



There's A Boy In The Girls' Bathroom

by Louis Sachar

1987 Bloomsbury

NOVEL STUDY GUIDE

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SUMMARY

Bradley Chalkers is the class bully, disliked by everyone in the school, including his own teacher. He sits alone at the back of the classroom. He has never done his homework and it is only when new student Jeff Fishkin joins his class that Bradley finally finds a friend.

At home, Bradley only has a collection of toy animals to talk to, with two in particular being special to him, Ronnie the Rabbit and Bartholomew the Bear. When his mother mentions the upcoming meeting with the teacher, Bradley becomes angry and defensive. Over time Carla, the school counsellor, helps Bradley to improve his behaviour and manage his emotions better. Bradley starts to believe in himself and his whole world changes.

The book has 47 chapters, each between 2-6 pages long.

CHARACTER REVIEW

Bradley Chalkers

Jeff Fishkin

Mrs Ebbel

Claudia Chalkers

Colleen Verigold

Carla Davis (Counselor)

SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK

- Relationships – Friends and Family
- Making Friends
- Feelings and Behaviours
- Bullying
- Feelings review: Scared, lonely, worried, guilty, cross/angry, shame, frustration, rejection,

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapters 1-3

- **Mrs Ebbel apologised to Jeff for a) not having an extra desk for him, b) making him sit next to Bradley or c) not having time to introduce him to the class properly.** *This is a good opportunity to explore starting the new school year and making friends. Mrs Ebbel clearly was unsure how Bradley would react to Jeff sitting beside him. Discuss how Jeff might have been feeling at this point, comfortable or uncomfortable?*
- **Why does nobody want to sit next to Bradley?** *What are the children's perceptions of Bradley are at this point? Bradley is always alone even at lunch, doesn't get good grades, scares the other children, tells lies and sometimes hurts other children.*
- **How do you think it would feel to start in a new school?**
- **Who does Mrs Ebbel want Bradley's mother to meet?** *Mrs Ebbel wants Bradley's mother to meet the new school counsellor. You may wish to discuss this role and explain to the children what a counsellor does.*
- **How does Bradley react to Mrs Ebbel's questions?** *Defensive, he tells obvious lies ('they go bowling together') and doesn't meet her eye.*
- **Why does Bradley be mean to Jeff at recess?** *Bradley has never really had a friend, sometimes people put on an act so they don't get hurt. Bradley is confused about why Jeff wants to be with him.*
- **Do you think Bradley enjoys being alone? Give reasons for your answer.** *Perhaps discuss the feeling of lonely (uncomfortable) and the difference between this and alone. How can Bradley deal with this feeling, are there any strategies the children would use, e.g. Three Steps for Calming Down / Control Signal Poster?*
- **If you were Jeff would you have taken the dollar from Bradley? Explain your answer.** *Bradley had taken it off him earlier and it was his money, he was also a bit frightened of Bradley now.*
- **Who are Ronnie and Bartholomew?** *A rabbit and bear, part of the collection of animals and toys in Bradley's bedroom.*
- **Why do you think Bradley talks to his animals?** *Bradley has a whole cast of stuffed animals who he talks to each day. They are all his friends and long for him to return to them daily. Compare this to the real situation Bradley faces daily in school where nobody is waiting for him. Explore the idea of being left out all the time.*
- **What does Bradley usually say when people don't believe him?** *Bradley usually says 'Call' whoever when it looks like people may be starting to disbelieve his story.*

Activity

- **Glossary of terms** – There are many American words in the story such as recess, which children outside of America would be unfamiliar with. Make a glossary of these words with their meanings.
- **Thoughts and Feelings** – After reading the first few chapters, how do you think Bradley feels in class? Use thought bubbles to show how the other characters make Bradley feel?
- **Art & Design** – Bradley has many imaginary friends in his bedroom. Draw what you think his bedroom might look like. Don't forget any of the toys! Remember to use evidence from the text to help you.



Chapter 4-8

- **What does Mrs Ebbel ask Bradley's mother's permission for?** *Mrs Ebbel would like Bradley to start seeing Carla the counsellor once a week because he has serious behaviour problems and needs to change if he wants to stay in the class. Discuss what things Bradley might need to change. At this point it is good to distinguish between feelings and behaviours. Bradley has some intensely uncomfortable feelings but a lot of his behaviour is 'not okay'.*
- **Who is Carla Davis and what is your first impression of her?**
- **Do you think Bradley will like seeing Miss Davis? Give a reason for your answer.**
- **What does Bradley's mother say about the meeting during dinner?** *Bradley's mother said it went fine, Bradley is doing really well'. Discuss why she might not have wanted to tell Bradley's dad about the meeting. (Bradley's dad wants to send Bradley to military school)*
- **How does Bradley react to his mother's news?** *He says no, he doesn't want to go and that she should have taken him to the zoo. Bradley is avoiding thinking about what is decided. Has anyone ever put off dealing with a situation or thinking about it? Allow pupils to share their experiences of this.*
- **Why is Jeff going to see the counsellor?** *To 'adjust to his new environment' because he was new to the school.*
- **In your opinion what makes a good friend?** *This could be done in pairs or groups where the children can brainstorm qualities and rank them in order of importance. If any qualities are suggested which are not healthy this is a good opportunity to address these e.g. 'he does my homework for me' or 'I can borrow all her nice clothes whenever I want'.*
- **Do you think Bradley is a loyal friend? Why/Why not?**

Activity

- **Point of View** – Take a chapter from what you have already read and rewrite it from a different character's point of view.
- **Literacy: Character Profile** – Write a brief character summary of Jeff Fishkin. Use evidence from the text to describe his appearance and personality.
- **Research:** Create a White House Fact File using What, Where, When, Who & Why (Use the internet to help you find out information) you might work in cooperative learning groups and share back to the whole class.

Chapters 9-12

- **What surprises Bradley about Carla?** *She is young and pretty, Bradley had expected an 'ugly old hag'. Talk about how we can form opinions quickly about people we have not met yet. Point out that this is a common mistake many people make but that we should always wait and make our opinions for ourselves.*
- **Why do you think, does Bradley feel tricked by Carla?** *Carla does not treat Bradley the way other teachers do. She is friendly and interested in talking with him. He does not expect this and is nervous of the way she is behaving. He thinks it is a trick played on him so he will be nice to her and then somehow he will get shown up. What does this tell us about Bradley's confidence around teachers? Why is Bradley so mistrustful of teachers? Is he right to be feeling this way?*
- **How does Bradley picture the girls' toilets to be?** *Carpeted in gold, with pink wallpaper and red velvet toilet seats. Not like boy's toilets and more fountains with*



coloured water. Bradley has certain ideas about girls. Why do you think he has these opinions?

- **What excuse does Jeff give for not going into the girls' bathroom?** Jeff says that now is not a good time because the girls will have gone home to use their own bathrooms and so the school one will be empty. Why do the children think Jeff gives this excuse? (Afraid to be caught where he ought not to be but not wanting to let his friend down) Have you ever been in a situation where a friend encourages you to do something which you know is wrong? How did you deal with this?
- **Do you think Jeff is a good friend to Bradley? Explain your answer.**
- **What problem does Colleen discuss with Carla?** Colleen wants to invite Jeff to her birthday party but it will mean inviting another boy and the only boy Jeff is friendly with is Bradley Chalkers. Why do you think this is a problem for Colleen?

Activity

- **Art & Design** – Make a birthday invitation to Colleen's party.
- **Role Play** – With your partner role play Colleen's visit to the counsellor. Swap over and chat about how it felt to discuss your problems with an adult.
- **History** – Create a time line of events so far.

Chapters 13-16

- **Which three girls was Bradley was waiting for outside Mrs Sharp's classroom and what did he want to do?** Colleen, Lori and Melinda. Bradley wanted to beat them up. Discuss how Colleen had said Hi to Jeff and the conversation the boys had after this. Jeff was embarrassed and readily agreed to hating the girls. Do you think he really hated them?
- **Do you think Bradley is a good friend to Jeff?**
- **Rewrite the fight scene from Jeff's point of view.**
- **How does Bradley's mother react to the fight?** Bradley's mother is protective. She wraps her arms around him and runs him a bath, getting him some clean clothes.
- **Who does Bradley blame the fight on?** Bradley tells his mother it was bullies who picked on him after school.
- **Why, do you think, Bradley doesn't say who else was involved in the fight?** Why do you think Bradley didn't tell his mother that it was Melinda who punched him?
- **How do you think Bradley feels going to school the next morning?**
- **Does anything surprise you about Bradley's behaviour towards Jeff? Explain your answer.** Despite telling his mum Jeff had beaten him up, Bradley pretends to be Jeff's friend after Jeff is called into the Principal's office to be questioned about it.

Activity

- **Group work** – Create a mind map of the conflict to show what caused it and how it ended up in a fight. Make a list of things that could have happened to change the outcome for the better.
- **Pupil of the Day** – Complete a compliment slip for Bradley Chalkers.
- **Literacy** - Write a diary entry as Bradley detailing the fight and your feelings about what happened.

Chapters 17-20

- **Why is Jeff happy after the basketball game?** Robbie (who had previously been mean to him) called him over and got him to play basketball with the others. They all thought he had given Bradley a black eye.



- **What name does Brian call Bradley?** *'Chicken Chalkers', this is a good time to talk about name calling and the golden rule 'Treat Others as You Would like to Be Treated'. Refer to the lesson 26 Dealing with Teasing and discuss the strategies Bradley might use to cope with / respond to the boys.*
- **If you were Jeff, would you rather be friends with Bradley or the other boys? Give reasons for your answer.** *Make a list of qualities and see if you can decide which is better for Jeff.*
- **How do you think Bradley feels when Jeff ignores him?**
- **How many new friends has Jeff made?** *This is a good time to talk about the kind of friends Jeff has made and if they are true friends?*
- **What lies does Jeff tell Carla when he next speaks with her?** *That he has fallen out with Bradley because he gave him a black eye and that he now has eight friends.*
- **How does Colleen think her problem is solved?** *Because Bradley is no longer friends with Jeff and Jeff now has new friends so she no longer has to invite Bradley to her birthday party.*

Activity

- **Literacy** - Write a letter as Carla giving advice. Choose to write to either Jeff or Bradley.
- **Cooperative Learning Roles** – Work in groups to brainstorm ok behaviours which will help with feeling uncomfortable in a situation where you are worried. Create a list of 'okay' behaviours to share with your class.

Chapters 21-24

- **What advice does Carla give Bradley to help to do better in school?** *Carla tells Bradley that the work on the tests is exactly the same as his homework assignments. If he does the homework it might improve his performance in the tests.*
- **Carla thinks Bradley is afraid to try to do well in his tests. Think about a time when you were afraid. Describe the situation and how it made you feel.**
- **Bradley is going to make a list of things to talk to Carla about. What do you think might be on it?**
- **Does Bradley remind you of any other characters you have read about? Why is he similar to that person?**
- **How has the behaviour of other children changed towards Bradley?** *The other children have become even meaner to Bradley, name calling and laughing at him. They aren't afraid of him anymore.*
- **Do you agree with Claudia that the counsellor will not want to talk about Bradley's topics? Give a reason for your answer.**
- **What do the other children call Bradley?** *One of the fourth graders said Bradley wasn't even human, he was monster. This led to the rest of the children calling him a monster. How would you deal with name calling if it happened to you?*
- **According to Carla, how does a monster stop being a monster?** *According to Carla a monster can stop being a monster but it isn't easy. He first has to realise himself that he isn't one, otherwise how will other people know?*
- **Do you think Carla is good at her job? Explain your answer giving two reasons.**
- **Why do you think Jeff was mean to the girls?**

Activity

- **Literacy** - Monster Musings – Bradley worried that maybe he was monster. Write about a time when you were very worried about something.



- **Cartoon Strip** – Use speech bubbles to draw a conversation between Carla and Bradley. Present your chat in a comic strip. Add drawings and colour to your work.
- **Three Wishes** – Let's pretend Bradley has three wishes, what does he wish for and why?

Chapters 25-29

- **Why is Bradley trying to be so good?** *Bradley is trying so hard to be good because he thinks it will help to show he isn't really a monster. He would also like to earn a gold star. Do you think Bradley will find it easy to be good, what obstacles will he face?*
- **Where does Bradley go to hide from the group of boys?** *The girl's bathroom. Discuss how this room looks so much like the boy's bathroom and how Bradley felt when he realised this.*
- **What do Bradley and Carla have for lunch?**
- **Do you think Bradley is a nice boy or a monster? Give a reason for your answer.**
- **Imagine you are Carla. What advice would you give Bradley to help him be good in school?**
- **Who helps Bradley with his homework?** *His family, first his mother, then Claudia, his sister and finally his dad.*
- **Why do you think, does Bradley destroy his homework?** *As he approached the desk with his homework Bradley ripped it up and threw it in the bin. What feelings did he experience over the course of completing it up to the point of throwing it in the bin? (excited, scared, anxious, worried, proud, confused and ashamed)*
- **How do you think Mrs Ebbel would have reacted if Bradley had handed up his homework?**

Activity

- **Freeze Frame** – In cooperative learning groups choose various scenarios to act out. Discuss feelings of each character at each point.
- **Prop writing** – Bring or create items related to the story and make a written explanation of their relationship to the story, characters, etc.
- **Art & Design Portraits** – Choose a character from any of these chapters and complete their portrait. Remember to check the text for additional details and add as much as you can.

Chapters 30-34

- **Why is Carla proud of Bradley?** *Even though he didn't hand it in Bradley had completed the homework and this was progress on the way to his goal. Discuss goals and obstacles. What obstacles did Bradley face when trying to be good?*
- **What is the main thing Bradley learned from doing his homework?** *That even though he did rip the homework up, he had still remembered what he had learned.*
- **Name the book that Carla gave to Bradley.**
- **Do you think Bradley will enjoy reading the book? Explain your answer.**
- **From what you know of Bradley, do you think he will write and hand in the book report?**
- **What was the letter from the Concerned Parents Association about?** *The letter was requesting parents to attend a meeting if they had any complaints about Carla Davis, the counsellor.*
- **Why do you think Carla was called to the Principal's office?**



- **Do you think Bradley will remain friends with Jeff and the other boys? Give a reason for your answer.**
- **Why was Bradley not a good basketball player at the start?**
- **Who walked into the boys' toilets? Colleen Verigold walked into the boys' bathroom but screamed and walked out. Do you think she meant to go in there and if so why?**
- **Who else do you think Colleen will invite to her party? Give a reason for your answer.**
- **Why do you think Colleen frowned when remembering Bradley had said hello to her that morning? Carla has pointed out that if you don't reply when even a monster says hello, then who is the monster? This has helped Colleen to reflect on how she treated Bradley.**

Activity

- **Art & Design** – Draw a map of Red Hill Elementary School. Be sure to include Carla's office and the girls' bathroom.
- **Literacy** - Pretend you are a newspaper reporter and write an article or editorial about Bradley's school.

Chapters 35-40

- **How does Bradley's father plan to help Bradley with basketball? He helped Bradley with dribbling but Bradley forgot so he planned to put a blackboard up in the garage at the weekend. Do you think this will help Bradley with his skill? Bradley has a goal to become better so he can enjoy playing with his new friends. How can he plan for this goal?**
- **What news does Bradley have for Carla? The birthday invitation and the new friends he has made mean he is really excited to tell Carla his news.**
- **Why does Bradley cry in Carla's office? Even though he was happy to be invited Bradley had not been to a party since third grade, when he had sat in a cake and knew nothing about how it would be. This made him feel overwhelmed. Discuss how new experiences can be like that and make a plan for how Bradley might prepare for the party.**
- **Have you ever been to a birthday party? Describe what types of things happen at birthday parties.**
- **What advice would you give Bradley about parties? Write down two pieces of advice.**
- **Describe the atmosphere at the Concerned Parents Organisation meeting. Parents who attended had complaints about Carla and got very wound up during the discussion. There was a lot of miscommunication and confusion about what happens in the counsellor's room. Discuss the parent's concerns, were they justified and do you think all schools should have a counsellor?**
- **How do you think Carla feels in the meeting? What thoughts might be going through her head?**
- **Do you think Carla could have explained her job better? Explain your answer. A lot of parents had gotten the wrong idea about what happens in the counsellor's office. Do you think it would have made any difference to the outcome of the meeting if Carla had tried to correct things? What do you think should have happened?**
- **Imagine you were Bradley Chalker's parents. What would you say to the other parents about Carla's effect on Bradley?**
- **What news does Carla have for Bradley? Carla has been transferred to another school.**
- **What is Bradley's reaction to Carla's news? Bradley takes the news very hard. He is upset and begins to feel let down. His confidence is shattered because he had come to**



believe he could do things because of Carla. It leads to him ripping up the book report and starting to become mean to others again.

- **Why do you think Bradley will not say goodbye to Carla?**

Activity

- **List Writing** – In the story Bradley made a list of things to talk to Carla about. What would you put on your list of things to talk about if you could speak to an adult?
- **New Report** – Pretend you are a newspaper reporter, write an article about Bradley's school and the meeting held by the Concerned Parents Organisation.

Chapters 41-42

- **Describe what happened at the barber shop.** *Bradley just wanted the experience to be over and regretted going there even though he had asked to be brought. Why did his feelings change? Have you ever wanted to do something but then changed your mind because your feelings changed?*
- **Who does Bradley meet at the school?** *Mrs Kemp the janitor was the only person there.*
- **What does Bradley find in Carla's office?** *A package. Carla had written a letter to Bradley. What do you think it will say? There was also a gift.*
- **How do you think Carla felt writing the letter to Bradley?**
- **What effect do you think Carla's letter will have on Bradley?**
- **Imagine you were Bradley and Carla entered the office. What would you say to her?**

Activity

- **Create** – In cooperative learning groups, make up a rhyme, song or rap which retells Bradley's experience of going to the school and how he felt when he missed saying goodbye to Carla.

Chapters 43-47

- **How do the girls react when Colleen mentioned that the boys were coming to the party?** *There was a variety of reactions with some of the girls not sure they would stay. Karen thought she might not say a word at all for the whole day. Discuss the idea of parties with both boys and girls and allow children to share their experiences of parties.*
- **Describe Bradley's mood when Jeff arrives.** *Bradley is fretting. He has a gift but is unsure whether it needs wrapped and can't decide until Jeff arrives. He isn't sure about his clothes and if the gift needs a bow. Discuss why Bradley is so nervous?*
- **Do you think you would be nervous if you were in Bradley's situation?**
- **How does Jeff help to calm Bradley down?** *He tells him to take off the dumb hat and then sits Bradley down to teach him everything he knows about birthday parties.*
- **What games do the children play at the party?**
- **What does Bradley receive for earning the most points in the games?**
- **How do you think Carla will feel when she reads Bradley's letter?**
- **Why do you think Bradley gave Carla his toy animal, Ronnie the Rabbit?**

Activity

- **Story Finishers** – If you were the author would you have made the ending different? Explain your answer. Write an alternative ending in your own words.

- **Book Report** – Complete a book report about the novel, include character profiles and a time line. Describe your favourite part.
- **Rate this book** - Describe the book, did you like it, Why/Why not?

Additional Study Questions

- **Take a closer look at the characters** – Review the characters in the story. What are the main characteristics of each person?
- **Into the Future** – Imagine Bradley Chalkers in 15 years' time, what will he be doing at this point in his life and why?
- **You're Hired** – Choose a character from the book and write out a letter of application for a job you think they might be suited to.
- **Literacy** - Choose your favourite character and rewrite one event from their point of view.
- **Fact File** – Create a fact file about the author Louis Sachar. How many other books has he written? What can you find out about his life?

