

We're Stuck!

Author and illustrator
Sue deGennaro



Synopsis

Turtle lives on the top floor of Building 24, and knows exactly how to behave when going up or down in the building's lift. No one talks, or asks how anyone else is doing, instead they all shuffle, and shift, and nod hello briefly in silence. But one day, a very special day for Turtle, things change drastically when suddenly the lift just stops. The lights go out, it grinds to a halt, and when they come back on it is clear that the residents of building 24 are stuck exactly where they are. How Turtle copes with his disappointment at spending his birthday stuck in the lift, and how the rest of the residents rally around to make his day special despite the circumstances is a delightful tale of friendship, compassion, and neighbourliness the like of which building 24 has never seen before.

About the Author/Illustrator

Sue deGennaro spent 10 years as an aerialist/ performance artist. However, as time passed, she found her fingers still searching for a pencil. In 2009, she received a mentorship from the Australian Society of Authors. The Pros and Cons of Being a Frog was shortlisted by the Children's Book Council's Book of the Year Awards in 2013 and was a Notable Book in the Picture Book category in the same year.

Themes

Community; friendship; bravery in adversity; dealing with disappointment; neighbourhoods; city living; hope; kindness.

Writing Style

Written in the third person throughout, the story features Turtle as its juvenile protagonist. The characters as a whole are an eclectic variety of anthropomorphised animals, who clearly live very human lives as hairdressers, doctors, tradesmen and the like in the middle of a city. DeGennaro's language choices are well aimed at her target audience of the very young, with sentences being brief and clear, and each page featuring for the most part just one plot point or action. DeGennaro makes good use of such techniques as alliteration and onomatopoeia to maintain interest and create the mood, while the textual narrative is

understated in its simplicity, allowing the visual narrative to carry many of the more intricate plot details.

Illustration Style

Created using ink, pencil, and collage, DeGennaro's artwork features a palette of faded neutral tones, highlighted by brighter primary and secondary hues featuring aspects of the individual figures.

Illustrations are for the most part half page spreads, and the visual narrative carries key plot elements that are essential to full understanding of the overall action.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look at the cover and title, and discuss what you can see. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What is shown on the front cover?
 - What do you think might happen to the characters you can see on the cover?
 - What does the title of the book tell us about the story?
 - Who do you think is the main character, and why?
 - Where do you think the characters on the cover are - where might the action of the story be taking place?
 - What are the different objects that the characters are holding?
- 2) What does it mean when the author says that *everything ran like clockwork*? Draw a picture that you think illustrates what 'running like clockwork' means.
- 3) Look at the picture of Building 24 on the first page. Who lives in which apartment on each floor? Look at the pictures on the next pages that show the residents leaving their apartments, and the numbers on their front doors. Using what you can see in these pictures, create a directory to put in the front lobby of Building 24 that shows who (or what) is on each floor.
- 4) Can you work out from what all the residents are wearing and carrying what their jobs or hobbies are? In small groups or as a class, discuss the clues in the illustrations that tell you what each animal's job might be. After reading the story, discuss your guesses and see if you think they were right or if you were mistaken about any of them.
- 5) The characters in *We're Stuck* managed to organise, cater for, and hold a party using just the things they had with them. (Look closely at the pink balloons and see if you can work out where they came from!) If your class found out that you were stuck in your classroom and it was a special occasion, what could you use from around the classroom to create a proper party atmosphere? In pairs or in small groups use some of the art and craft supplies that you have on hand in your classroom to create a party decoration.
- 6) Hippo makes party hats from folded paper. Look online or in the library for a set of instructions on how to make a hat from folded paper. Use what you found to fold a colourful paper hat of your own, and decorate your hat with glitter, feathers, crepe paper, or any other decorations you have to hand.
- 7) As a class, bake and decorate cupcakes that look like the one in Pelican's lunchbox for a class party. Decorate your classroom with the party decorations you made in activity 5, and wear your folded paper party hats.

- 8) At the end of the story, it says that *nothing was ever the same again*. What do you think the author means by this? As a class discuss in what ways things might be different for the residents of Building 24 in future, and why.
- 9) Think about what things make a neighbourhood or building feel like a community, and the different ways that people can behave to help make their local area seem welcoming and friendly to others. As a class, brainstorm a list of things that you can safely do to help make your neighbourhood or school community a friendlier place. In pairs, create a poster showcasing some of the items from your list and put your finished posters around the school for everyone to see.
- 10) When Turtle got home that day and told his Mum about what had happened, what do you think he said? Write a short piece from Turtle's point of view that shares what happened that one day, and how he felt before, during, and after being stuck in the lift.
- 11) What do you think was on Turtle's list, and where was he going? Why do you think this? As a class discuss your hypotheses and share your reasoning.
- 12) Look carefully at the picture of everyone in the lift right before the power cuts out, and then at the picture where it is completely dark. Can you tell which eyes belong to which character? How can you tell? How has Sue DeGennaro created the impression of total darkness while still showing all the characters in her illustration? Using the illustrations in *We're Stuck* for inspiration, create a two-part artwork of your own, showing a group of different characters in a well-lit space, and then showing just their eyes in the dark when the lights go out.
- 13) As a class, adapt the story of *We're Stuck* into a stage play. Practice your performance, and then present it for another class or at assembly.
- 14) Do you think there is a moral to the story of *We're Stuck*, or some good lessons to be learnt? As a class discuss what the different characters in *We're Stuck* learnt from their experience, and how their behaviour changed. Individually, think of one very important thing that someone in the story learnt, and what advice they might share with others reflecting what they learnt. Try to work out how to say this advice in a single phrase or sentence. Write your final phrase on a piece of card, and illustrate it with a colourful drawing or painting inspired by the artwork in the book. Use your captioned artworks to create a class wall display.
- 15) Turtle is wearing a bowtie that matches his socks. Use white paper and felt-tip markers or paint to create a paper bowtie that matches your socks. If you are wearing plain socks, then make a bowtie that matches a favourite pair that you have at home.
- 16) Look at the picture of Building 24 at the start of the story. Using it as inspiration, draw a picture of your house or school showing the inside of the building, and what people and items can usually be found in each room.
- 17) What are all the different characters doing when they are at home in the first picture? Create a character who you would like to see move into the vacant apartment of Building 24. Think about what sort of animal they could be, and what they might like to do each day at home. Draw a picture of your character engaged in a daily activity.