

THE RED BICYCLE: The Extraordinary Story of One Ordinary Bicycle

Written by Jude Isabella

Illustrated by Simone Shin

ABOUT THE BOOK

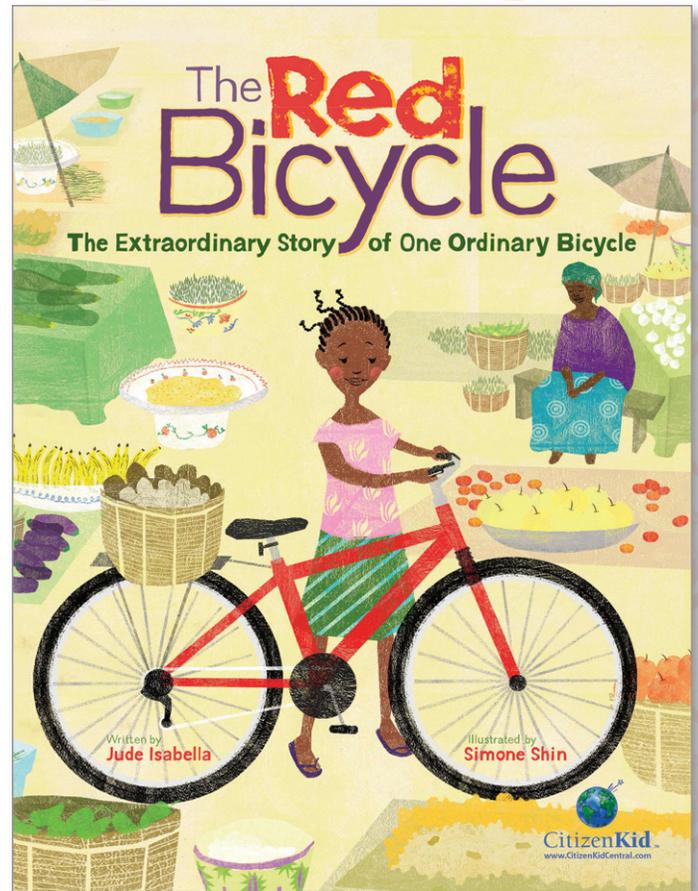
Leo rides his beloved red bicycle to school, soccer practice and everywhere in between. He is devastated when he outgrows Big Red. But when Leo learns of a bicycle donation program, he perks up — someone who really needs his bike can give it a new life. Little does he know that Big Red will change other people's lives, too. Follow the bike as it travels to West Africa, where it helps people in Burkina Faso bring goods to the market, and serves as a makeshift ambulance, proving that an ordinary bicycle can be truly extraordinary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

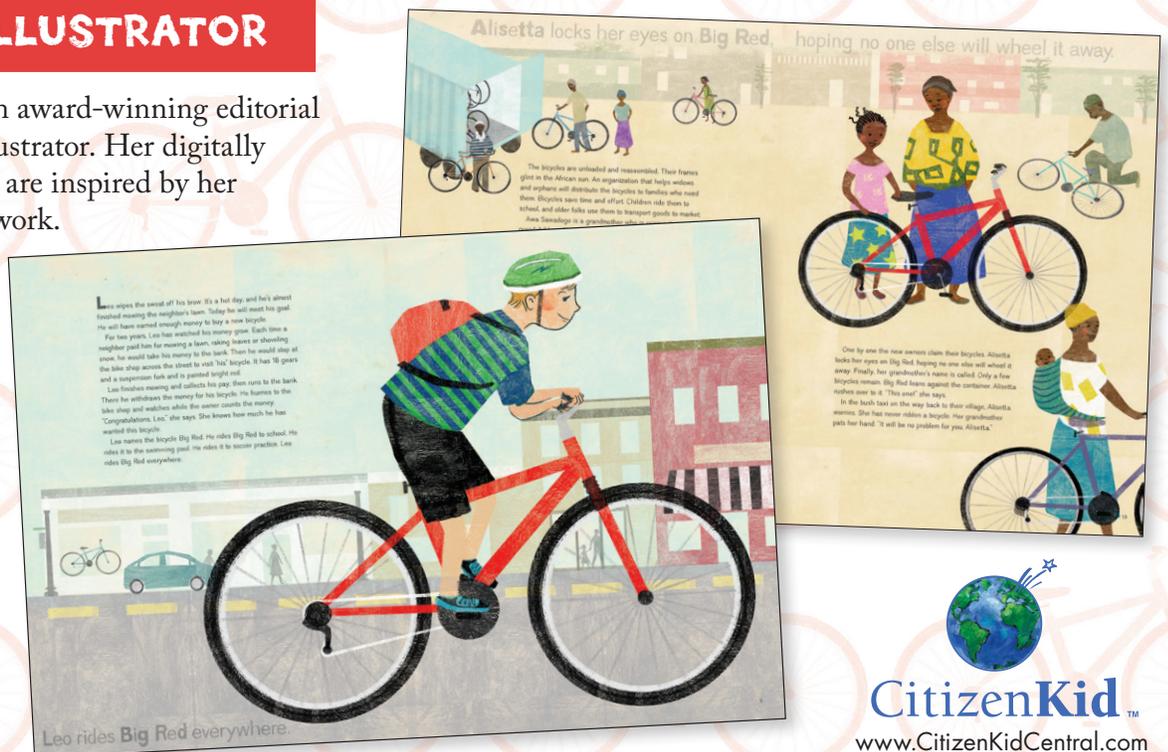
JUDE ISABELLA is the award-winning author of *Chitchat* and *Fantastic Feats and Failures*. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

SIMONE SHIN is an award-winning editorial and children's book illustrator. Her digitally composed illustrations are inspired by her early silk-screened artwork. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



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GOALS

- To understand different subgenres within fiction, including realistic fiction
- To understand characterization in literature

OVERVIEW

After reading *The Red Bicycle* by Jude Isabella, students will engage in a discussion about different subgenres within fiction. Together, the class will discuss historical fiction, science fiction, fable and folktale, and realistic fiction, and determine into which category this book fits. Then students will brainstorm a list of words to describe the three main characters in the book: Leo, Alisetta and Haridata. They will complete a character map and then practice their own writing.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do fictional characters help readers categorize fiction by subgenre?
- How do authors create believable characters in literature?
- How do believable characters help you understand what you're reading?
- What roles do characters play in realistic fiction? How does this subgenre depend on characterization differently than it does in, say, folktales?

OUTCOMES

- Students will be able to define subgenres of fiction, specifically realistic fiction.
- Students will be able to define characterization.
- Students will work cooperatively to investigate the characters in this book.
- Students will cite specific textual evidence and make inferences from their readings to understand the characters.
- Students will practice writing believable characters in their own stories.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3 — Describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words or actions).
- Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6 — Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.
- Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3 — Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).
- Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6 — Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION

The context of *The Red Bicycle* provides educators and their students with an opportunity to explore multiple themes from Social Studies, including: Culture; People, Places & Environments; Individual Development & Identity; Global Connections; and Civic Ideals & Practices (<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands>).

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DISCUSSIONS

DISCUSSION 1

Engage students in a discussion about different types of literature. Writing the subgenres of fiction on the board, ask students to define each group, brainstorm a few words that describe it or provide examples. Fiction subgenres include: historical fiction, science fiction, fable and folktale, and realistic fiction. Distinguish between realistic and historical fiction, if students are confused, by explaining that many events in historical fiction actually did happen, while events in realistic fiction could happen today but are not based on historical fact. A novel about World War II, for example, is based on actual facts and events that happened during the war. *The Red Bicycle* is an example of realistic fiction because the events told in this story could happen today.

Activity

Retell or read a common folktale, such as *Cinderella* or *Goldilocks*. Discuss the protagonist, or hero, in the story. Now talk about the antagonists, or bad guys. Finally, discuss the minor characters — those who are not central to the action, but whose personalities help advance the plot. List character names and traits on the board.

Ask the group:

- How are the protagonists and antagonists alike and different?
- What motivates the antagonists to go against the hero of the story?
- How are the protagonist's character traits connected to how he or she responds to the bad guys?

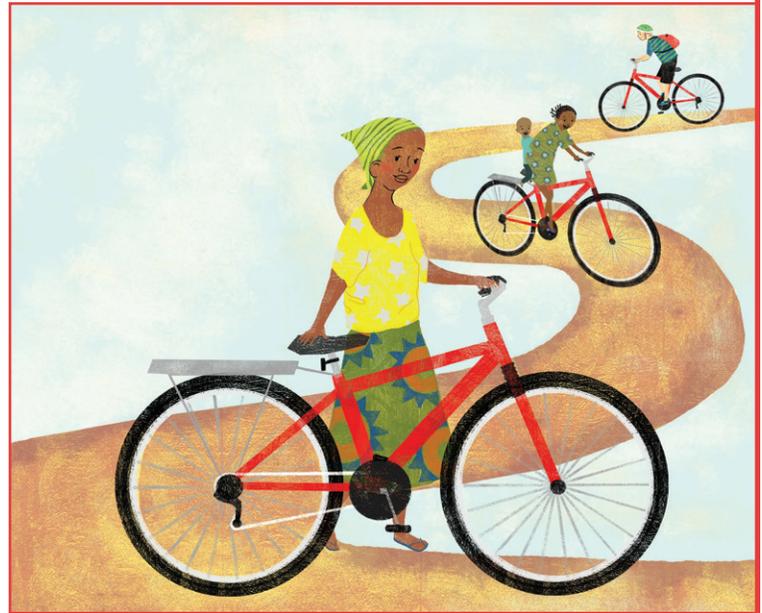
After everyone in the class has a sense of each character in the story, write down the characters' names on small pieces of paper and place them in a bag or hat. Have one student come up to the front of the class and draw a name to act out in front of the group. While students can talk during this activity, make sure they don't use their words to give away the character they are acting out. Have the other students guess which character it is. After each student's turn, talk with the group about how they knew which character was being acted out.

Ask:

- What clues did your classmate use to show you who he or she was being?
- How did those actions help you understand the character's traits?

DISCUSSION 2

Point out that the previous activity involved folktales, not realistic fiction. Remind them that *The Red Bicycle* is realistic fiction. Ask students how they think fictional characters help them categorize fiction by subgenre. For example, how did they know the folktale discussed above was a folktale and not realistic fiction? What traits did some of the characters have that indicated the story couldn't happen in real life? Did anyone use magic? Did animals talk? Students won't need reminding that these things can't happen in real life, but it bears pointing out that they can categorize subgenres of fiction by looking closely at character traits.



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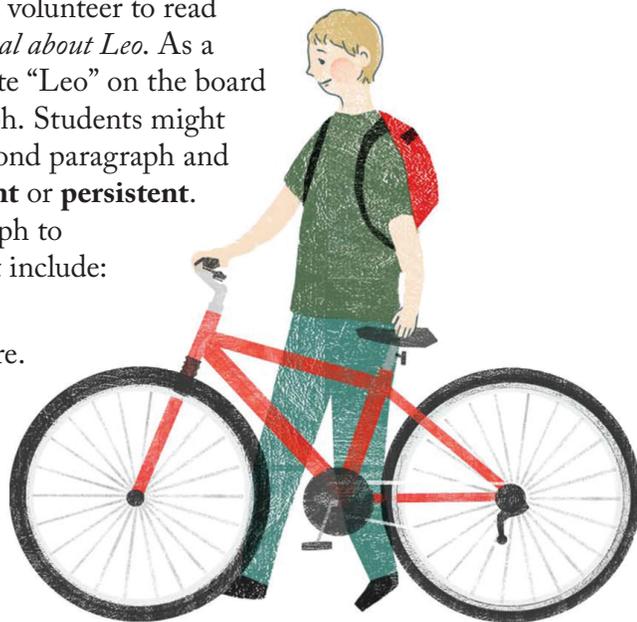
Ask:

- How would characters in historical fiction probably behave?
- How do characters in realistic fiction behave?
- How can you tell the difference?

Explain that you will now analyze the characters in *The Red Bicycle*. Tell students to pay particular attention to the characters as you reread the book, jotting down character traits and descriptions as they listen.

Read the first paragraph of *The Red Bicycle* as a group, asking for a volunteer to read it aloud. Say: *Even in these few sentences, we already know a great deal about Leo.* As a group, begin your brainstorming list of Leo's character traits. Write "Leo" on the board and ask for volunteers to describe him, just based on this paragraph. Students might describe Leo as **goal oriented** or **hardworking**. Now read the second paragraph and ask for students to add to the list. Now they might say he is **patient** or **persistent**. Read pages 4 to 9 in this way, stopping at the end of each paragraph to add to the list of Leo's character traits. By the end, your list might include: **responsible, proud** and **helpful**, in addition to the words above.

Ask the group how authors create believable characters in literature. Is Leo believable? How, or how not? If he is believable, how does he help them understand what they're reading?

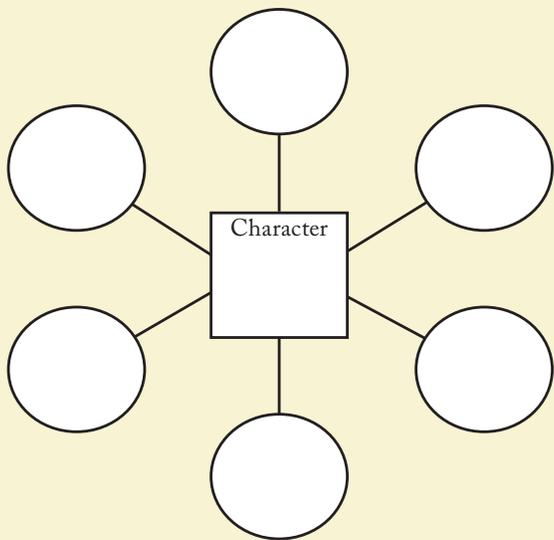


LESSON ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Now create a character map of Leo. Draw one on the board and have students copy it into their notebooks. Point out that to make a character map, they will need to select six traits. You have probably brainstormed more than six traits about Leo. Encourage students to work independently or in small groups to decide which traits they think are most important for the character map.

Sample Character Map



When students have completed their character maps, return to the larger group to discuss Leo, the traits each student selected for their map and why it matters to understand character when reading. (Note: You will return to this topic in more depth toward the end of the activities.)

Individual and small group activities:

- Ask students to talk in small groups about if they would like to hang out with Leo. Have them write their responses in short paragraphs saying why or why not.
- Ask students if they know anyone like Leo. What does Leo have in common with that person? What makes them different? Have students write their answers in short paragraphs.
- Ask students if they have ever worked hard to get something they really want. What was it, what work did they do to get it and did they — like Leo — eventually outgrow the item? Have them write short paragraphs about their experience.

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Explain that students will be writing a short story of their own later on. Perhaps some of their ideas from these activities will help them write it. Encourage them to keep notes as they go through the activities.

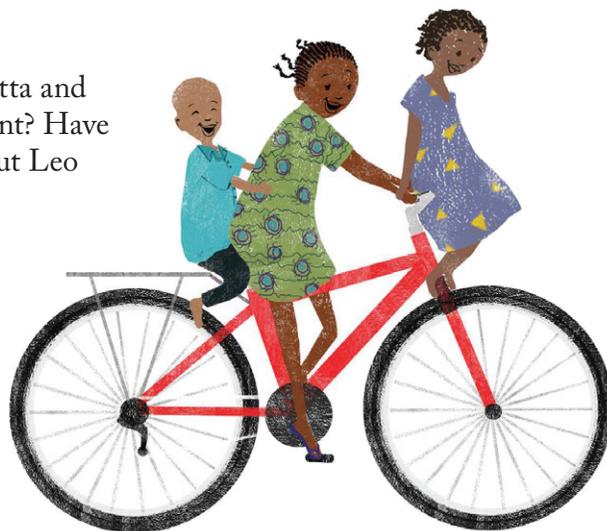
ACTIVITY 2

Remind students that you will be reading closely in order to learn as much as possible about the characters in the book. Say: *Today we will talk about Alisetta.* Break students into small groups and have them each read pages 12 to 21 of *The Red Bicycle* aloud to one another. Remind them that they should read paragraph by paragraph, and jot down Alisetta's character traits and other words that describe her as they read. When they have completed their close readings, each group should create a character map of Alisetta. Students might write words such as **excited**, **patient**, **worried**, **determined**, **hardworking** and **responsible** to describe Alisetta.

Individual and small group activities:

- Have small groups work together to compare and contrast Alisetta and Leo. What do they have in common? What makes them different? Have students write one paragraph about Alisetta, one paragraph about Leo and one about their similarities and differences.
- Have groups research the country where Alisetta lives, Burkina Faso. They can do this research on the Internet or with print resources from the classroom, such as atlases and encyclopedias. After they have completed their research, ask students how Alisetta's character is influenced by where she lives. How does the setting help determine her personality? Students should write two to three paragraphs on this topic.

Return students to the large group and lead them in discussion about the roles characters play in realistic fiction. Ask: *How does this subgenre depend on characterization differently than it does in, say, folktales?*



ACTIVITY 3

Tell students that today they will practice reading closely on their own to understand character. They will work individually to create a character map of Haridata. Students should read pages 24 to 29 on their own. Remind students to read paragraph by paragraph and to take notes about Haridata's character as they read. When they are done reading, instruct them to fill out a character map of Haridata. They might include words such as: **cheerful**, **well prepared**, **observant**, **outgoing**, **helpful**, **successful** and **responsible**.

Small group activities:

- Have students form small groups to talk about all three of the main characters in *The Red Bicycle*. Ask them to name one or two character traits that Leo, Alisetta and Haridata share. Suggest they not think about what each of them does or has (riding the red bicycle, for example), but some personality trait they each share. If students get stuck, remind them of their character maps. Did any of them write down, for example, the word "responsible" for each of their characters? If not, could they describe each of the characters that way? Have small groups write a few paragraphs on that character trait and what it means to be responsible.

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Creative Writing Exercise

Discuss how important it is to create realistic and believable characters in stories. Ask students to share their thoughts about if Leo, Alisetta and Haridata seemed realistic. Engage in a discussion about what each character was like and how, exactly, they came across as real. As the discussion continues, ask students to refer back to the text to find evidence of their claims about the character.

Now have students write a first draft of a realistic fiction story. Encourage them to make their characters complex, with different traits and types of personalities. If they get stuck, have them look back at *The Red Bicycle*, reread the paragraphs that describe Leo, Alisetta and Haridata and try to include some sentences similar to those. Explain that in the stories they write, plot and setting are not as important as character.

Possible writing prompts:

- Suggest students draw a picture of their main character, to get a sense of what he or she looks like. Say:
 1. Label your character's thoughts, feelings and personality traits like it's a diagram.
 2. Write those labels down as sentences that describe what your character looks like, what your character likes to do and what your character's personality is like.
 3. Finally, write an opening paragraph that describes your character's physical and personality traits.
- Imagine that Jude Isabella, author of *The Red Bicycle*, is going to write a book with a character based on you. What would you want your character to be like?
 1. Make a character map of yourself to help Isabella write a more realistic story.
 2. Now answer these questions:
 - What is your name in the story?
 - What are you like? Describe your personality.
 - What do you do in the story?
 - How does the story end?

When students have completed their rough drafts, encourage those who would like to share their stories to read them aloud to the class. When students have finished their readings, point out the aspects of their characters that seemed most realistic.



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