

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

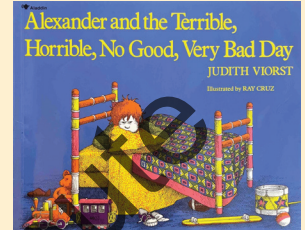
by Judith Viorst and Illustrated by Ray Cruz

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Summary: Alexander wakes up and explains all the ways his day was terrible.

Why We Love It: This is a picture book classic with a capital C. Plus, who can't relate to Alexander—or to his mom telling us that's just how life is sometimes?

Big Ideas: having a bad day, self-empathy, feeling alone, frustrations, dealing with problems, unfairness



1 QUICK WRITE.

- To inspire a nonfiction piece, ask, *What would your worst day be like? What kinds of things would happen to you?*
- To inspire a narrative piece, ask, *If you've had a pretty bad day when things just didn't go your way, what happened, and how did you feel?*

Write about one of these prompts for 3 minutes and then set it aside.

2 READ.

Read the picture book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* and discuss the story. Discuss parts of the story that stick out to you or that you connect with. What writer's craft moves do you notice the author using? What pattern did you see? Notice the parts of the story.

3 CRAFT MOVES TO NOTICE.

- A refrain, a line that is repeated on purpose
- The rule of three, like a pitchfork with three prongs (a set of three words, three sentences, three things that happen, three descriptions, three characters, three problems, or some other trio)
- Long sentences joined by conjunctions next to short, simple sentences

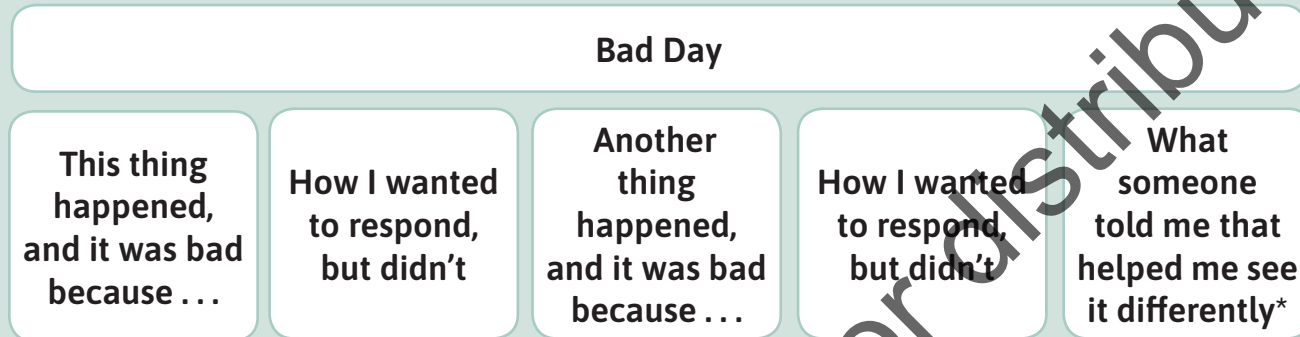
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4 SHARE THE STRUCTURE.

This text structure is loosely based on this story. Show the students the structure and reread the story. Can they find any of these parts?



Repeat these first four steps as many times as your story needs.

*This is a good place for a truism!

5 INVITATION TO WRITE.

Here are several ways you can get students to write.

- Have students use the text structure to write a kernel essay summary of the story. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- Have the students use the text structure to write their own piece in a kernel essay. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this).
- See what students come up with. (Give them around 10 minutes.) Here are some possibilities:
 - A page of thoughts in their quick write
 - Examples of the author's craft moves
 - A text structure

Whatever they choose to write, let students know that they can change anything they need to and make it their own.

6 SHARE.

Invite students to try their writing on someone else's ears. This is a crucial step! The sharing is just as important as the writing.

Want to Go Deeper?

Try These Options.

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OPTION 1: CRAFT CHALLENGE

Use a Refrain

This author used a refrain, which is a line that is repeated on purpose. Writers sometimes do this to create humor (make it funny), create rhythm, and engage their reader.

The author repeats the line, "I think I'll move to Australia."

Look through your piece and see where you can add a refrain of your own. Try it out on someone's ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

OPTION 2: ANALYZE

1. Start with a big idea.

- If you want students to find the big ideas themselves, try asking, *What big ideas do you see in this story that tell you what it's really about?*
- If students need a nudge, try using some of the big ideas from the "Big Ideas" list in this lesson's introduction. Have students provide evidence from the story to support their answers. **Ask:** *How is this story about (big idea)? How does the author explore the big idea of _____? Where in the story do you see that?*

2. Turn the big idea into a truism (thematic statement).

- Once you have identified the big ideas, use one of them to create truisms for this story. Here are some examples from this story:
 - Bad days can seem never ending.
 - It seems like sometimes people have their best days when you're having your worst.
- Have students write and share their own truisms.

Ask them to prove their truisms by providing evidence from the text. They might imagine a listener saying, "Oh yeah? How do you know? How is that true in the story?"

OPTION 3: READING RESPONSE

If you want your students to demonstrate understanding of the story and compose written, constructed responses (short or extended), try asking a few of these questions and using the list entitled "Basic Reading Response Text Structures" found in the appendix. There are also lists of question stems to create your own questions available in the appendix.

Questions for Reading Response

- What is this story really about?
- What is the problem in the story?
- What does Alexander mean when he says, "My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia"?
- Why does Alexander become upset when he _____ (choose any other event in the story)?
- What argument does Alexander make to support his reaction to _____ (choose any event in the story)?

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Student Examples

QUICK WRITES

Sue King, adult

I was in Mexia, attending Environmental School for my garden club activities. I stepped outside to take a call from a lady I'd been trying to connect with for months, it seemed like. What she said to me ruined my whole day.

KERNEL ESSAYS

Charlise Kristof, preK

1. A baby seal got lost.
2. Mama Seal made a sign saying "Lost Baby Seal."
3. A mermaid found Baby Seal.
4. Everybody was happy.

Madeleine Kristof, third grade

1. My friend named Stella used to include me in everything, like going to her house, telling me everything, and trying not to freak me out.
2. Then Ayla came along and changed Stella's brain! After, Stella started not including me, and not telling me things, even if it was about me and I was standing right there!
3. I said, "Hey, you're making me frustrated when you talk to Ayla about me." Finally, I was frustrated and talked to Stella about it.

4. Stella started talking to me more about what I could change when I was around and she started including me.
5. I was excited she was including me more. Sometimes you can turn bad days around.

Andres Longoria, fifth grade

I was going to go to a trampoline park with a friend. There was one small problem: my mom got a flat tire. I was furious. All I could do about it was stay home with my friend, Cash, and play pass with a football.

Alexander Gutierrez, sixth grade

1. I wasn't ready for anything. This day was horrible because I had tons of tests and quizzes and had done badly on all of them.
2. I wanted to redo all of them to get a better grade, but didn't because I was mad and didn't want to do more work.
3. My mom found out and this was also horrible because she got very mad. She told my dad and I got into lots of trouble.
4. I wanted to do it again to get out of trouble but didn't because I figured that I was already this deep in.
5. My dad helped me see it differently. He told me that if I never take initiative to do the work, I will never

Student Examples

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succeed in anything. I then learned that it was important to work hard with determination.

READING RESPONSES

Sophia Canales, third grade

Text Structure: Figuring Out the Reading

I read the words, "My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia," which told me that days can be bad in Australia and every other place in the world. It also told me that probably people in Australia have bad days in their life too. Then I read, "I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair," which told me that Alexander will never go to sleep with gum in his mouth again. It also told me that I should not sleep with gum in my mouth. So now I know that everyone has a bad day.

Valeriia Zakharkevych, third grade

Text Structure: Summary

Alexander wanted to have a good day. But lots of bad things started to happen. His brothers even pushed him in mud. So he started to hit them. Then he got into even more trouble. And he said it was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Andres Longoria, fifth grade

Text Structure: RACE

Q: What is the problem in the story?

The problem is that Alexander's day is not going as planned, and he was mad about that. I know because in the book, at the end of the day, he wants to go to Australia because he is furious. It means that Alexander is furious.

Alexander Gutierrez, sixth grade

Text Structure: Ba-Da-Bing the Evidence

Q: What does Alexander mean when he says, "My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia"?

A: When Alexander says, "My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia," he means that he thinks Australia is a perfect place where nothing can go wrong and you can't have a bad day. I know this because whenever anything goes wrong, he always says he wants to go to Australia. This shows that Alexander means that he thinks Australia is a place where no bad days could happen, but his mom told him some days are just tough, even in Australia.