life and why that memory is special to you.

<sup>4</sup> <http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/tdc02.sci.life.colt.plantsgrow/from-seed-to-flower/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/5dea21b4-6c92-46ff-982c-8650f9429c01/think-garden-plant-structure/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://sciencenetlinks.com/lessons/look-at-those-seeds-grow/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2384>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2714>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2463>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2398>

3. Imagine you are Mr. or Mrs. Silver and are writing Raymond's mother to give her an update on her son's wellbeing. In the letter, describe what Raymond is up to and how he is doing. What do you think Raymond's mother would want to know?
4. In an essay, argue whether the shopkeeper should give Raymond the flowers for free or reduced price. Is the shopkeeper in the right not to give Raymond the flowers? Do you think Raymond learns more from not getting what he wants at first? Why or why not?

### School-Home Connection

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Have students take a picture or sketch a plant they have at home—it can be an indoor or outdoor plant. Students can write a paragraph description about the plant's shape, color, size, and other characteristics. Encourage students to include why this plant is special to their family. Ask student volunteers to share out the diverse plants in their homes.
2. Interview a parent or caregiver about a time they gave someone flowers or received flowers as a gift. What was the occasion? How did the flowers make them feel? Students should write up their interview and bring it to class. As a group, discuss why flowers make popular gifts and what occasions they are usually given.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Therese On Louie** made her picture book debut with *Raymond's Perfect Present*, an honor winner in Lee & Low Books' New Voices Award writing contest. The story was inspired by both her own and her husband's childhood experiences. She has a masters degree in elementary education from Teachers College, Columbia University. She currently teaches ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. Louie lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with her family.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Suling Wang** has an engineering degree from Stanford University and an illustration degree from the Academy of Art College in San Francisco. She has illustrated three books for older readers, including *The Magic Paintbrush* and *When the Circus Came to Town*, both written by Laurence Yep. *Raymond's Perfect Present* was her first picture book. Wang lives in San Francisco with her husband. Visit her online at <http://www.sulingwang.com/>.

### Book Information

\$9.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-62014-229-5

32 pages, 8-3/8 x 10-7/8

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\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades K–3

Guided Reading Level: M

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.1/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

Themes: Responsibility, Overcoming Obstacles, Animals (birds), Plants (flowers), Family life, Mothers, Illness, Empathy/Kindness, Optimism/Enthusiasm, Chinese American Interest, Asian/Asian American Interest

**RESOURCES ON THE WEB:**

Learn more about *Raymond's Perfect Present* at:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2439>

**ORDER INFORMATION****On the Web:**

<https://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering> (general order information)

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2439> (secure online ordering)

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