

## The Seventh Most Important Thing: Teacher's Guide

**By Robert Kaminski, Librarian, Woodbury Elementary School, Shaker Heights, OH**

Feel free to use as little or as much of this to facilitate your students' exploration of the plot, characters, and major themes in this incredible book. I have first listed activities and ideas to explore throughout the book. I have then separated the book into different sections where I saw natural plot or thematic connections (you don't have to break it down this way though). Within each section you will see discussion/journal questions for (nearly) every chapter. Use these as you see fit; some questions are simple plot clarifications and some are deeper and more reflective, so be sure to preview and decide which questions and format would be the most appropriate to use with your particular students.

**\*All page numbers refer to where students should have read through before discussing\***

### Ongoing Questions and Themes

#### **Character Tracking**

It might be helpful to have students discuss/write about the important characters in the story and how their perception of them changes as the story unfolds. In the chart below, I've included multiple points in the book where it might be particularly helpful for students to:

- Record/discuss the important things the character has said or done to this point
- Choose 1-2 words to describe the character and give examples from the text to support why they chose those words
- Reflect on their perception of the character at that point in the story

Arthur	5	83	107	151	186	226
Mr. Hampton	11	69	142	171	206	
Mom	25	92	226	254		
Barbara	31	97	181	254		
Officer Billie	36	87	149	221	246	
Groovy Jim	41	129	219			
Squeak	107	161	209	260		

**Arthur committed a horrible crime, but he also shows that he is a caring person. Have students find examples of when Arthur shows concern and caring for others as they read the story.**

Some examples of Arthur's caring actions for others even though it makes him uncomfortable: Trying to keep his suit neat in court because that's what his mom would want (4); Walking to Mr. Hampton's garage so the family didn't spend money on gas (37); Setting up the Christmas tree even though it reminded him of his dad's death (76-83); Intervening when Squeak was being bullied (102); Going to the hospital with Mr. Hampton (130); Making the best of mom's boyfriend coming for dinner (184-185); Going to tell Groovy Jim what happened to Mr. Hampton (210); He didn't tell his mom that he just wanted it to be the three of them together on his birthday (252)

#### **Theme of Persevering Instead of Quitting**

Here's a list of some passages in the book where Arthur is tempted to quit, but intentionally chooses to persevere instead: When given the list of the 7 most important things to collect (45-46); Arthur's first week back in junior high (60); When there was no list of things to collect and no one answered his knocking at the garage door (120-121); After learning Mr. Hampton was dying (158-161); Trying to continue Mr. Hampton's project after he died (208, 216, 220,222); Explaining the artwork to the visitors from the museum (249)

<b>Chapters 1--5 Pages 1--21</b>		
<b>Vocabulary:</b> Decrepit (1), Bailiff (4), Insolent (5), Unprovoked (7), Disheveled (8), Hideous (13), Retribution (20), Redemption (20), Smug (21)		
<b>Ch.</b>	<b>Pg.</b>	<b>Question</b>
1	2	How could things have gone worse when Arthur threw the brick?
2	5	What does it mean that the judge "was not a listening sort of man"?
3	11	What does Arthur not knowing the victim's name or race tell us about the crime he committed against the man?
4	16	Why did Arthur's mom throw his dad's things away?
5	21	Why would Mr. Hampton recommend that Arthur work for him instead of going to the juvenile detention center?

<b>Chapters 6--12 Pages 22--53</b>		
<b>Vocabulary:</b> Sarcastic (27), Probation (32), Futile (34)		
<b>Figurative Language:</b> "The buck stops here" (35)		
<b>Ch.</b>	<b>Pg.</b>	<b>Question</b>
7	31	What does Arthur mean when he thinks, "There were no friends in juvie. Just varying degrees of people you didn't want to have as enemies."? (p. 27)
8	36	Why is Officer Billie so strict and harsh in her interactions with Arthur?
10	44	How does Arthur feel when he first finds out what kind of work he will be doing for Mr. Hampton? What do you think Mr. Hampton will do with the seven things Arthur is supposed to collect for him?
11	50	Why does Arthur lie to Groovy Jim about why he is collecting his list of things?
12	53	Why did Arthur get red when he was talking with the woman about the toaster he found in the garbage? The chapter ends with finding out Arthur's first work session for Mr. Hampton "wasn't nearly good enough." What might be some of the consequences of that?

<b>Chapters 13--17 Pages 54--83</b>		
<b>Vocabulary:</b> Perish (65), Philosophical (68)		
<b>Figurative Language:</b> "I'm turning into a block of boredom." (66); "She sounded like a crazed hyena." (80); "They had really lost their minds." (81); "It was as if their old life had briefly flickered back on, like an old movie." (83)		
<b>Ch.</b>	<b>Pg.</b>	<b>Question</b>
14	60	How are students and teachers treating Arthur differently when he comes back to school? In earth science class, Arthur learned that "some people are unlucky enough to live in places where the plates already have big cracks in them." What does it mean that "Arthur was convinced that he was one of those people"? (59)
15	65	What was different about Arthur's second work session for Mr. Hampton? When Arthur's mom called Officer Billie to make sure Arthur would be safe while working for Mr. Hampton, Officer Billie told her that Arthur was more dangerous than Mr. Hampton. Do you agree more with Arthur's mom or Officer Billie about who should be concerned about their safety?
16	69	Do you think of Mr. Hampton differently after Arthur's conversation with Groovy Jim?
17	74	Why was Arthur so upset when Barbara didn't like the Hungry Man dinner?
1 <sup>st</sup>	83	What more do we learn about Arthur's dad in this chapter? Why are the lights so important to Arthur?

**Chapters 18--24 Pages 84--115****Vocabulary:** Raucous (100)**Figurative Language:** "Like they were actors in a play. Or aliens on a planet that looked exactly like their own, only it wasn't." (89); "The snow-covered sidewalks crunched like icebergs under his feet." (93); "He slipped into the noisy hall like some kind of invisible spirit." (106)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
18	87	Why did Officer Billy unexpectedly visit Arthur at his home?
19	92	Why did Arthur lie about how much his gift to his mom costed? In this chapter, Arthur realizes how things can have different value to different people. What is something that has meaning to you, but that someone else might not think is important?
20	97	Why did Arthur go to Mr. Hampton's garage when he wasn't supposed to work? Why did Mr. Hampton tell Officer Billie that he was going away for the holidays?
21	100	When Arthur first sees the jocks goofing around, he says "it wasn't his problem," but then he sees someone is in the can that they're throwing balls at. Do you think he will take action? Why or why not?
22	104	Was Arthur correct to take the actions he did? What are some other ways he could have dealt with the situation?
23	107	Given Arthur's past, do you understand why the Vice Principal doesn't believe Arthur was trying to help Squeak?
2 <sup>nd</sup>	111	At first Arthur doesn't want to eat lunch with Squeak, why does he change his mind?
24	115	Why is it a big deal that Arthur shares the list of the seven most important things with Squeak?

**Chapters 25--31 Pages 116--149****Vocabulary:** Imperceptibly (129), Tinker (131), Stabilized (133)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
25	119	Why didn't Arthur take the \$10 offered for the chair and then just deliver one of the other chairs he saw to Mr. Hampton?
26	123	Do you think it would have been okay for Arthur to go home after there was no list of things to find and no one answered when he knocked on the door?
27	125	What do you think happened to Mr. Hampton?
28	129	Does knowing what is in the garage and the things he says to Arthur and Groovy Jim change the way you see Mr. Hampton?
29	132	Why did Arthur lie to the policeman about having ridden in police car before?
30	142	Why is Arthur nervous to visit Mr. Hampton in his hospital room? Why does Mr. Hampton say that Arthur saved him twice?
31	149	Why does Arthur tell Officer Billie that he doesn't want to work for Mr. Hampton any longer?

**Chapters 32--37 Pages 150--178****Vocabulary:** Ricocheted (153), Dilapidated (163), Pulverize (173)**Figurative Language:** "as if he was working with an unexploded bomb" (173)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
33	157	Why did Squeak get up on the lunch table? What would have happened if Squeak didn't get up on the lunch table?
34	161	Why did Arthur share what happened to Mr. Hampton with Squeak?
35	165	How do you think Mr. Hampton will react to Arthur bringing Squeak to the garage?
36	170	How do you think Arthur feels about bringing Squeak to Mr. Hampton's garage?
3 <sup>rd</sup>	176	Why did Arthur enjoy smashing the mirrors so much?
37	178	Why did Arthur ask Officer Billy about the seven most important things?

**Chapters 38--41 Pages 179--209****Vocabulary:** Iridescence (189), Trek (197), Delicacy (202), Eternity (205)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
38	181	Why might have Arthur's mom told Barbara about her boyfriend before Arthur?
4 <sup>th</sup>	186	Meeting mom's boyfriend probably went better than Arthur expected it to. What are some reasons the dinner wasn't a complete disaster?
39	194	Why do you think the Pinewood Derby car meant so much to Arthur? What stood out to Arthur about the conversation he and Mr. Hampton had about Arthur's dad?
40	198	What's different about Arthur's trips around the neighborhood to collect things from when he first began working for Mr. Hampton?
5 <sup>th</sup>	206	Do you think Mr. Hampton knew he was going to die soon when he was sharing orange sodas talking and with Arthur?
41	209	Who could help Arthur figure out how to keep his promise to finish Mr. Hampton's project?

**Chapters 42--49 Pages 210--246****Vocabulary:** Surreal (231), Anonymous (241), Eccentric (243)**Figurative Language:** "His face felt like it was on fire" (216)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
42	214	Why did Arthur decide to tell Groovy Jim the truth about how he knew Mr. Hampton?
43	219	What does Arthur do in this chapter that other people have unfairly done to him?
44	221	What does "nothing was clear to Arthur anymore" mean?
45	226	Is Arthur's mom right that he should be willing to let Mr. Hampton's things go?
6 <sup>th</sup>	228	What do you think is the idea Arthur had while staring at the coffee can?
46	232	What are some other phrases Arthur and Squeak could have put on the donation cans to describe Mr. Hampton's art?
47	237	Why would it bother Arthur that his mom's boyfriend is so nice? What does Arthur mean when he said, "I'm not who a lot of people think I am." (p.237)
48	242	Do you agree with the photographer that it's sad that Mr. Hampton worked on his masterpiece alone, with no one seeing it while he was alive?
49	246	Do you think it would be okay for Arthur to say he had done all he could and stop trying to save Mr. Hampton's artwork now?

**Chapters 50—7 Years Later Pages 247--273****Vocabulary:** Exasperated (267)

Ch.	Pg.	Question
50	251	Do the visitors from the art museum seem like they understand Mr. Hampton's artwork the way he and Arthur would want them to?
51	254	Why didn't Arthur tell his mom that he wanted it to be just him, Barbara, and his mom together for his birthday?
52	258	If you were Arthur, would you be happy to find out that Mr. Hampton's artwork was going to a museum, but would be in storage for now?
53	265	What do you think Mr. Hampton's last message to Arthur means?
Last	273	The definition of "redemption" that Arthur found was: "1. The act of being rescued or set free. 2. The act of being saved from consequences. 3. The payment of an obligation. 4. Salvation from sin." (p. 30) How does that definition fit with what Arthur experienced from the time he threw the brick at Mr. Hampton through the end of the story?