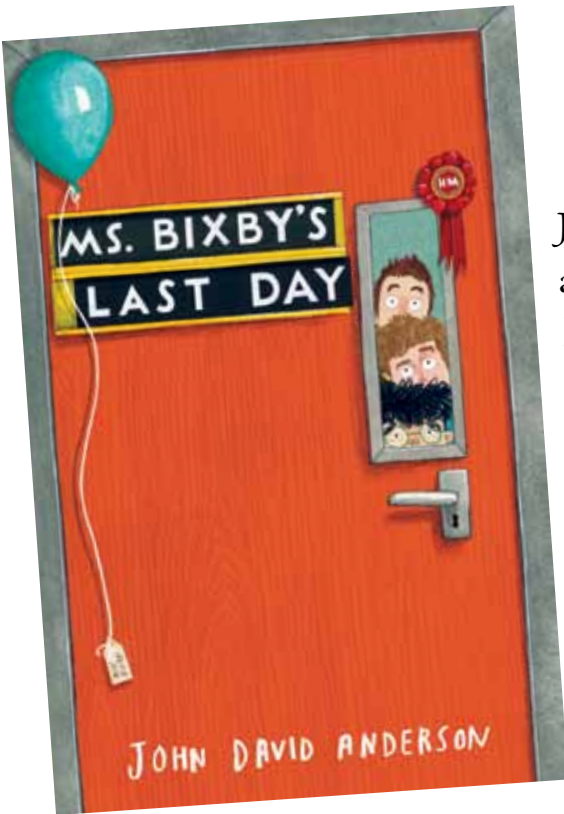


ABOUT THE BOOK



John David Anderson, author of *Sidekicked*, *Minion*, and *The Dungeoneers*, returns with a funny, heartwarming, and heartbreaking contemporary story about three boys, one teacher, and a day none of them will ever forget.

Everyone knows there are different kinds of teachers. The boring ones, the mean ones, the ones who try too hard, the ones who stopped trying long ago. The ones you'll never remember, and the ones you want to forget. Ms. Bixby is none of these. She's the sort of teacher who makes you feel like school is worthwhile. Who recognizes

something in you that sometimes you don't even see in yourself. Who you never want to disappoint. What Ms. Bixby is, is one of a kind.

Topher, Brand, and Steve know this better than anyone. And so when Ms. Bixby unexpectedly

announces that she won't be able to finish the school year, they come up with a

BIXBYISM

"Nothing worth doing is easy."

risky plan—more of a quest, really—to give Ms. Bixby the last day she deserves. Through the three very different stories they tell, we begin to understand what Ms. Bixby means to each of them—and what the three of them mean to each other.

BIXBYISM

"I've always said the greatest gift you are ever given is your imagination."

ACTIVITY:
"THE GOOD ONES"

There's no question that Ms. Bixby played a significant role in the lives of many of her students. According to Topher and his friends, she is "one of the good ones."

Use the space below to answer questions A, B and C.

- A. What are the five other types of teachers?
- B. Describe the opening scene with Rebecca Roudabush and her cooties. How does Ms. Bixby handle the situation? What is it about the way she responds to the situation that speaks to her placement in the Good Ones category?
- C. Pretend that you are describing Ms. Bixby to someone who doesn't know her. What would you say? Use examples from the text to support your description.

BIXBYISM

"We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

TEACHER TRIBUTE

- D. Is there a teacher or another influential adult in your life whom you would consider one of the Good Ones? Create a tribute to honor this special someone. The tribute can be an essay, a letter, a piece of artwork, or an oral presentation.
- E. Interview your favorite teacher. Sample questions can include:
 - What inspired you to be a teacher?
 - What is the best part of your job?
 - What is the worst part of your job?
 - What do you hope to achieve by being a teacher?
 - Do you have any heroes?
 - When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
 - If you could have another job for a day, what would it be?
 - What do you want former students to say about you? What impact do you hope you have?

- A.** On a separate piece of paper, draw outlines of three human figures. Each one represents one of the boys. Using the book as evidence, write any known details about each boy inside his outline. Outside the outline, write about this boy's relationship with Ms. Bixby and what her influence has been on him.
- B.** The epilogue, although containing information about all three boys, is written from Topher's point of view. In the space below, rewrite this epilogue from the point of view of either Steve or Brand.

ACTIVITY: THE PLAN

Describe The Plan in your own words.

- A. On a separate piece of paper, describe The Plan in your own words. Name at least three obstacles the boys face along the way. How do they overcome each obstacle?
- B. In the space below, create a map of The Plan depicting the journey from the school to the park by the hospital. Be sure to include all of the stops along the way, such as the bakery, the liquor store, and McDonald's.
- C. On a separate piece of paper, draw a picture of Topher, Steve, and Brand at the start of the journey and then a picture of the three boys at the end of the journey. What has visibly changed? Are there changes in the boys that cannot be seen? Explain your answer.



BIXBYISM

"The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it."

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ACTIVITY:

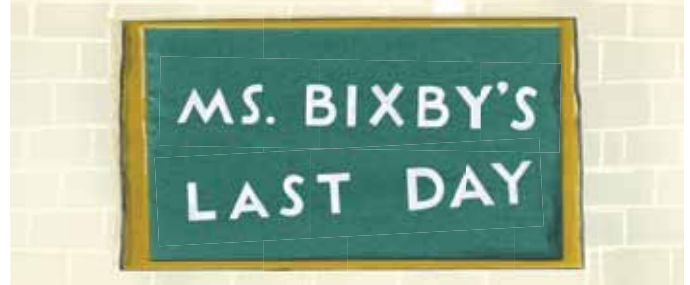
BIXBYISMS: BITS OF WISDOM

Ms. Bixby is always offering little quotes or affirmations that her students call Bixbyisms. Choose one of the following Bixbysms. In the space below, explain its meaning in your own words.

Next, create a list of all of the Bixbyisms included in the book. Which is your favorite? Why? Which do you think could serve as a theme for the book?

- A. "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."
- B. "The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it."
- C. "Things are never as bad as they seem."





ACTIVITY:

“THE DRAWER OF DREAMS” TIME CAPSULE

In her bottom desk drawer, Ms. Bixby kept several folders filled with discarded poems and drawings from former and current students. They reminded her of the dreams of her students and of her own dreams when she was young.

BIXBYISM

"I've always said the greatest gift you are ever given is your imagination."

I grew up wanting to become a magician, but I became a teacher instead. Teaching is wonderful, don't get me wrong, but it's not every ten-year-old's dream."

She said, "It's funny how, as kids, we get these ideas in our head about what's possible and what's not. One day we're invincible and the next day we are afraid of what's in the closet."

Answer these questions in the space below.

- A.** Why do you think Ms. Bixby has saved Topher's drawings and Susanna's poems? Explain in your own words, using examples from the book where possible.
- B.** Once, Ms. Bixby wanted to be a magician. If her teacher had created a folder of her work when she was ten years old, what items would you imagine being inside?
- C.** If Ms. Bixby had a folder with your name on it, what would be inside?

EXTRA!

Create a “time capsule” folder or box for yourself, using Ms. Bixby’s bottom drawer as inspiration.

- What would you include in the time capsule? If you're not sure, ask a friend or family member.
- How might this time capsule help you sometime in the future? (Remember, nothing is impossible!)

ACTIVITY: THE QUEST

A quest story tells the tale of a hero who sets off on a journey. And we get to come along for the ride! Examples of quest stories from literature and popular culture include *Lord of the Rings*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and the *Star Wars* series.

Though it takes place in the “regular” world, *Ms. Bixby's Last Day* is also a quest story. In *Ms. Bixby's Last Day* there are no sword fights or evil villains to overcome, but there are three heroic fifth graders: Topher, Steve, and Brand, setting off on a dangerous journey with one goal in mind—to give their teacher the best last day on earth ever!

Create a quest story plot graph for each one of the characters. Each arc will be a little different depending on which character it belongs to. Be sure to include the following important quest plot points:

THE CALL TO SERVICE: what is the character's motivation to go on this journey?

STAKES: what risks does the character face in taking this journey?

THE JOURNEY: what challenges does the character face along the way? Be sure to describe this journey from the point of view of a single character.

THE TRIALS: what obstacles, fears, or danger does the character need to face to achieve his goal?

THE VICTORY: how does the character achieve his goal and complete the quest?

THE RETURN: how has the character changed or transformed through the experience of the quest?

