Guide for

Three Cheers for Catherine the Great!

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The Five-part Process

Although each book in the AfterSchool KidzLit® program is different, follow the same process to introduce the story, read and talk about it, and help the kids see how it relates to their own lives. This process should be done over several days. For more ideas and information about the process, see “Explore the Five-part Process,” page 16, in the Quick Tips Plus handbook.

Part 1: Introduce the story.
Lead an introductory activity (or two) (see “Introduce,” page 8).

Part 2: Read the story.
Read the story aloud to the kids and define new words (see “Leaders Read,” page 12) or have the kids read the story in pairs or small groups if the reading level is appropriate (see “Kids Read,” page 22).

Part 3: Discuss the story.
If you read the story aloud to the kids, ask some of the group discussion questions listed in the guide (see “Discuss,” page 14). If the kids read the story in pairs or small groups, they can discuss the questions listed in “Talk!” (page 23) on their own. Then reassemble the kids and discuss the book together.

Part 4: Connect to the story.
Lead the kids in a connection activity (or two) to deepen the connection between the story’s content and the kids’ lives (see “Connect,” page 15).

Part 5: Wrap up the story.
Lead the kids in an activity that extends their thinking about the story, reviews new words, or brings closure to the book (see “Wrap It Up!” page 20).
Get Ready

Review the “Five-part Process” to help you lead the guide. Read through “What’s the Story?” “Heads Up!” “Some Things the Kids Will Need to Know,” and “Some Big Ideas Suggested by the Story” for an overview of the book and the themes emphasized in discussions and activities. You and the kids may discover other themes as you read.

What’s the Story?

What will all of Grandma Catherine’s friends and family do when she says she wants no presents for her birthday? Her granddaughter Sara is especially concerned. Catherine, who came from Russia to the United States many years ago, is important to Sara, her mother, and the whole little apartment building community of which the family is part. As Sara puts it, “Any NO PRESENT for Grandma had to be GREAT—just like she was.” As the neighbors and her mother come up with some fun and surprising “no presents,” however, Sara learns that presents can take many different shapes. Eventually she too comes up with a special “no present” to give at a wonderful birthday party of borscht and blintzes for Catherine the Great.

Heads Up!

- This book includes the following foreign language words. You may want to practice pronouncing them before you read the book aloud.

borscht (Russian, Yiddish, Ukrainian) bohrsh: soup made with beets, cabbage, potatoes, or other vegetables (p. 7)

Three Cheers for Catherine the Great! doesn’t have page numbers. You may want to write them in, starting with the title page. Page 3 begins with the words, “My grandma came to America from Russia….”
Some Things the Kids Will Need to Know

- An immigrant is someone who moves from one place to another, usually a country, to live there permanently.

- Throughout the story, Russian phrases follow their English equivalents. The Russian letter "C" (as in “C for Sara”) is pronounced “ess.”

- Explain to the kids that the name “Catherine the Great” also belonged to a real person in history. Catherine the Great was an empress of Russia from 1762 until she died 34 years later in 1796.

Some Big Ideas Suggested by the Story

Relationships with Elders

- Grandparents and grandchildren often have a special bond that makes them comfortable teaching each other things.
• Family members give each other love and support by showing appreciation for and helping each other.

• When family members do activities together, they often feel closer to each other.

Celebrations
• Gifts that come from the heart can be very special.

• It feels good to honor someone important to us on his or her birthday.

• Many things can make a good gift; gifts don’t always have to be something we buy.

Immigrant Families
• Immigrants usually have experiences very different from those of their children and/or grandchildren who grow up in the new country.

• Raising a family in a new country can be very difficult but also very enriching.
Choose 1 or 2 Activities

Lead an introductory activity (or two) to build curiosity and excitement about the story. An introduction prepares the kids for the characters and ideas they will encounter and gives them a chance to build on what they know from their own life experiences.

Waltzing
15–20 minutes

Materials
• Waltz music
• Music player

1. Prepare the music. Find some simple waltz music, either by downloading it from the Internet or checking out a CD from the library. (Note: “Blue Danube” is a well-known waltz that is easy to find.)

2. Explain the waltz. Explain to the kids that they will hear a story about Catherine, a grandmother who asks her family and friends for a “no presents” birthday. Tell them that one of the “no presents” Catherine receives is a dance with her neighbor. Together they do a waltz. Tell the kids that a waltz is a type of ballroom dance that has been around a long time.

3. Clap the rhythm. Play the waltz music and point out its 1-2-3 beat to the kids. Show them how to clap it out, if possible.

For more information about introducing the story, see page 16 in the Quick Tips Plus handbook.
4. **Pretend to waltz.** Invite the kids to pretend that they are waltzing, too. They should hold their arms up as if ballroom dancing and step forward and to the side, ending with feet together each time, while repeating “1-2-3; 1-2-3.” Since they are just pretending, there is no exact way to do this. The idea is just to listen to the music and move around the room.

**Option.** Research how to really do the waltz and teach it to the kids or invite someone from the community who can teach them.

### Apartment-house Drawing

30–40 minutes

**Materials**

- Paper

- Colored pencils, markers, or crayons

1. **Make predictions.** Explain to the kids that the story they will hear takes place in an apartment building. Show the kids the illustrations on pages 4–5. There are upstairs neighbors, downstairs neighbors, and next-door neighbors. Ask the kids to look at the pictures, guess what is going on in each apartment, and explain why they think that.

2. **Discuss apartments and houses.** Have the kids talk about the differences between living in an apartment and in a house. First in pairs, and then as a whole group, discuss the following questions:

   - Do you live in a house or an apartment? Have you ever lived in a house? Have you ever lived in an apartment?
What is the difference between living in a house and in an apartment?

What is the same about living in a house and in an apartment?

3. Draw an apartment building. Distribute paper and colored pencils, markers, or crayons and tell the kids to draw an apartment building. Explain that the building and its people can be real or imaginary. Have the kids write about what’s happening in each apartment. Finally have them, first in pairs and then as a group, share their drawings.

Note: For kids who do not know how to write yet, ask them what they want to say, and write it on their papers.

Family Birthdays
15–20 minutes

1. Share birthday experiences. Tell the kids that they are going to hear a story about a grandmother who is having her seventy-eighth birthday party. First in pairs and then as a whole group, discuss the following questions about how the kids celebrate family birthdays:

Q How have you celebrated your birthday?

Q How have you celebrated another family member’s birthday (such as an aunt or a grandparent)?

Q What was your favorite part about your birthday? Why?

Q Who would you want to be at your birthday party?
2. **Imagine and share.** Explain that in the story the grandma says, “I have music in my Russian bones, and laughing in my heart. I have the day and the night, and I have all of you. That’s why for me the best presents will be no presents.” Tell the kids to close their eyes and imagine themselves as older people having a birthday and turning seventy-eight years old! Ask them:

- What would you want for a birthday at that age?
- What would you want the birthday party to be like?

Have the kids, first in pairs and then as a group, share their ideas.
Leaders Read

Use this section only if you are reading aloud to the whole group. For kids reading with kids, use the “Kids Read” pages that begin on page 22.

Reading

15–20 minutes (plus 15–20 minutes for discussion)

Read the book aloud to your group, pausing occasionally for the kids’ comments and questions about the story, its illustrations, or words they don’t know.

NOTE

You may want to introduce “Cool Words” before you read. See “Cool Words,” next page.
Cool Words

Help the kids understand each suggested cool word as you come to it in the story. As you read the story, read the word, briefly define it, and reread the word and the rest of the sentence (for example, “And she rapped—rapped means hit sharply and quickly—and she rapped the desk with her ruler”). You may want to write the word and its definition on a self-stick note and attach it to the page where the word appears. After the story, ask the kids if they remember any words that stood out in the reading. Invite the kids to pick words they like or want to remember and write them.

**passport** (p. 3): official booklet that shows a person belongs to a certain country and allows her to travel to other countries

**opera** (p. 5): play in which all or most of the words are sung

**muffle** (p. 5): make a sound quieter or duller

**borscht** (p. 7): (Russian) soup made with beets, cabbage, potatoes, or other vegetables

**blintzes** (p. 7): (Russian) thin pancakes rolled around cheese or fruit that are fried or baked

**gin rummy** (p. 9): card game.

**empress** (p. 20): female ruler of a kingdom.

**waltz** (p. 21): smooth, gliding ballroom dance with a regular 1-2-3 beat.
Discuss

Give the kids a chance to react to the story. First in pairs, and then as a whole group, discuss some of the questions suggested below.

Q If you were to give someone special, like a grandparent or other older family member, a “no present,” what would it be?
   Q Describe what you would do.

Q Sara and her grandmother do many fun activities, like playing dress-up, listening to poems, and cooking. What kind of activities do you do with your family members?

Q Why do you think that Sara calls her grandmother “Catherine the Great”?
   Q What kind of a person is Catherine?
   Q Who do you think is great and why?

Q Catherine writes, reads, and speaks Russian. Does anyone in your family speak a language other than English?
   Q If so, what is it and when is it used?
   Q What words do you know?

TIP

For ideas about leading great discussions, see page 20 in the Quick Tips Plus handbook.
Connect

Choose 1 or 2 Activities

Use connection activities after the reading to help the kids take a deeper look at the story’s content and themes, the characters’ actions and motives, and how the book relates to their own lives.

“No Presents” Party

Two sessions (one 15- to 20-minute planning session; one 20- to 25-minute presentation session)

Materials

• The kids might need different materials for their “no presents.” Be sure to have some paper, pencils, and art supplies available.

1. Review. Ask the kids to recall the different “no presents” that each person gave Grandma for her birthday. Let the kids share which “no present” was their favorite and why.

2. Preparing the “no presents.” Explain to the group that they will have a “no presents” party. Ask the kids to think of someone they would want to give a “no present” to and what they would give. Have them work in pairs to prepare some “no presents.” They can prepare songs, dances, pictures, poems, stories, or a lesson on how to do something.

3. Have the party! Ask the pairs to share their “no presents” with the group and explain who they made it for and why. Review with the whole group ways the audience can be

TIP

For more information about connecting to the story, see page 24 in the Quick Tips Plus handbook.
respectful during each presentation. If you choose, you can serve snacks for the party.

**Option:** Have the kids choose someone at your site to give their “no present” to.

### Poemy Poem

30–40 minutes

**Materials**
- Chart paper
- Markers

1. **Prepare.** On chart paper, write out the moon poem from page 11 and the poem frame below.

   Oh (name an object; add a y to the end) (an object) so (word(s) that describes the object) and (word(s) that describes the object),

   You look like a (another object),
   If I eat you
   One, two, three,

   Your (characteristic of the object) Will be in me.

   Try writing a poem using the poem frame before doing it with your kids.

2. **Write a group poem.** Remind the kids that the little girl in the story writes poetry. Have them read the moon poem together with you first. Explain that, as a group, they are going to write
a similar poem, using a poem frame. Read the frame to the kids and explain what could go in the blanks. Have the kids decide on a poem topic. Take suggestions from the group to fill in the poem’s blanks. Below is an example if you need it.

**Sample Poem:**

Oh, racy car
   So fast and handy,
You look like a
   Piece of candy
If I eat you
   One, two, three,
Your speediness will be in me.

3. Poetry reading. Pages 11 and 24 show Sara reading her poetry aloud. Explain to the kids that poetry is often read aloud because it’s interesting to hear. Ask the kids to read the group poem in unison or ask volunteers to stand up and read the poem individually.

**Option: Write a poem for someone.** Explain that Sara’s “no present” for Grandma is the very special poem on pages 24–25. The poem gives specific examples of why Grandma is special to Sara and why she is “Catherine the Great!” Reread the poem to the kids. Ask them to write a poem that describes how special someone is to them. Ask the kids to read their poems to a partner or to the whole group.
**Pattern Quilt**

30–40 minutes

**Materials**

- 8 ½" × 8 ½" paper squares, one per kid
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers
- Optional: 1- or 2-inch graph paper cut into 8 ½" × 8 ½" paper squares, one per kid

1. **Prepare the squares.** Cut the paper. Make a sample square by folding the paper in half and then in half again. Unfold the paper. Then fold it in half and fold it in half again the other way so that when you unfold the paper there are 16 squares. Fill in the squares to make a pattern.

2. **Explain patterns.** Explain to the kids that the book illustrator used many patterns in the illustrations. Tell the kids that a pattern is created when something is repeated over and over again. Have the kids look through the book with you and try to spot all the patterns. They should spot the one on the cover and those on pages 4, 5, 14, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, and 29. Tell the kids that each of them is going to fill in a square piece of paper with a pattern. Then you will combine all the squares to make a paper quilt.

3. **Make pattern squares.** Show the group your sample square. Hand out a paper square to each of the kids. Walk them through folding the paper into smaller squares. Discuss different ideas for patterns using their squares (color in
every other square, color the squares different colors in a repeating pattern, draw pictures in the squares). Have the kids make their squares.

4. Share. After everyone completes their squares, have the kids share them with the whole group. Combine all the squares to make a large square “quilt” on a wall or on the floor.

**TIP**

For more creative ideas, see “Connect to the Story,” starting on page 24 in the **Quick Tips Plus** handbook.
Wrap It Up! Bring Closure to Every Book

Choose 1
These short activities help the kids pull together and extend their thinking and learning about the story, its vocabulary, and its themes.

Act Out the Cheers!
15–20 minutes

Materials
• Cups
• Juice or water
• Optional: Graham crackers or cupcakes

1. Appreciations. Toward the end of Grandma’s birthday party, Sara reads a poem explaining what she appreciates about her grandmother. When she is done with the poem, everyone gives a toast, saying, “Three cheers for Catherine the Great!”… And for Sara the Great, too!” Then everyone claps. Show the kids this scene on pages 24–25. Reread these pages. Discuss:
   • What is a toast? When do people usually toast?
   • What are some examples of things you appreciate about someone?
   • What do you hope others appreciate about you?

2. Explain. Tell the group that they will each toast someone in their family by sharing what they appreciate about that
person. Have the kids think of a person they appreciate in their family. What would they say in a toast to that person?

3. Appreciations and toasts. Pour every kid a cup of water or juice. One at a time, have each kid share what he or she appreciates about a family member. When each is finished sharing, do a cheer like the one on page 25. “Three cheers for ___________ the Great!”

Option: Serve food. In the story, Sara’s mother serves a birthday pie after the three cheers. You may choose to serve a special treat after all the toasts are done.

Draw a Word

25–30 minutes

Materials

• Large, white pieces of construction paper, one for each pair

• Crayons, pencils, or markers

1. Illustrate a word. Explain that the kids will work in pairs, choose a cool word, and make an illustration that shows what the word means. For example, for opera they could draw a picture of a person singing; for waltz they could draw people dancing; for empress they could draw someone who looks like a queen. Review the meaning of each cool word and have the kids do the activity. Make sure that all the words get assigned, if possible.

2. Share pictures and thinking. Have the pairs present their illustrations to the whole group and explain how they illustrated their words.
Kids Read

For Kids Reading with Kids

For partner or small-group reading, cross-age buddy reading, or book clubs.

Use this section only if kids are reading with kids. If you are reading aloud to the whole group, use the “Leaders Read” pages that begin on page 12.

Directions to the Leader

1. Photocopy the “Kids Read” pages that follow. Make one copy for each kid.

2. Introduce the story with an introduction activity or two. (See page 8 of this guide.)

3. Give a set of photocopied pages to each kid. Explain how partners or small groups will use the pages to guide them. You may need to provide extra paper for writing or drawing.

4. Group the kids in pairs or small groups with one book per pair or group.

5. Circulate as the kids read and talk, helping to refocus any who are struggling or off task as you go.

6. Reassemble the kids into one group. Lead a discussion about the book and the “Get It Down!” activity. Discuss what went well and what was challenging during their pair or small-group work.

7. Lead a “Connect” and “Wrap It Up!” activity.
Read!

15–20 minutes
(plus 15–20 minutes for discussion)

Decide how you will take turns reading the book together.
Take turns reading. If you come across new words that are important to the story, talk about their meaning together or ask a friend or leader for help.

Talk!

Q If you were to give someone special, such as a grandparent or other older relative, a “no present,” what would it be? Describe what you would do.

Q Sara and her grandmother do many fun activities together, such as playing dress-up, listening to poems, and cooking.

Q What kind of activities would you do with a special family member or friend?
Get It Down!

On page 20, Monica and her dad give Grandma a fancy hairdo as a “no present” for her birthday party. Now you make a new hairdo for Grandma. Draw her face and then change her hair however you like. You can draw more than one hairdo if you have time. Share your drawing with your partner. Explain why you gave her this hairdo.
Cool Words
What words do you like and want to remember? Write them down here.

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