

3–7 Grade ELA Lesson Plan

***SideKicks: Thick as Thieves* by Dan Santat**

Grade Levels

3–7

Time

45–60 minutes

Common Core State Standards (CCSS ELA)

- **RL.3–7.1:** Ask and answer questions using evidence from the text.
 - **RL.3–7.2:** Determine the theme or central message.
 - **RL.3–7.3:** Describe how characters respond to challenges and how they change over time.
 - **RL.3–7.6:** Explain how a character's point of view influences the story.
 - **RL.3–7.7:** Analyze how illustrations contribute to the meaning, tone, and humor of the story.
 - **W.3–7.3:** Write narratives using descriptive details and clear event sequences.
 - **SL.3–7.1:** Participate effectively in collaborative discussions.
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Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze how the SideKicks work together to solve problems and protect others.
 - Explore themes of trust, loyalty, teamwork, honesty, and belonging.
 - Use evidence from both the text and illustrations to support their thinking.
 - Examine how mystery and suspense develop in a graphic novel.
 - Write an original superhero mystery featuring teamwork and problem-solving.
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Essential Questions

- What makes someone worthy of your trust?
 - Why is teamwork important when solving problems?
 - Can first impressions be misleading?
 - How do illustrations help create suspense and humor in a graphic novel?
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Materials

- *SideKicks: Thick as Thieves* by Dan Santat
 - Character and Mystery Graphic Organizer
 - Sticky Notes
 - Chart Paper
 - Writing Journals or Notebook Paper
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Vocabulary

- Loyalty
 - Trust
 - Suspicion
 - Evidence
 - Inference
 - Conflict
 - Resolution
 - Perspective
 - Sidekick
 - Graphic Novel
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Before Reading (10 minutes)

Activate Prior Knowledge

Ask students:

- What qualities make someone trustworthy?
- Have you ever had to decide whether to trust someone new?
- What makes a good teammate?
- Why do superheroes often need partners or sidekicks?

Students complete a **Think-Pair-Share**, then share ideas with the class.

During Reading (25 minutes)

Character & Mystery Tracker

Students gather evidence while reading.

Character	Challenge	Evidence (Words & Pictures)	What They Learn
Manny			
Roscoe			
Fluffy			
Shifty			
Whipley			

Encourage students to notice:

- Facial expressions
- Dialogue
- Body language
- Visual clues
- Humor
- Suspense
- Character interactions

Class Discussion

Discuss:

1. Why are the SideKicks suspicious of Whipley?
2. How does trust affect the characters' decisions?
3. Which clues help solve the mystery?
4. How do the illustrations build suspense and comedy?
5. What lesson do the SideKicks learn by the end of the story?

Mini-Lesson

Making Inferences in Graphic Novels

Explain that readers make **inferences** by combining clues from the text and illustrations with what they already know.

Readers should look for:

- Facial expressions

- Body language
- Dialogue
- Background details
- Panel sequence
- Character reactions
- Visual clues that hint at future events

Ask students to identify one scene where the illustrations reveal information before the dialogue does.

Collaborative Activity (10–15 minutes)

Trust or Trick?

Present students with several scenarios, such as:

- A new student joins your group project.
- Someone promises to return something they borrowed.
- A friend tells you surprising news.
- A teammate admits making a mistake.

In small groups, students discuss:

- What clues help you decide whether to trust someone?
- How can trust be earned?
- How should misunderstandings be handled?

Groups create a chart titled:

"Building Trust on a Team."

Writing Activity (20–25 minutes)

Writing Prompt

Imagine you are the newest SideKick protecting Metro City while Captain Amazing is away. A mysterious visitor arrives claiming to be a hero's long-lost partner, but something doesn't seem right. Write a story about how you investigate the mystery, work with your teammates, and decide whom to trust. Describe the clues you discover, the challenges you face, and what you learn about teamwork, honesty, and loyalty. Include descriptive details, dialogue, and an exciting conclusion.

Extension Activities

Grades 3–4

Create Your Own SideKick

Design a superhero sidekick.

Include:

- Name
 - Special powers
 - Personality traits
 - Greatest strength
 - Favorite gadget
 - Illustration
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Grades 5–7

Character Analysis

Write an essay explaining how one SideKick changes throughout the story.

Use evidence from both the text and illustrations to support your analysis.

Graphic Novel Project

Create a six-panel comic showing:

- A mysterious problem
- Gathering clues
- Teamwork
- Solving the mystery
- Defeating the villain
- Celebrating together

Use speech bubbles, captions, and sound effects.

Assessment

Formative

- Class discussions
- Character & Mystery Organizer
- Group collaboration
- Reading observations

Summative Writing Rubric

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Ideas	Creative and detailed	Clear	Developing	Limited
Organization	Logical sequence	Mostly organized	Some organization	Difficult to follow
Text Evidence	Strong support	Some support	Minimal support	No evidence
Conventions	Few errors	Some errors	Frequent errors	Many errors

Exit Ticket

Students answer one question:

- Which character earned your trust the most? Why?
 - What clue was most important in solving the mystery?
 - How did teamwork help the SideKicks succeed?
 - What advice would you give Shifty during the story?
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Differentiation

Support

- Sentence starters
- Graphic organizers
- Partner reading
- Teacher-guided discussions
- Visual vocabulary cards

Extension

- Compare the SideKicks to another superhero team from literature or comics.
 - Rewrite a key scene from Whippley's point of view.
 - Design a new SideKick headquarters with labeled features that help heroes solve mysteries and protect the city.
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Cross-Curricular Connections

Art: Create an original superhero comic using expressive facial features, action lines, and panel layouts to tell a story visually.

STEM: Explore how detectives and investigators use observation, evidence, and logical reasoning to solve problems, and compare those skills to the SideKicks' investigation.

SEL: Discuss how trust is built through honesty, responsibility, and communication, and explore healthy ways to resolve misunderstandings within a team.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Connection

Students reflect on:

- Trust
 - Loyalty
 - Teamwork
 - Empathy
 - Honest communication
 - Responsible decision-making
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Big Idea

SideKicks: Thick as Thieves reminds readers that being a hero isn't just about superpowers—it's about making thoughtful choices, earning trust, and working together. Through mystery, humor, and adventure, the SideKicks discover that loyalty, honesty, and cooperation are the strongest powers of all.