

# Discussion Guide for "Pa Lia's First Day"

Michelle Edwards

www.michelledwards.com

## Pa Lia's First Day

Michelle Edwards, Author and Illustrator

Teachers, librarians, and parents, feel free to choose from the questions below, all of which prepare the readers for the ideas brought forth in the book.

### Pre-Reading Questions

1. Have you ever been fishing? What did you use for bait? Have you ever used minnows for bait? Can you remember how big they are? Did you ever feel as though you were as small as a minnow?
2. Have you been to a lake? Which one? Could you see to the other side of the lake? Have you ever seen an ocean? Could you see to the other side of the ocean? Have you ever felt as though you were as big as an ocean?
3. Do you remember your first day of school? Were you ever a new kid on your first day at school? What did you wear? What was in your backpack? Do you remember what you ate for breakfast? How did you feel about going to school on the very first day?
4. Have you ever moved from one neighborhood to another? How easy was it for you to make new friends? Did you make a new friend the very first day? In a week? Or did it take longer than that?
5. When you went to school, did you make friends who didn't live close to your house? Did that happen the very first day or did it take awhile?
6. Have you ever wanted to be friends with someone who didn't want to be your friend? Did you become friends anyway? What happened?
7. How many names do you have? Do you have a first name and a last name? Do you have more than one last name? Do you have a middle name? Do you have a nickname?
8. What do you know about being brave? Have you ever been called brave? When did that happen? Have you sung The Star-Spangled Banner and heard about "the land of the free and the home of the brave"? Have you ever heard firefighters called brave? Why do we call them that?
9. The author says that her children went to a school that was "like a small United Nations." What do you think that means? Does your school have students who are from many countries? What countries are they from? Have they eaten other food than you eat at home? Do they sometimes bring lunches so you get to share?

### After Reading the Book

1. Do you remember being worried about your first day in a new school? Did someone help you feel easier about that? A brother or sister? Your mother or father? A grandparent? A friend from your neighborhood? Even though they were there, how did you feel about all the unfamiliar faces in your classroom?
2. Can you remember all of Howie's names? Howardina Geraldina Paulina Maxina Gardenia Smith. Howie has four middle names and they all end in "ina." Why do you think that Howie has four middle names? Why do you think Howie wanted Pa Lia to call her by all of her names?



# Discussion Guide for "Pa Lia's First Day"

Michelle Edwards

www.michelledwards.com

3. Pa Lia tries to make friends by drawing funny pictures and passing notes to Calliope and Howie. Do you ever draw in class? What do you like to draw? Do you know that sometimes these kinds of drawings are called "doodles" because people do them while they're listening or thinking or watching something else? Could you share some of your doodles with us?  
*You might even suggest having a Doodle Board where students or your child could use pushpins to stick their doodles up, letting other students guess what they were listening to or watching while drawing.*
4. Why do you think Mrs. Fennessy is unhappy because notes were being passed?
5. Do you think Mrs. Fennessy should have asked who was the person who started passing the notes?
6. If you were Pa Lia, would you have spoken up about being the one to pass the notes? Do you think Pa Lia should have said she did it or should she have kept quiet because Calliope and Howie wouldn't have told on her? If Pa Lia hadn't spoken up, do you think Calliope and Howie would have wanted to be her friends?
7. Why is Pa Lia so happy because Calliope and Howie think she is brave? Do you think Pa Lia is brave?
8. Tomorrow, Howie will bring "snickerdoodles" to share. Do you know what those are?

*Here is a recipe for Snickerdoodles, a recipe which is more than 200 years old. Some people believe this cookie came to America on the boats with the first settlers, probably those who came from England.*

## Snickerdoodles

1½ c. plus ¼ c. sugar, divided  
½ c. stick margarine or butter, softened  
½ c. shortening  
2 large eggs  
2¾ c. all-purpose flour  
2 tsp. cream of tartar  
1 tsp. baking soda  
¼ tsp. salt  
2 tsp. ground cinnamon

Heat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix 1½ cup sugar, margarine, shortening and eggs in large bowl. Stir in flour, cream of tartar, baking soda and salt.

Shape dough into 1¼-inch balls. Mix ¼ cup sugar and the cinnamon. Roll balls in cinnamon-sugar mixture. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until set. Remove from cookie sheet. Cool on wire rack. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.

Each cookie has approximately 90 calories, 4 gm. fat (1 gm. saturated), 13 gm. carbohydrate and 1 gm. protein.



# Discussion Guide for "Pa Lia's First Day"

Michelle Edwards

www.michelledwards.com

## About the Illustrations (visual literacy)

Michelle Edwards not only wrote the Jackson Friends series, but she also illustrated and designed the series. She drew the pictures so we can see what Pa Lia, Calliope, Howie, and even Stinky Stern look like. We can see what their classroom looks like.

1. Did you imagine Pa Lia's classroom looks the way that Michelle Edwards did?
2. In the illustration on page 13 where Stinky yells behind Pa Lia and she falls down the stairs, why do you think Michelle Edwards chose to draw many, many pairs of glasses on that page?
3. On page 37, what are the little curls above Mrs. Fennessy's head? Why does it say "Thump!" all over the page?
4. On page 46, why do you believe there is a picture of Stinky Stern and a picture of Stinky Vang?
5. Do the pictures help you understand the book better? How do they do that?

## Learning about the illustrations from Michelle Edwards

"I did many sketches and dummies in pencil before I was able to figure out how that first Jackson Friends book would look. I made a final-sized dummy of each page of the book. I sketched in pencil, on tracing paper, all images and placed them where they belonged in the book.

"When I completed the entire book in this manner, I used a light table and traced the images from my dummy onto good paper. After the art was traced in on the paper, I inked in the images using a nib pen and ink. For *Pa Lia's First Day*, I used just washes and some white gouache."

## Unfamiliar illustration terms?

*dummy* .....A preliminary handmade version of the book by an illustrator, roughly showing a layout of the finished art and accompanying text.

*galley* .....Typeset text layout for proofing of type.

*gouache* .....A type of watercolor paint characterized by its opacity. For illustrators, it provides a quick color intensity without the many layers required with transparent watercolor, without the plastic finish of acrylic.

*light table* .....A surface, usually an enclosed table, that has a frosted glass top with a light source inside the table. A diffused light shines through the paper, allowing the artist to see through two or more layers.

*washes* .....A very diluted form of watercolor or gouache, possibly mixed with 50% to 60% water.



# Discussion Guide for "Pa Lia's First Day"

Michelle Edwards

[www.michelledwards.com](http://www.michelledwards.com)

## About Michelle Edwards

Michelle Edwards writes and illustrates children's books. Her newest books are *Stinky Stern Forever* and *Papa's Latkes*, the fourth book in the Jackson Friends series. Michelle turned fifty years old on January 25, 2005. She was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut and grew up in Troy, New York. Michelle has studied, lived, and worked in Jerusalem, Israel. Her children and her children's books were born in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Michelle now lives in Iowa City, Iowa with her husband Rody and their three daughters Meera, Flory, and Lelia.

## Pa Lia's First Day

is a part of the *Jackson Friends Series*



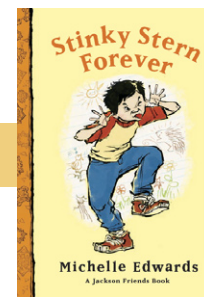
**Pa Lia's First Day**  
Harcourt 1999  
ISBN 0-15-205748-X



**Zero Grandparents**  
Harcourt 2001  
ISBN 0-15-205754-4



**The Talent Show**  
Harcourt 2002  
ISBN 0-15-205760-9



**Stinky Stern Forever**  
Harcourt 2005  
ISBN 0-15-216389-1



**Michelle Edwards is available for school visits and conference presentations. For more information please visit her website at [www.michelledwards.com](http://www.michelledwards.com) or send an e-mail to [michelle@michelledwards.com](mailto:michelle@michelledwards.com).**



© 2005 Winding Oak. If you wish to use this copyrighted material in a manner that may exceed 'fair use' or for reprint permission, please contact Winding Oak: [www.windingoak.com](http://www.windingoak.com).