

If I Built a School

by Chris Van Dusen

On the playground one day, Jack tells his teacher, Miss Jane, all about the amazing school he would build if he were given the chance. Told in humorous rhyme, *If I Built a School* is a whimsical story about making decisions for the benefit of the group—and in the name of fun.

BEFORE THE READ-ALoud

Have students consider the following question **as a class**:

If you had the opportunity to make a change at your school, would you make a change that only benefits you? Or would you make a change that was positive and benefited everyone?

Invite students to share their answers.

Then have students **turn and talk** with a partner:

Think of a time when you had to plan or help plan something for a group. What was that experience like? How did it make you feel?

Show the title and cover of the read-aloud book *If I Built a School*.

In the book we are about to read, the main character, Jack, thinks that school would be much better if he oversaw the design. Jack uses his creativity and curiosity to “build” a school of his own.

Academic Vocabulary

sprout (p. 8) to shoot forth, like a plant

grand (p. 10) large and impressive

hologram (p. 15) a 3-D image made of light

galore (p. 27) in abundance; plentiful amount

impeccably (p. 29) perfectly, without fault

DURING THE READ-ALoud

As you read aloud the whole book, you may wish to pause and discuss the following questions, either as a whole class or through turning and talking between partners. These questions will allow the class to explore the library’s themes as well as comprehension strategies. (In this book, pages are not numbered. The first page with text is page 3.)

pp. 2–5 Jack refers to his current school as “plain.” Does the imaginary school he and Miss Jane walk into look plain? What are some words you might use to describe it? **(Compare & Contrast)**

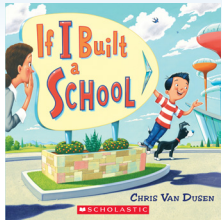
pp. 6–9 Jack describes the towers in the schoolyard as “colorful flowers.” Think about what it might feel like to be in a building like that. What would sitting in a classroom like that be like? It’s important to note that the author is also the illustrator of this book. How do the details in the illustrations make Jack’s idea come alive? **(Visualize)**

pp. 10–15 Think about the features that Jack describes in the classroom. How might Miss Jane feel about her writing magically glowing? How might the students feel about the hologram lessons? **(Make Inferences)**

pp. 16–21 Jack’s gymnasium and cafeteria are built to meet the needs and interests of all students. There is a lot of variety in the kinds of activities and foods available. What does this tell you about the kind of friend Jack is? **(Analyze Character)**

pp. 22–27 Jack gives Miss Jane a tour of the playground, the classrooms, and his specialty buses. What do you think Jack hopes to achieve with his school? What might his main focus be, and how might the details he includes make it a reality? **(Key Ideas and Details)**

pp. 28–31 Jack gives his school a score of 15 on a scale that only goes to 10. What does that tell you about what he thinks of his ideas? Think of a time when you imagined a way you could make your school or community better for all. How did you feel making those plans? **(Make Connections)**



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AFTER THE READ-ALoud

After completing the read-aloud, allow time for class discussion. Sit in a circle or in another configuration that is comfortable and allows for class interaction.

Acting as a facilitator, invite children to have *accountable discussions*: remind them to use evidence from the text, their own inferences, personal connections, and other text connections in order to learn from one another.

- Jack is very proud that he made this plan all by himself. How might planning have been different if he worked with others to imagine new ideas for the school? Think about if you were working with Jack. Who else would you want to be on the planning committee? What kinds of skills should people on the committee have? **(Building Relationships)**
- If you were Jack and you really wanted to think about suggesting changes for a school, do you think working alone would be the best way to do that? Can Jack account for the needs of everyone on his own? **(Making Decisions)**
- Jack has so much fun dreaming up his school, and his imagination is amazing! But if he really wanted to make a change in his school, what might he pick? Think of something that Jack might implement in his school that is real. What kind of real-life change might you advocate for in your school? **(Managing Myself)**
- Jack talks a lot about his ideas throughout the book, and Miss Jane doesn't say anything at all. How do you think Miss Jane might have reacted to some of Jack's ideas? Think about the importance of listening. What might Jack learn from listening to others? Can you think of a time when listening to others has lead to something positive? **(Respecting Others)**
- Jack shares that "learning is fun in a place that's fun too." Can you think of a time when you had fun learning something new? What made that experience memorable for you? Think about what an architect or school planner does. Do you think this is something Jack should do when he grows up? Is this a career you might be interested in, too? **(Understanding Myself)**

Activity Bank

Writing Activity

(with Graphic Organizer) Write a news story about Jack's new school. Write quotes from the perspective of other students and share what they like most about Jack's new school and why. Be sure to give the news story a headline. **(Making Decisions)**

Give a Speech

(Civics) Have students work in groups to design one or two rooms of their dream school together. Then, have students imagine they are asked to give a speech on the steps of the newly opened school. What would they like to share with their fellow students, their teachers, and their families? What are the features they are most proud of? How can the community celebrate all together? Invite students to jot down talking points, and have group volunteers share their speeches with the class. **(Building Relationships)**

