Based on

The Best School Year Ever

By Barbara Robinson

About the Book:
If there's a problem at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, you can be sure that one of the Herdmans is behind it. They are notorious for being outlaws – they smoke cigars, lie constantly, set fire to things, and hardly ever attend school! But when a school project is assigned and the students are required to compliment their classmates, life changes for the Herdmans. Is it possible that behind all of their mischief and pranks, there is some good in these kids?

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:
• Have you ever known a student who was a troublemaker in school? What things did this student do to be disruptive? How did the teacher react?
• How do you feel on the first day of each school year? Explain your answer.
• What is a compliment? Share a compliment with one of your classmates.
• What is the purpose of a WANTED poster?
• What are refreshments?
• What do you think goes on in the teachers’ lounge at your school?

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:
• What class project is assigned by Miss Kemp at the beginning of the school year? How does Beth Bradley feel about this project?
• What did the Herdman children do to Howard McCluskey?
• Describe the Herdmans’ cat. How does this cat eventually get clean?
• What happened to the snake that bit Leroy Herdman’s leg? What insight does this provide regarding things and people that come into contact with the Herdmans?
• Who is Alice Wendleken? Describe her.
• What are the uses of iodine?
• Why do you think the social worker, Miss Phillips, said that her sympathies were with the snake instead of Leroy?
• What unique talent does Eugene Preston display at the school’s talent show?
• What does Imogene Herdman tell other students regarding the teachers’ lounge at school?
• Why are the students on Bus #6 afraid it is doomed?
• What happens to Howard’s missing blanket? How does Imogene Herdman show sympathy for him?
• How does Woodrow Wilson Elementary School end up winning the Fire Department Speed and Safety Award?
• What happens to the bear that is displayed by the second graders in honor of winning the Fire Speed and Safety Award?
• Why do several students end up quitting the Fire Safety Team?
• What compliments does Beth give Imogene? How do you know that Imogene appreciated Beth’s compliments?
**Student Activity** (found on the last page of this PDF):
Students are asked to compliment and write a brief paragraph about one of their classmates and share this with the class.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Herdman Havoc:** The Herdmans are known for being “outlaws” and creating havoc wherever they go. Have students think about all of the different ways the Herdmans created trouble for others and ask them to make a list of these misfortunes. Ask students: What would you do if you ever encountered one of the Herdmans? Have students write ways in which people might be able to handle the Herdmans’ mischievous behavior.

- **Fire Safety:** Woodrow Wilson Elementary School is honored with the Fire Department Speed and Safety Award. Ask students: What do you know about fire safety? With your class, visit your local fire department and talk to the firefighters. Create a list of ways fires can be prevented and what to do in case of a fire. Have students make posters titled “Fire Safety” and list some ways to prevent tragedy caused by a fire. Ask students to share their posters with the class.

- **Comparing Stories:** *The Best School Year Ever* is the sequel to the book *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Read *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* with your class, if you haven’t already done so. Have students make a Venn diagram comparing/contrasting the two stories. Which story did they prefer? Ask them to write a brief journal entry explaining their preference.

- **Write It Right:** The Herdmans are the type of characters everyone loves to hate. Ask students to imagine they are the author of a short story about the Herdmans. What would be the title of their story? The setting? Plot? Climax? Conclusion? In their journals, have students write a short story with the Herdmans as the main characters. They can also add some illustrations and then share their stories with the class.

- **Smart Cookies:** The Herdmans are much smarter than people give them credit for. With your class, think of some ways in which the Herdmans outsmarted members of their school and community in order to get what they wanted. Make a list of these ideas. Then allow students to choose one of the ideas and create a comic strip showcasing the event and the Herdmans’ clever actions.
Compliment Corner
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Directions: In the book The Best School Year Ever, Miss Kemp assigns her class a year-long project: the students are required to learn about their classmates and compliment each other. Place all students’ names in a jar or bowl. Draw a name (you must draw a name other than your own). Write a paragraph complimenting the student you select. Draw a picture of that student to go along with your writing. Share the compliments with your classmates without mentioning the student’s name. See if others can guess who you complimented. Finally, have your teacher display these compliments in a corner of the classroom.

Person I’m Complimenting: ______________________________________________
Compliment #1: _______________________________________________________
Compliment #2: _______________________________________________________
Compliment #3: _______________________________________________________

Compliment Paragraph:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Attach a picture of this classmate.