The View From Saturday
Study Guide

I. Introduction

This study guide provides material to assist in the preparation of a lesson, unit, book-club discussion, or individual assignment about the novel *The View From Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg. Studying this novel explores the virtue of care in judgment, particularly seeing others favorably, the theme of the *Tishrei* issue of BABAGANEWZ.

Through the story of an academically talented group of four sixth graders and their teacher, Mrs. Olinski, the novel tells an inspiring and funny tale of burgeoning friendships and maturing tolerance for others. Family ties blend with school friends and teachers to create an engaging story of overcoming obstacles and evolving mutual respect and friendship. Set in Florida and New York, the book weaves the stories of the students, their parents and grandparents into a funny, emotional, and ultimately triumphant guide to friendship and love.

To help plan for the study of the novel, this guide offers:

- Questions for study and discussion
- Passages for close analysis
- Lesson ideas
- Writings activities
- Projects

Combine any components of the guide to help shape your lessons on the novel. You may also want to use the ideas as a means of offering enrichment and extra credit to students who wish to read the novel on their own.

II. Questions for Study and Discussion

1. The Diamondstein's wedding is a community effort. Make a list of who does what for the wedding.

2. Make a list explaining how each of Noah's gifts for the cat's paw invitations keep on giving (page 19).

3. Nadia begins to feel that Margaret was responsible for her parents' divorce. What did Margaret do that makes her feel this way? How does Nadia come to see Margaret in a more favorable light?

4. Julian uses clever clues to invite his new friends to tea. Make a chart or a diagram that traces the steps he takes with each friend.

5. Noah takes a potential disaster (the cat's paw invitations) and turns it into a triumph. What does this tell you about the kind of person Noah is? Sometimes our initial impressions of a situation turn out to be wrong. Can you think of a situation where you turned a potential negative into a positive?

6. Nadia has trouble seeing Margaret as Grandpa Izzy's wife. List several differences between Margaret and the Bubbe that Nadia remembers. How is Nadia judging Margaret? Are the things she's judging her on fair? What would be good criteria for judgment?

7. Find the page where Ethan first describes Julian. In what ways is Julian different from the other children on the bus and in school, and in what ways is he very much the same? How does Ethan come to see past his first impression of Julian and get to know him as a friend?

8. What kind of person is Hamilton Knapp? Would you want him for a friend? Why or why not?

9. What are your impressions of Mrs. Olinski? How does her disability affect her character?

10. What are some words Noah uses to describe Allen Diamondstein, Nadia's father? What are some words that Nadia uses to describe her father? How do they each see him differently? Why, in general, do different people see the same person in different ways? What do Nadia and Noah each know and understand about Mr. Diamondstein?

11. Why is Hamilton Knapp mean to Julian? Why does he make trouble for Mrs. Olinsky? How do both Julian and Mrs. Olinsky show Hamilton that they're smarter than he originally thought, and that they can stand up to him?

12. What does Mrs. Olinsky think that Julian did on the first day of school? How did she reach that conclusion? When does she get to see what he's really like? Was there a time when something you thought a person did or said turned out not to be true? After you knew the truth, how did your new understanding of that person change your relationship with them?

13. What are examples in this book of people whose lives are made difficult because they are different? How do they overcome those difficulties?

14. Throughout the book, people are constantly asking Mrs. Olinsky how she chose her team. Why? What are some of the answers she gives? Why are those answers true but not the whole truth? How are people usually chosen to be on something such as an academic team? What about a sports team? What's unusual about the way that Mrs. Olinsky chooses her team? Is she a good judge of others? Why or why not? How do you think people should be chosen for teams or groups?

III. Passages for Close Analysis

1. On the top of page 22, Mrs. Olinski thinks about a reference from *Alice in Wonderland*. The Cheshire Cat says to the king, "A cat may look at a king." Read the entire paragraph at the top of the page, write down what is happening in the book at this time, and then explain what that comment by the king means, and what Alice means by her reply.

2. On pages 55–57, how does Nadia compare her life situation to young sea turtles in a storm? Read the pages carefully and explain how the comparison develops. What realization does she come to about herself and the turtles? How does Nadia's ability to understand the turtles help her to better understand herself, her parents and their situation?

3. On page 93, Ethan explains that the first tea party at a Sillington House was a transformative time for him. Skim the pages before that which tell of how The Souls spent their first tea party. What was it about that day that allowed Ethan to see himself so differently and let others see a different side of his personality? What was it about Ethan's life up until that day that made him feel somewhat inadequate? How do you imagine other people must see Ethan? How do The Souls see Ethan?

IV. Activities

1. Drawing Activity:

Divide the class into groups of three. Have them carefully read over the following descriptions. Then, using the images described on the page, have the groups draw each event or place. Then have the students compare their drawings with other groups or with the entire class. How do their drawings reflect differences in the ways they imagine these people and events?

- The turtle walk after Mr. Diamondstein's "bombshell" (Pages 42–43)
- The Souls gathered for their first tea party in the dining room at Sillington House (Pages 64–65)
- Mrs. Olinsky, The Souls and their fifth grade class leaving the Knightsbridge contest together (Page 138)

2. Reading Activity:

In Lewis Carroll's book *Alice in Wonderland*, one of the story's themes is that nothing is as it seems. Alice is continually encountering new surprises— in fact, her favorite thing to say is "Curiouser and curiouser!" Find three examples in Alice's world of things that turn out to be different than they seem. If you were to create your own wonderland, what "curious" things would you have there? Either write about or draw your wonderland, including at least three things that are different than they appear.

3. Writing Activity:

Ethan, Mrs. Olinsky and Julian each go through important experiences in the book of either changing their opinions of others or watching other people change their opinions and treatment of them. Write a series of diary entries for one of the following people and situations:

- Ethan: about his impressions of Julian, from the time he first meets Julian through the first tea party at Sillington House
- Mrs. Olinsky: about her impressions of both Julian and Hamilton Knapp, from the first day of school through to her final decision about the Academic Bowl team
- Julian: about the way that the other students treat him from his first day through the Knightsbridge contest, and how that treatment makes him feel
- Mrs. Olinsky: about the way that the people at the school see her and treat her, from the first day of school through the end of the Bowl competition, and how she feels about that treatment

4. Game and Discussion – Human Camera:

This game is best played outdoors, but can be played indoors if necessary.

- Divide the class into pairs.
- One person is the camera and the other is the photographer. The camera closes its eyes. The photographer looks around and chooses a "picture" (a picture can be anything around) he or she wants the camera to "take" (the camera will take the picture by opening and closing its eyes). The photographer then guides the camera over to where it needs to stand in order to see the "picture" when it opens its eyes. When the camera is positioned accordingly, the photographer taps the camera on the shoulder to open the shutter; when the camera feels its shoulder tapped, it opens its eyes. The camera shouldn't move its head at all, but just look straight ahead at the picture that has been set up by the photographer. After a moment, the photographer "closes the shutter" by tapping the camera on the shoulder again. When the camera feels its shoulder tapped again, it closes its eyes. Then, with its eyes closed, the camera should describe what it saw to its photographer. You can do this more than once, with the photographer choosing different pictures for the camera to take.
- After this, the pair should switch so that each person gets a chance to be the camera and the photographer.
- Bring the class back together. Discuss:
    - When you were the camera, what did you see? Did anything immediately stand out to you? Did anything surprise you? How did it feel to be looking at something that someone else chose?
    - When you were the photographer, how did you choose what picture you wanted to take? Were you able to take the pictures you wanted – when the camera described what they saw, did it match what you saw?

- Why play this game? What is it like in life?
- When do we want others to see what we see? When is it difficult to see things the same way as someone else?
- What parts of our personalities affect the way we look at other people, at ourselves, at the world around us?
- How can we best share our visions with others?

5. Art Project and Group Work:

In the book, each of the characters discovers new strengths within themselves. They are also all seen as talented and even heroic by the rest of the class, while the other kids may not have seen them that way before. In this activity, you will be able to identify your own strengths and appreciate other people's.

- Have each person in the class make a list of their strengths and interests (i.e. reading, good listener, basketball, good at math)
- Read the following text:
  "He used to say: Do not be scornful of any person and do not be disdainful of anything, for you have no person without his hour and no thing without its place." (*Pirkei Avot* 4:3)
- Discuss: What does it mean to be scornful or disdainful of someone or something? What's the opposite of being scornful or disdainful? How can we appreciate our own strengths and help our friends appreciate theirs?
- Using magazine pictures and other decorations, each student should make a collage of the list they made before of their strengths and interests (i.e. an ear for a good listener, a ball for sports, etc) with their name in the center— a "Celebrating Who I Am" page.
- Share the pages with the group.
- If each student could create a brand-new "team" (not sports or Academic Bowl, nothing that already exists, but a new team – like a furniture-building team) that they would enjoy being on, what would that team be? Once each student has chosen a team, try to form groups based on whose teams might go together. Each group should create a new activity in which their team would compete.

6. Debate and Game: Labels

In the book, many people are labeled at different points, often with labels they didn't choose and that aren't so positive. The following activity explores what we think about labels and why we label others.

- Start by giving students a sticker to put on their foreheads with a label (nerd, jock, religious, ADD, space cadet, etc.)— but each person should not know what is written on his or her own label. PLEASE REMEMBER TO BE SENSITIVE AND JUDICIOUS WHEN YOU DISTRIBUTE THE LABELS. For a few minutes, everyone should walk around and hang out, treating others according to their label. After a few minutes, people can guess their label and then take them off to check.

- What are some of the labels that came up with the different characters in *The View From Saturday*?
- Next, post the words Always, Usually, Sometimes and Never in different corners in the room. Read the following list of statements and after each one, instruct students to stand in the corner that best expresses their opinion. After each statement, call on people to explain why they chose the sign they did.
    - I think a person's label reflects who they are, and that you can know a lot about them based on the groupings they fit into.
    - I think stereotypes are based on truth.
    - I think that girls like "girl activities."
    - I think that guys like "guy activities."
    - I think no one should get labeled or stereotyped.
    - I think it's impossible not to judge and label others.
    - I don't mind knowing that people judge and label me.

Discuss:

- What do we judge other people on? What they look like? What they say? What they do? Which of these are useful?
- Share a nickname or label that has been placed on you at some point. How did you feel about that label?
- Share an experience where you were able to break out of your "usual" role – What was difficult about that? What was useful about it? What were other people's reaction to you?
- Share an experience where someone surprised you in some way – where you thought you had a person all figured out, but then they did something to make you reevaluate your sense of them.
- Make a list of labels that the group thinks should never be used.

To conclude, instruct students to think of a person they know who is the hardest to label or categorize— the most multi-faceted person they know. Have them draw a stick figure, and then surround that stick figure with words and pictures that illustrate the various qualities and characteristics of the person they chose.

7. Game: How perceptive are you?

In this book, there are many little secrets, sleights-of-hand, or times when someone does something that not everyone sees or notices.
Make a list of at least five times that this happens.

Play the following game:

- Sit in a circle. Have two people go and stand in the middle of the circle. These two people should stand back to back (they need to not be able to see each other) and change four things about their appearance (unbutton a button, put your hair up, etc).
- After each person has changed their four things, they should turn back to face each other. Each person should try to name the four things that the other person has changed about themselves. After they're done, give others a chance to try.
- Discuss:

  What is important to pay attention to in others? What should we pay attention to with our friends? With our families? With our teachers? What would we want people especially to see in us? How can we better show each other that we notice each other, that we are paying attention, that we care?