

SARAH LAMSTEIN

children's book author

CLASSROOM GUIDE:

I Like Your Buttons!

By Sarah Marwil Lamstein; Illustrated by Nancy Cote

About the Book:

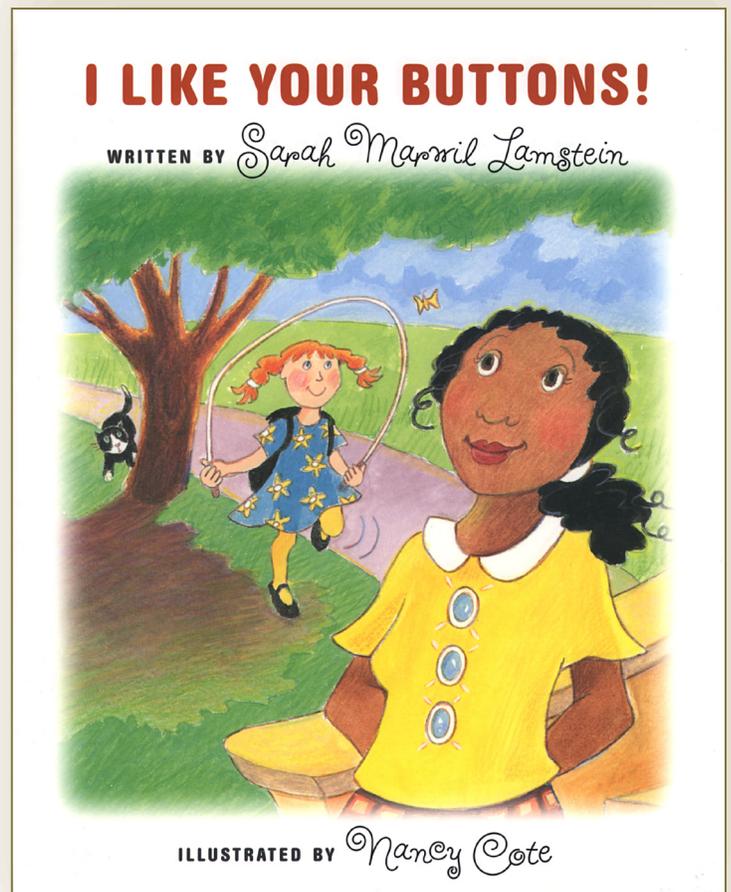
When Cassandra compliments her teacher about the buttons on her outfit, she starts a chain reaction of good will, good deeds, and thoughtfulness throughout the day.

About the Guide:

This guide includes discussion questions and projects appropriate for book clubs, literature circles, and classroom discussions. It is intended to provoke thought and insight into the subject and themes of this book including kindness, thoughtfulness, and appreciation.

About the Author:

Sarah Lamstein received her B.A. and M.A. in English literature from the University of Michigan and her M.L.S. from Simmons College. She received an M.F.A. in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College. She was the school librarian at Milton Academy and the Roxbury Latin School, as well as library consultant at the Mather School in Boston. She lives with her husband in Newton, MA and is the mother of three grown children.



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Author Interview:

1. What inspired this story?

This story came to me when I was working in the library of a Boston elementary school. One day I went into the office on an errand, and there was the assistant principal wearing a blouse with big, glittery buttons. Each one of her buttons was different. "I like your buttons, Ms. Mellon-Jones," I said. "Why thank you, dear," she replied. "You've made my day."

A few weeks later, when I was sitting down to write, the conversation with Ms. Mellon-Jones popped into my head. I wrote it down, and the rest of the story just poured out of me - a teacher saying something nice to a custodian, the custodian saying something nice to a teacher, and on and on. No story before or since has ever flowed out of me in that way.

2. How do you know whether an idea has enough merit to become a book?

If I am struck by something and want to write about it, I have to think very carefully about how to do it in a way that would be both fun and worthwhile for children. In the course of writing, I constantly think about how to make the story as rich as possible.

3. What's your favorite part of writing?

My favorite part of writing is re-writing because I have something to work with. The scariest part for me is staring at a blank page.

Once I have the first draft of a story, I go back and back and back, revising and revising until it's the best I feel it can be. Achieving the best may never be possible, but when it's as close to best as I can get it, I'll send the story out to publishers. If a publisher accepts it, then the revising begins again, but this time I'm not alone. I'm revising with an editor, another eye, an expert who can tell what the story needs to perhaps make it "best."

4. You've written both picture books and novels. How are they similar?

Besides length, what makes them different?

With picture books and novels, as with any story, there needs to be a structure that presents a problem, shows the problem getting more intense, until a turning point when the problem is resolved. With a novel, there's so much more to deal with, so many characters and events, that writing it becomes more complicated. Though a novel may be more time-consuming and complicated because of its greater length, achieving excellence in a picture book can be as hard as in a novel.

Pre-Reading Activity:

Pass out a plain piece of paper to each child. Have them put their name on the top. Then, pass the sheet around the room so each child can write a compliment about the others (they must sign it).

Discuss how this made them feel and what compliments can do.

Comprehension Check:

1. What starts the chain reaction of kindness?
2. What did Mr. Diaz do during spelling that was a surprise?
3. Why was Phillip proud? What did he do with that feeling?
4. Where did Julian work? What kindness did he receive?
5. How did Julian pass on his good feeling?

Discussion Guide:

1. What does it mean to "make someone's day?" How can you do this?
2. What is a chain reaction? Do you think Cassandra started one? How?
3. It wasn't just compliments that changed so many people's day. What else did characters do in the story?
4. Sam teaches his brother a song. What songs could you teach a younger sibling or neighbor?
5. Whose day, do you think, was changed the most? Why?
6. What acts of kindness could you do today? Have you done one yet?
7. How can we remember to be kind to one another? Can you create a reminder for yourself?
8. Which illustration is your favorite? Why?
9. What did the daddy do for the mommy? What do you notice people doing for each other?
10. Do you think kindness can come back to you as it did for Cassandra? How?

Projects:

LANGUAGE ARTS:

Send out anonymous notes of kindness to children and adults all over the school. Write the notes on decorated paper of your own design. Make someone's day!

MATH:

Create a chart that shows how the kindness moved from one person to another in the story.

-or-

Study each page and create a new path the kindness could have taken. What else could have been shared?

MUSIC:

Sing this song to the tune "Wheels on the bus"

The kindness that we show
goes on and on
on and on
on and on
the kindness that we show
goes on and on
throughout the day.

Can you create a new stanza based on the book?

ART:

Create a series of posters for kindergartners to learn the ways of kindness in your school. On each poster create a scene of What Not To Do followed by an example of What To Do. Use simple words to help them understand your point.