

THE FRIENDSHIP WAR

Teacher / Facilitator Guide

CENTRAL IDEA

What can watching a fad spread through a whole school teach us about who actually holds the power in a friendship — and what does it take to fix one that was never quite equal to begin with?

Resource Information

Novel: The Friendship War by Andrew Clements

Setting: A present-day middle school, with a subplot at a grandfather's old New England textile mill

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 4–6, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete 28-chapter novel. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

Resource Overview & Intended Use

A six-mission whole-novel inquiry for advanced readers, designed for seminar, compacted ELA, enrichment, or a mixed-readiness classroom. It emphasizes how fads spread, how power operates inside a supposedly equal friendship, and the limits of treating social behavior as purely predictable data.

Nonnegotiable alignment

Use the same ranges throughout: Chapters 1–4, 5–9, 10–14, 15–19, 20–24, and 25–28. The culminating mission requires the complete 28-chapter novel.

Text & Edition Information

- Novel: *The Friendship War* by Andrew Clements; published 2019 by Random House Books for Young Readers; 28 chapters.
- Narrated in first person, present tense, by Grace, a science- and data-minded sixth grader.
- Use chapter numbers and titles as the stable reference; record publisher, year, format, and ISBN locally.
- This guide reproduces no novel quotations. Verify any teacher-added quotation against the exact classroom edition.

Content Care

This is a gentle, contemporary school story. The main content to preview is a grief subplot (Grace's grandfather processing his wife's death) and ordinary, realistic friendship conflict (exclusion from a lunch table, a damaged friendship). No content warning beyond this is needed.

Learning Objectives & Conceptual Questions

- Track a developing claim across a complete novel and revise it with later evidence.
- Analyze how fads spread through real social mechanisms, not just the appeal of the object itself.
- Distinguish a reciprocal friendship from one where the terms are set by one person.
- Evaluate the limits of applying scientific or economic reasoning to social behavior.
- Analyze narrative techniques: framing openings, parallel plot structure, and situational irony.
- Compare punitive and restorative responses to a mistake.

Conceptual spine

What can watching a fad spread through a whole school teach us about who actually holds the power in a friendship — and what does it take to fix one that was never quite equal to begin with?

Implementation Map

Phase	Reading	Core Work	Checkpoint
Launch	Before Ch. 1	Pre-assessment; norms; edition check	Initial profile
Mission 1	Chapters 1–4	All of Them	What does “winning” mean to Grace at the start of this book, and what does that reveal about how her friendship with Ellie has actually worked all along?
Mission 2	Chapters 5–9	Show-and-Tell	Why does a box of old buttons turn into “button fever” for an entire school — what does a fad actually need in order to spread that fast?
Mission 3	Chapters 10–14	Fashion and Power	What does Ellie's reaction to the fad reveal about what she actually valued in her friendship with Grace?
Mission 4	Chapters 15–19	Long Distance	What does Hank's friendship offer Grace that her friendship with Ellie never did?
Mission 5	Chapters 20–24	Fad Gone Bad	Why does Grace's supply-and-demand plan backfire — what did her “scientific” thinking miss about people?
Mission 6	Chapters 25–28	Melting	Why does Grace's breakthrough about her friendship with Ellie come from watching her grandpa grieve, rather than from anything that happens at school?
Synthesis	Complete novel	The Fad Report	Product + reflection

Suggested Timing

6–9 sessions: one launch, six mission seminars, one context lab, and one exhibition/reflection. Compact routine skill practice when pre-assessment evidence shows mastery.

Pre-Assessment Interpretation

- Score dimensions separately; do not total them into a fixed ability label.
- Advance quickly when a student already distinguishes a reciprocal friendship from an unequal one without prompting.
- Teach evidence-location and claim-reasoning links explicitly when needed.
- Offer oral, visual, or speech-to-text response modes without reducing conceptual demand.
- Reassess after Mission 3; profiles should change. Full dimensions and levels are in the companion Pre-Assessment & Interpretation Guide.

Facilitation Principles

- Ask “What makes you say that?” then “Who set the terms of this friendship, and when?”
- Keep both the fad's social mechanics and the friendship's power dynamics visible as parallel threads.
- Separate explaining Ellie's reaction from excusing how she treats Grace.
- Avoid treating Grace's scientific framing as automatically correct — the book itself shows its limits.
- Use wait time, written entry points, and structured turn-taking.

High-Level Presses

- What does the text actually show about who benefits from the friendship's usual terms?
- What does a fad need, socially, to spread — beyond the object itself being interesting?
- What would count as evidence that a friendship has become genuinely reciprocal, not just repaired on the surface?
- What can this story illuminate about real fads, real economics, or real grief — and what needs outside checking?

Mission 1 Facilitation: All of Them

CHAPTERS 1–4

Essential question

What does “winning” mean to Grace at the start of this book, and what does that reveal about how her friendship with Ellie has actually worked all along?

Look-Fors

- the opening framing of the button fad as a kind of “war”
- Grace's established role as Ellie's sidekick
- Grandpa's mill visit and the discovery of the buttons

Seminar Sequence: Silent Noticing + Turn-and-Talk

- Silent noticing (2–3 minutes): jot one moment in these chapters showing how the friendship's terms usually get set.
- Turn-and-talk: compare notices before any whole-group claims.
- Whole-group seminar with the Friendship Ledger visible.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Grace and Ellie are just best friends having a normal disagreement.” Press students to find evidence, even in these early chapters, that the friendship's terms were set by Ellie long before any button appeared.

Craft Focus: The Declarative Opening

The book opens by naming the conflict a “war” before walking that word back. What does this opening move tell you about how seriously to take Grace's narration — and how much to trust it?

Mission 2 Facilitation: Show-and-Tell

CHAPTERS 5–9

Essential question

Why does a box of old buttons turn into “button fever” for an entire school — what does a fad actually need in order to spread that fast?

Look-Fors

- the show-and-tell moment that sparks the fad
- the fad's spread from Grace's class to the whole school
- Grace's habit of treating the fad like a data-collection project

Seminar Sequence: Predict-and-Check

- Before discussing, each student writes one prediction for what makes a fad actually spread, with a reason.
- Check predictions against the text as a group.
- Whole-group seminar with the Friendship Ledger visible.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “the buttons are just cool, that's why everyone wants them.” Press students to separate the buttons' own qualities from the social mechanisms (status, scarcity, competition) actually driving the spread.

Craft Focus: The Narrator as Scientist

Grace narrates the fad the way a scientist would describe an experiment. Find one moment where her “data-collecting” voice shapes how you, the reader, experience the fad — as something to study, not just something happening to her.

Mission 3 Facilitation: Fashion and Power

CHAPTERS 10–14

Essential question

What does Ellie's reaction to the fad reveal about what she actually valued in her friendship with Grace?

Look-Fors

- Ellie's discomfort with not being the center of attention
- the “showdown” and Grace being kicked out of Ellie's lunch table
- the specific language Ellie uses to reassert her position

Seminar Sequence: Fishbowl

- Silent evidence sort (2–3 minutes).
- Fishbowl: an inner circle discusses what Ellie is actually protecting by kicking Grace out; an outer circle tracks the reasoning moves used.
- Outer circle reports patterns before the whole group responds.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Ellie is just jealous, end of story.” Press students to name the specific thing Ellie loses (status as the center of attention) and why that particular loss threatens her more than an ordinary disagreement would.

Craft Focus: Setting as Social Staging

The lunch table becomes a literal staging ground for social power in this section. How does Clements use where people sit — not just what they say — to show status shifting?

Mission 4 Facilitation: Long Distance

CHAPTERS 15–19

Essential question

What does Hank's friendship offer Grace that her friendship with Ellie never did?

Look-Fors

- Hank's honesty about the risks in Grace's plans
- moments of real collaboration between Grace and Hank
- the growing emotional distance between Grace and Ellie

Seminar Sequence: Two-Column Contrast

- In pairs, build a two-column chart: “What the Ellie friendship required of Grace” and “What the Hank friendship requires of Grace.”
- Compare charts across pairs before the whole-group seminar.
- Whole-group seminar tests whether Hank is a genuine alternative or simply a replacement.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Hank is just a replacement best friend for Ellie.” Press students to name the specific qualities — honesty, not feeling threatened by Grace's ideas — that make this a different kind of relationship, not simply a substitute.

Craft Focus: Parallel and Contrast Structure

These chapters develop the Hank friendship and the Ellie rift side by side. How does reading them in parallel change your understanding of each relationship compared to reading about them separately?

Mission 5 Facilitation: Fad Gone Bad

CHAPTERS 20–24

Essential question

Why does Grace's supply-and-demand plan backfire — what did her “scientific” thinking miss about people?

Look-Fors

- Grace's plan to scatter buttons and devalue them through oversupply
- the unintended consequences (litter, a school ban, a police investigation)
- Grace's growing guilt and indecision about confessing

Seminar Sequence: Structured Academic Controversy

- Paired controversy: one partner argues Grace's plan was a reasonable, well-intentioned idea, one argues it was reckless, using only textual evidence.
- Partners must produce one joint, qualified position before the whole-group seminar.
- Whole-group seminar with the Friendship Ledger visible.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “the plan failed just because Grace picked the wrong strategy.” Press students to consider what the plan's failure reveals about the limits of treating social behavior as something fully predictable and data-drivable.

Craft Focus: Situational Irony

A plan built on logical, scientific reasoning produces a chaotic, illogical mess. Locate the moment the irony becomes clearest, and explain what makes it land as irony rather than just bad luck.

Mission 6 Facilitation: Melting

CHAPTERS 25–28

Essential question

Why does Grace's breakthrough about her friendship with Ellie come from watching her grandpa grieve, rather than from anything that happens at school?

Look-Fors

- Grandpa's letter about sorting through his late wife's belongings
- Grace's apology to Ellie and Ellie's own admission
- the school's restorative response (repayment instead of punishment) to the button litter

Seminar Sequence: Socratic Seminar

- Each student submits one genuine question about the ending.
- The group selects and pursues the most generative question together.
- Facilitator presses for textual evidence, not guesses — direct rehearsal for the culminating mission.
- Exit line: “I used to think this friendship was ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept that the ending “fixes everything perfectly.” Press students to separate what's genuinely repaired (mutual apology, restored trust) from what simply fades away (the fad itself, the threat of punishment).

Craft Focus: The Parallel Plot Resolution

Grandpa's unrelated grief storyline is what triggers Grace's realization about Ellie. Why might Clements resolve the main friendship conflict through a completely different plot thread, rather than through an event at school?

Context Packet Integration

After Mission	Context File	Purpose
1	Real Fads: How They Actually Spread	Ground the button fad in real social-contagion research.
2	The Industrial Revolution and New England's Textile Mills	Connect Grandpa's mill and the school's history unit to real history.
3	The Real History and Craft of Buttons	Deepen the object at the center of the story.
4	Supply and Demand: The Real Economics Behind Grace's Plan	Explain the economic idea Grace tries to apply, and its real limits.
5	Grief and Sorting Through a Loved One's Belongings	Handle Grandpa's grief subplot with real, respectful context.
6	Restorative vs. Punitive Responses in Schools	Deepen the culminating mission's judgment about the ending's resolution.

Culminating Mission Facilitation

Complete novel

Require evidence through Chapter 28. A partial reading does not meet the task.

Students prepare The Fad Report: an analysis of why the button fad spread, how it exposed the real power dynamics in Grace and Ellie's friendship, and what actually changed by the novel's end, using evidence from across the whole novel and at least one context source.

- Approve proposals only after checking novel evidence across chapters and at least one context source.
- Require students to distinguish what's genuinely repaired in the friendship from what simply faded away.
- Allow varied products but hold one rubric.
- Assess the reasoning, not agreement with the facilitator.

Conference Questions

- What does your strongest piece of evidence establish — and not establish?
- Which moment in the book most complicates a simple “Ellie was just jealous” reading?
- Where might your report be treating Grace's scientific framing as more reliable than the text actually shows it to be?

Assessment & Differentiation

Need	Access Without Lowering Rigor	Extension
Decoding / fluency	Audio paired with text; bounded chapter targets	Compare how each mission's chapters open
Writing production	Oral rehearsal; speech-to-text; modular paragraphs	Persuasive closing paragraph
Executive function	Milestones; evidence cards; visible checklist	Student-managed reading calendar
Discussion entry	Questions in advance; written first turn	Seminar co-facilitation
Mastery shown	Compact repeated organizers	Independent source critique
Emotional access	Preview; pause; choice of response mode	Compare to another story about fads or friendship repair

Implementation Checklist

- ☐ Confirm the 28-chapter edition and record bibliographic data.
- ☐ Read the complete novel before facilitating.
- ☐ Remove or verify every locally added quotation.
- ☐ Send content preview regarding the grief subplot.
- ☐ Administer and interpret the pre-assessment dimensionally.
- ☐ Use aligned mission ranges in every handout.
- ☐ Verify economics and history facts against the context packet's sources.
- ☐ Require Chapters 1–28 for culmination.
- ☐ Collect student access feedback and revise.

Facilitator Reflection
