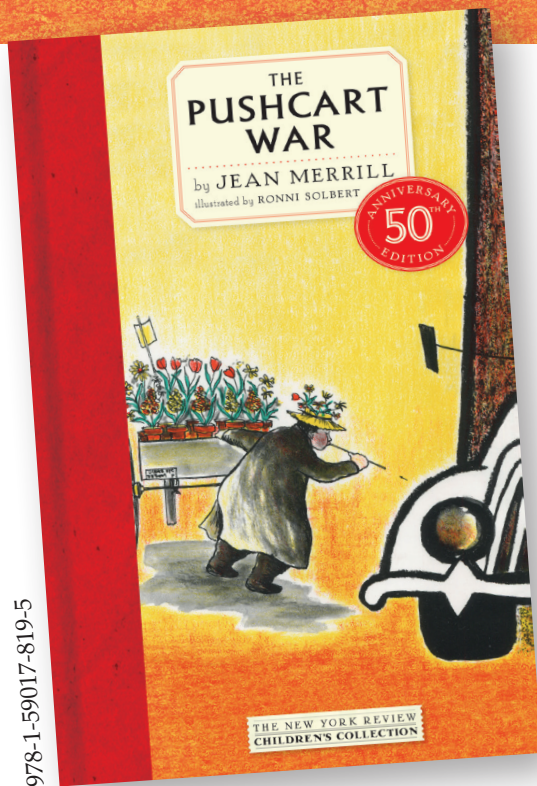


EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



THE PUSHCART WAR

by JEAN MERRILL
illustrated by RONNI SOLBERT

“The Pushcart War started on the afternoon of March 15, 2026, when a truck ran down a pushcart belonging to a flower peddler. Daffodils were scattered all over the street. The pushcart was flattened, and the owner of the pushcart was pitched headfirst into a pickle barrel.”

SO BEGINS JEAN MERRILL’S classic satire, *The Pushcart War*, about the battle between pushcart vendors and trucks on the streets of New York City. Vibrant characters like Morris the Florist and Maxie Hammerman, the Pushcart King, stand up to the owners of the city’s largest trucking firms—“Big Moe” Mammoth, Walter “The Tiger” Sweet, and Louie Livergreen—who’ve declared war on the meddlesome pushcart peddlers who threaten the wheels of progress and big business.

Since its publication over fifty years ago, *The Pushcart War* has inspired generations of children and been adapted for television, radio, and the stage around the world. The novel’s assertion that a committed group of men and women can prevail against a powerful force is as relevant in the twenty-first century as it was in 1964.

“The best book about politics ever written for children.” —*The Washington Post*

★ “To all it should be funny, and to many it will have the disturbing ring of truth.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

“An utterly captivating book . . . the satire cuts deep into some of our most hallowed institutions.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Merrill’s story, full of unexpected reversals and understated witticisms, feels exceptionally modern. And by the end—after the two sides have hammered out a peaceful and deeply reasonable compromise—one can only hope that we’ll catch up to Merrill’s future one day.” —Adam Mansbach, NPR, *You Must Read This*

nyrb.com

Common Core State Standards addressed by the activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.

THE NEW YORK REVIEW
CHILDREN'S COLLECTION

BEFORE READING

Have you ever lived in or visited a big city? What is life like for those who live alongside a lot of people in very little space? List the pros and cons of living in a big city. Discuss as a class what benefits and challenges might be a part of living in a big city.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What incident started the fictional Pushcart War of 2026 in New York City?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- The incident that started the Pushcart War was captured by a photographer who was trying to get a photo of a pickle barrel, but instead captured an important event that started the conflict in the story. What information could be gained from studying the photo?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- The Pushcart War is important enough for university professors to study and to write books about. One professor from New York University wrote a book about the Pushcart War in which he explained the “Large Object Theory of History.” What does the “Large Object Theory of History” describe?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- Politicians make promises and plans for how to make a community better. In the novel, one mayoral candidate gave the “peanut butter speech.” What was the key slogan within the speech and how did it contribute to the conflict in the Pushcart War?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3
- Some people in New York City did not agree with the slogan in the peanut butter speech. A book entitled *The Enemy in the Streets* showed an opposing viewpoint. What was the theme of *The Enemy in the Streets*?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- Two sides battled one another in the Pushcart War. One side was comprised of the pushcart vendors and the other side was led by “The Three.” Who were “The Three” and what were their thoughts about pushcart vendors on the streets of New York City?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3
- The pushcart vendors all sold different wares and all had specific territories in the city where they sold their goods. The conflict with “The Three” brought the vendors together. Where did the vendors meet to make a plan and what was their first strategy to fight “The Three?”
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

- Mysterious accidents started to happen to the trucks in New York City. Many speculated as to what could be causing these strange accidents. What is the Rotten Rubber Theory? The Scattered Pea Tack Theory? The Enemy from Outer Space Theory?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- Some in the Pushcart War would consider Frank the Flower a hero. What did Frank the Flower do that garnered admiration from his pushcart peers? How did children respond to Frank the Flower's actions?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- City officials tried to shut down the rebellion against trucks. Soon dried peas became the focus of the problem. What happened at Posey's Pea Packing Plant when city officials became suspicious of Posey's role in the Pushcart War?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- The Pea Tack Squad moved on from Posey's plant to Maxie Hammerman's place. How did Maxie's arrest affect the morale of the pushcart "army?" How did General Anna rally her troops of pushcart soldiers to want to fight again?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- What does it mean to have a truce? How do a truce and a peace rally affect the Pushcart War?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- "The Three" are outraged when Maxie is released by the police commissioner and they meet to come up with a plan. "The Three" are unaware that Miriam Portlette is listening and practicing her shorthand skills. How do Miriam's actions change the course of events?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- What is the War of Words and how does this part of the Pushcart War help the pushcart vendors gain the support of the people of the city?
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**
- What is your opinion of how the Pushcart War and how the story itself ended? Cite specific portions of the text to support your opinion.
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1**



ACTIVITIES

- Portions of the story read like a play. Maxie's police interrogation (pages 139-142) and the transcribed meeting held by "The Three" (pages 146-151) are written in script format. Use one of these sections of text to create a readers' theater script. Add parts for narrators who will share important background information about the story so that the audience understands the characters, setting, and problem in the story. Perform the readers' theater script for the class.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A
- Many citizens of New York wrote letters to the editor of the newspaper in support of the pushcart peddlers. Would you support the pushcart peddlers or the trucks? Write a letter to the editor detailing the reasons you support pushcarts over trucks, or vice versa.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1
- Slogans are an important method of conveying messages in politics and in wars. Slogans in the Pushcart War include "Big trucks mean big progress" and "Don't be a truck," adapted from the expression "Don't be a dope." Think of three important events in the story that involve the battle between trucks and pushcarts. Write a slogan for each event.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D
- Pretend a movie is made of the events in the dramatic four-month battle between the pushcart peddlers and the truck companies. Design a movie poster for *The Pushcart War: The Movie*. What illustration would you create to depict the bitter battle? What slogans will you include on the poster? Who will star in the film?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9

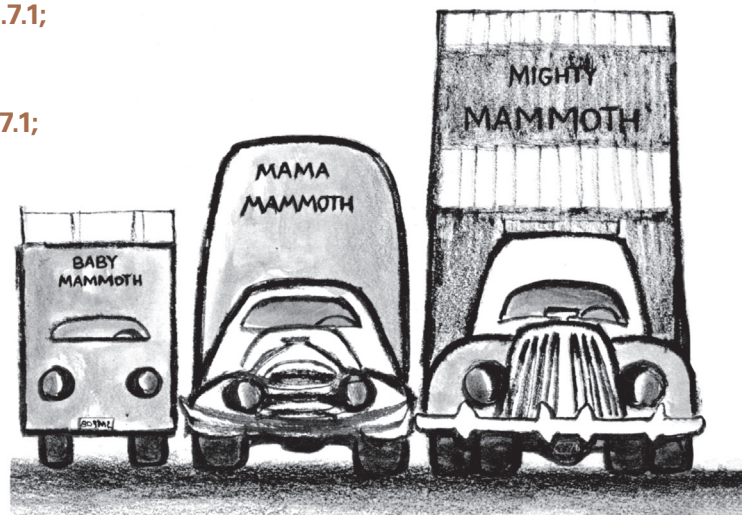
CCSS for worksheets:

COMPARING THE PUSHCART WAR TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.8.1**

INFERRING FROM THE TEXT:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Name: _____



COMPARING THE PUSHCART WAR TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The event that started the Pushcart War may have been small, but the conflict between trucks and pushcarts continued to grow large enough to affect a large metropolis like New York City. Many of the events that happened in the Pushcart War are similar to events that happened in the American Revolutionary War. Write a description of the story events in *The Pushcart War* listed in the first column below. In the second column, identify and explain events that occurred in the Revolutionary War that were similar to the events in the Pushcart War.

Event in the Pushcart War	Event in the Revolutionary War
The Tacks Tax	
The Pea Blockade	





INFERRING FROM THE TEXT

The line is drawn between the pushcart vendors and the delivery trucks in a battle to determine which side has power over the streets of New York City. Read the following passages from *The Pushcart War*. Think about what clues the author gives the reader to draw distinctions between the two sides in the novel.

More and more the truck drivers crowded other drivers to the sides of the street. They hogged the best parking places. Or, if there were no parking places, and a truck driver felt like having a cup of coffee, he simply stopped his truck in the middle of the street and left it there, blocking the traffic for miles behind him.

The heavier the traffic, the ruder the truck drivers became. At busy intersections, they never let anyone else turn first. If anyone tried to, a truck driver had only to gun his engine and keep on coming. (page 32)

What adjectives would you use to describe the truck drivers as they are portrayed in the passage above?

At the time of the Pushcart War, Morris the Florist had been in the flower line for forty-three years. He was a soft-spoken man, and his only claim to fame before the war was that it was impossible to buy a dozen flowers from him.

If a customer asked Morris for a dozen tulips—or daffodils or mixed snapdragons—Morris always wrapped up thirteen flowers. The one extra was at no cost. “So it shouldn’t be a small dozen,” Morris said.

Morris sold his flowers from a pushcart which he pushed between Sixth and Seventh Avenues from 14th Street to 23rd Street. He never went above 23rd. It was not that he didn’t like it farther uptown, but above 23rd was Frank the Flower’s territory. (pages 21-22)

Based on the passage above, what adjectives would you use to describe Morris the Florist?

What can you infer about each side in the battle between trucks and pushcarts? Does the author favor one side over the other?
