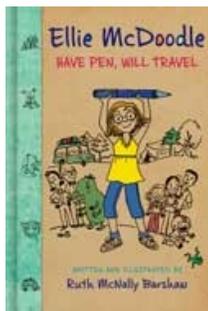


teacher's guide to

# Ellie McDoodle: Have Pen, Will Travel

Written and illustrated by Ruth McNally Barshaw  
Bloomsbury Children's Books, May 2007

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## About the book:

Ellie McDougal (better known to her friends as McDoodle) is being held prisoner...by her aunt, uncle, three annoying cousins, and baby brother, Ben-Ben. Sentenced to a camping trip with them while her parents are out of town, Ellie is absolutely, positively determined to hate every single minute of it. Thank goodness she at least has her sketch journal in which to record all the excruciating (and, ahem, funny) details. But how will Ellie keep her journal from falling into Er-ick the Enemy's hands? And what will happen if- inconceivable!- she actually starts having fun? Part graphic novel, part confessional journal, part wilderness survival guide, Ellie's story is a treat for young campers, vacationers, or any kid looking to curl up with a great summer read.

## Author interview:

### 1. **Admit it- you were just like Ellie as a girl, weren't you?**

I would have liked to be like Ellie. She's more courageous than I was. But there are parts of me in her. I kept a sketch diary, like she does, starting when I was 15. I still keep one today – and there are hundreds in my house.

### 2. **What was your favorite part of creating this story?**

My favorite part was the revisions process. I wrote and illustrated the story the best I could, and sent that work to my editor. She sent back a long letter saying what she loved about the book and what she thought could be improved. At first I was indignant. I thought some of her ideas weren't so great.

But as I thought it over, I realized she was right. Later I was glad I accepted her ideas without fighting. She's very smart about books. I pushed myself very hard to make the book the best I could.

Because of the revisions, Ben-Ben became Ellie's little brother instead of her cousin. And Er-ick's older brother, Justin, was taken out of the book (my editor said he was unnecessary to the plot – maybe he'll make an appearance in a future book). The Lost in the Woods scene became less scary, and the frog pond scene became more scary. All of these changes (and a couple dozen others) made the book a lot stronger, I think. And it made me a better writer and artist.

### 3. **What advice do you have for young people wanting to become artists or authors?**

Write and draw, every day. And read as many books as you can. You'll get lots of good ideas that way and you'll understand what makes a good story.

If people around you don't understand your love for writing and illustrating, try not to let them bother you. Protect your work and your dreams from them. When you go to college you will find others who think the way you do. College is a great place to get your work noticed and appreciated.

In the meantime, keep a journal of your feelings and your ideas. Someday you will be very glad you did. Also, check out my website for advice for writers.

## Pre-reading Discussion:

Have you ever had to spend several days with family or friends when your parents were out of town?

What was it like to suddenly be dropped inside another family?

What did you learn about them and yourself?



author website:  
[www.ruthexpress.com](http://www.ruthexpress.com)

## Discussion questions:

How does Ellie end up camping with her cousins?

In the beginning how do they get along?

Ellie likes to describe people in both pictures and words. Which sketch of a person is your favorite? Why?

Create one inspired by Ellie.

Ellie calls her cousins obstinate, obnoxious, and obstreperous (p.33) What does she mean by this?

Use three words to describe someone you know. Explain why you chose those words.

Not only is Ellie creative on paper but she's also fabulous at sharing fun games with her cousins.

What are the games that they play? What are your favorite games to play on rainy days or on long car rides? Try one of the games described in the book and then share it with a friend or family member.

What are Ellie's tips for surviving camp with family you can't stand? What tips do you have for surviving the following activities: a boring sermon at church, a substitute teacher who hates kids, a rained out picnic, a sleepover with someone who is not any fun?

What happens at frog pond? Why is this an important event between Ellie and Er-ick? Describe the biggest accident you've ever had.

Write your own version of "I Am a Nice Girl" (p. 124) Then compare yourself to Ellie in a venn diagram.

How do people react who read Ellie's private book? Should Er-ick and Aunt Ug have read it or not?

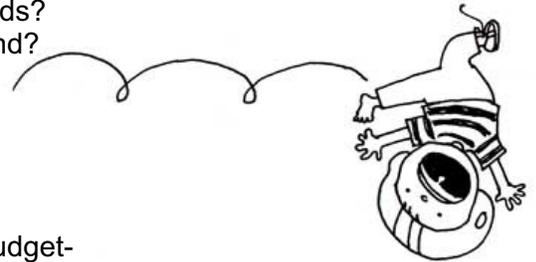
Do you think kids should have total privacy or not?

Explain what happened the last night at camp. How would your parents react to this situation?

What are you supposed to do if you find yourself lost in the woods?

How does Ellie change from the beginning of the story to the end?

Do main characters always change? Why or why not?



## Projects:

### *Language Arts/ Art:*

Keep a sketchbook journal for one week. You do not actually have to share the contents of it (though it should be at least ten pages long) but you will have to show that the pages are written and drawn on in your own handwriting. Teacher will grade it by walking around and checking to see that the work is complete.

### *Music*

Sing to the tune "take me out to the ball game"

Take me out to go camping

Take me out of my world

Buy me a sketchbook

and mosquito spray

I'll go exploring the woods all day

Cause its sketch, sketch, sketch

The whole family

And all the animals too

For it's one, three, seven days too long

To be stuck with you!

### *Math:*

Camping budget-

Plan a camping trip to a dream destination.

Figure out how much money you'll need for travel, camping equipment, food, and entertainment. Draw or find pictures to represent each part and add up all your totals. Don't forget to add on five percent for taxes.

### *Science:*

Create a pamphlet, poster, PowerPoint presentation on one of the following topics from the book:

Animal tracking

Survival skills for kids

Bacteria in water

Lifecycle of frogs

Low impact camping

Edible wild plants and insects

Trout hatchery

Geology

Bald eagles

Fire safety

*This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of Reaching for Sun from Bloomsbury Children's Books. Visit her website to find many guides to children's literature.*