



THE GRADE 6
SURVIVAL
GUIDE

SCHOOL RULES ARE OPTIONAL

ALISON HART

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Recommended for 8-12 year olds

Summary

It's the first day of school and I've already got three problems:

- 1) *Mrs Leeman is my classroom teacher. She's so ancient she taught my dad!*
- 2) *I might have accidentally been voted School Captain. I had an unusually popular day when the class voted last year.*
- 3) *Somehow I've lost my Grade Six jumper between receiving it and Mrs Leeman's lecture about being responsible.*

That's a lot to go wrong in half an hour. On top of that, it's a million degrees. So that's four problems. It's worse than I thought!

At least things can only get better, right?



Themes

Humour • primary school • friendship • family • responsibility



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Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Manager: Tel: +02 8425 0150, Email: education@allenandunwin.com

Author style

This first-person madcap account of everyday life as a Grade Six student will have you guffawing with laughter as it sends up so many of the well-known rituals of primary school's final year. Jesse, our witty, lazy and forgetful narrator, has to deal with a disrespectful prep buddy, a plumbing problem the size of Niagara Falls in the girls' toilet block, as well as the dreaded compulsory school camp, all while trying to figure out where he put his Grade Six jumper.

This story of being undervalued and over everything is perfect for fans of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Secrets of a Schoolyard Millionaire*.

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application:

Before reading *School Rules are Optional*

Before reading *School Rules are Optional*, look at the cover and consider the book's title and illustrations. What is it about the title that stands out for you? What do you think is happening in the scene on the cover? How do the title and illustration support each other? What sort of story are you expecting to read based on the title and illustrations? Do other visual techniques on the cover help you guess the sort of book it will be? (Consider font, colour, composition, framing, etc.)

Comprehension: Chapter One

1. Why does Jesse think Mrs Leeman must be 'about a hundred'? (page 1)
2. Does Jesse want to be school captain? (page 2)
3. Everyone wants to be school captain. True or False? (page 2)
4. Why doesn't Mr Wilson announce the new school captains at the assembly? (pages 6-7)
5. Why is Jesse more worried about his mum than his teacher finding out about his jumper? (page 9)
6. Who do you think is the better student, based on the ideas Jesse and Alex come up with for the Sneak Peek assignment? (page 10)
7. Choose one word to describe Minha based on Jesse's description of what she likes to do. (pages 11-12)
8. What is it about the way the new student teacher introduces himself that makes him different to all the other teachers in Jesse's school? (page 13)
9. Would you describe Alex as a good friend to Jesse? (page 14)
10. Why does Jesse's mum threaten that he and his brother will never see mini toast as long as they live? (pages 16-17)

Language

Come up with a list of words to describe the sort of person you think Jesse is. Give examples of things he says or does in the book that made you think he is that sort of person. For example, you might think that Jesse is prone to forgetfulness as he loses his school jumper on the morning of the first day at school, or that he is kind because he saves Thomas Moore on the climbing wall.

Friendship

Jesse recognises that Alex is a considerate friend when Alex collects a school form for Jesse when he goes to the office to get his asthma puffer. Compare and contrast Jesse's friendship with Alex and Peta's friendship with Leini and Gina. With whom would you prefer to be friends?

Jesse's gang get up to all kinds of antics in the books, snail racing being just one of them. What are some funny stories of things you have done with your friends in the school playground or on excursions?

'I didn't know . . . I really didn't . . . ' Alex says, like it makes him happy that he hadn't figured it out. (page 184)

Why do you think it is so funny that of all of Jesse's friends, Alex is the one who also didn't figure out who Ian was related to?

Environment

Mrs Leeman has her class perform Environmental Duty every week. Come up with three reasons why this kind of duty is important in a school? What other ways could you help keep the environment at school clean?

School camp

Jesse writes a list of pros and cons about camp on pages 78-80. Do you think these are the real reasons why he is reluctant to go to camp? Could there be another reason? In the end, Jesse has a great time despite a showdown at Goaty Town. Make your own list of things you liked and disliked about school camp. If you haven't been to one yet make a list of things you want to do on camp?

Book review

Write a book review for *School Rules are Optional*. In the review make sure you include the book's title and author, as well as a brief summary of what happens. Pay particular attention to whether you found the story and characters funny and what made you want to keep reading to the end.

Predict

Read the extract from the next book at the end of *School Rules are Optional*. What do you think might happen next to Jesse in Grade Six? Think about some of the typical things that happen in Grade Six (that didn't happen in this book) and how he might handle them?

Humour

Rearrange the following scenes or quotes from the book so that they match one type of humour listed below.

Quote
A place called Kamp for Kids that turns out to be full of goats
"Someone should really explain to her what 'volunteer' means."
Total mayhem breaking out in the flooded toilet block
Miss Creighton, the terrifying school receptionist

Type of Humour	Quote
Slapstick	
Joke	
Stereotypes	
Sarcasm	

In the author's own words:

'*School Rules are Optional* is written for the 8-12 demographic because this is where my thinking and flow of ideas naturally sits. When my daughter was in this age group, she started bringing home books that really resonated with me. I remember how difficult it was, being a child but starting to connect in an adult world. I remembered all the books I read at that age and tried to find them. When I started writing, I was a bit all over the place in terms of plot, structure and ensuring the content reflected contemporary society, but I think the themes are more or less unchanged.

'I've since discovered children's writing seems to fit loosely into three categories: classic timeless literature at one end, vacuous formulaic series at the other and interesting, readable books for discerning readers somewhere in-between. Here I found writers like David Walliams, Andy Griffiths, Tom Angleberger, Lauren Child, Jim Benton and countless others write in a fun approachable way that engages the reader without being condescending or preachy.

I hope to be included that group someday.'

– Alison Hart

Author Background:

Alison Hart lives at the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges with her daughter and lots of animals, wild and domestic. The house block is so steep, you have to go down two sets of steps to get to the front door. It's nice and quiet for writing, but also a bit distracting because the view is really good. In her spare time, Alison likes reading, watching old movies, and opening and closing the door for the cat. Besides writing, Alison works in community aged care. *School Rules are Optional* is her first novel.

