



Kerascoët is the joint pen name of the French illustrators, comics and animation artists Marie Pommepey and Sébastien Cosset, a married couple. They were nominated for the Ignatz Award for Outstanding Graphic Novel for *Beauty*, and for an Eisner Award for their comic *Beautiful Darkness*.

www.kerascoet.fr

https://www.instagram.com/kerascoet_

WITS CONNECTIONS: Walk Away, Ignore, Talk it Out and Seek help.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Teachers and Parents can start by **REFRAMING THIS STORY**. This story IS about a girl whose family moves to a new area after the school year has started. But it is really a story about children's feelings. Most of the children ignore Vanessa, but one child looks curious and turns out to be a friend and a leader of the other children. There is also a boy who is not very nice to Vanessa. It would be easy to label him "the bully", but when we first see him, he is also isolated on the playground and looks unhappy too. "Bullying" has become a catch word for a number of non-physical but hurtful behaviors including teasing, yelling, ignoring, leaving out, and threatening to hurt someone. Unfortunately, many children who do these things are also experiencing them! This boy is also portrayed as chubby. Obesity is one of the main reasons for teasing. This book shows what happens when we move from leaving out one child to leaving

out another. We solve one problem but create another! The new child is accepted by the other children, but what can be done for the boy who was mean to her?

2. Ask your children about their trip to and from school: How do you get to school? Do you walk, come on a bus, parent drives, etc? Who walks with you? What do you carry? What do you do on the way to and from school? Do you like this time of day or not? Have a look at this walking school bus!



3. Look at the cover of the book. This scene happens near the end of the book.

- a. Where are the girls going and how do you know that? (School. They are carrying backpacks)
- b. How are they feeling and how can you tell. (They are happy and smiling. They like each other because they are really looking right at each other.)

READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the first drawing. This story is about Vanessa who comes to a new school after the year has started. Has this happened to you? Do you know anyone who has had this experience? How do you think she feels walking into class on her first day? (Excited, shy, nervous, curious, scared.)

2. When you meet people new people, how do you feel? (Unsure, shy frightened, excited, curious.)

3. Look at the second drawing. Which desk does Vanessa choose? Why do you think she does this? Make your body and expression look like Vanessa in the drawing. What does her body language tell us about how she is feeling? Which person in class notices Vanessa? (Vanessa sits by the window, leaving an empty desk between her and the girl in the yellow dress. She is

looking down at her desk, which means she is uncomfortable. But, the girl in the yellow dress notices her out of the corner of her eye. Why is she looking at Vanessa?)

4. What is your favourite PE activity? Have you ever had to sit out because you didn't have the right clothing or shoes? How did you feel? Why would it be extra hard for a new kid? (It is harder for a new kid because they don't have any friends yet and may already feel left out.)

5. Centre fold. Take a look at the children at the end of the school day. Some are in groups, some in pairs and some are alone. Find the blond boy in the red and white striped shirt. How do you think he is feeling? Why? (He is unhappy or maybe angry. Does he have friends?)

6. In the next drawings, the boy in the striped shirt catches up with Vanessa. What happens? Why do you think the illustrator chose a red background for the second last picture? (Red is the colour of anger. The red background tells us that the boy is yelling at Vanessa very hard.) Why is he yelling at Vanessa?

7. When the boy walks off he is smiling? Why? How does Vanessa feel? Who notices? (He might feel powerful about putting someone down and getting his anger out. Vanessa is very upset and runs home. The girl in the yellow dress notices.)

8. The girl in the yellow dress is being a bystander. What does that mean? Why might someone be a bystander instead of helping? There are lots of reasons. (She saw bullying but did nothing to help. She might be afraid of the boy who was mean to Vanessa. It may not be safe. She might not know what to do since there are no grownups around. She may not know about using her WITS.)

9. How do we know that all four children are upset when they hear that Vanessa was bullied? (The redhead has her hands on her face in one picture. All the children are looking at the ground and are not smiling.) Who could help them figure out what to do?

10. The girl in the yellow dress and Vanessa are both upset all evening. Neither of them knows what to do to help the situation until the girl in the yellow dress gets an IDEA during breakfast. Now she feels better! Before we turn the page, what might her good idea be?

11. How does the street look different now that Vanessa has a friend to walk with? (Everything was grey/blue before, but now the houses and trees are showing their colours.)

12. Everything looks better when you have some friends. Look at the picture of the crowded playground. Find Vanessa and her new friends. Find the boy in the red striped shirt. What is he feeling?

13. The two girls are first to go into the school and the boy in the striped shirt is going to be last. Why do you think the illustrators drew it this way?

POST READING ACTIVITIES

1. Show the children the page covered with grey circles (before the book begins) and the one with multi-coloured circles (after it ends). Ask them what that shows.
2. How can you respond if someone is bullying you? Think about examples of “bullying.” These are often peer conflicts that can be discussed and resolved. **Open the conversation. We expect elementary school students to have difficulties getting along and to be learning how to do it. Be accepting of all examples.** Give examples of using your WITS to Walk Away, Ignore, Talk it Out and Seek Help. Draw pictures of children using their WITS for your class.
3. Lead a discussion on safe things children can do to help someone who is being bullied or someone who is bullying others. How can you make friends with someone who is new or alone? See also the WITS PICK and lesson plan for THE RECESS QUEEN at <https://witsprogram.ca/book/the-recess-queen/>.
4. Find the boy who is not very nice to Vanessa on each of the pages where the children are all together (leaving school on the playground). How do you think he is feeling? What does his face say? (He is always alone and looks unhappy too!) This boy needs some help, too. How could the children help him be kinder to the others?
5. Make coloured copies of the story – perhaps in reduced size. Work with a grade 5 or 6 teacher to create working pairs with your pupils. Have the older kids add dialogue boxes, while the young students dictate their dialogue and descriptions. Each pair might only do a few pages and versions could be compared and compiled later. Perhaps the first drafts could go back to the grade 5 or 6 teacher to go through an editing process. Completed books could be displayed in the school library!
6. Does your school have a walking school bus? You could use it to go on a field trip in your neighbourhood. You could get your parents to organize a walk to school day! Get everyone on board. See suggestions for getting started at <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>

7. Connect emotions, arts, dance, and music. Go to www.WITSINMOTION.ca to see a children's dance video and a wealth of non-verbal resources that focus on social emotional learning!

