

Cats in the City

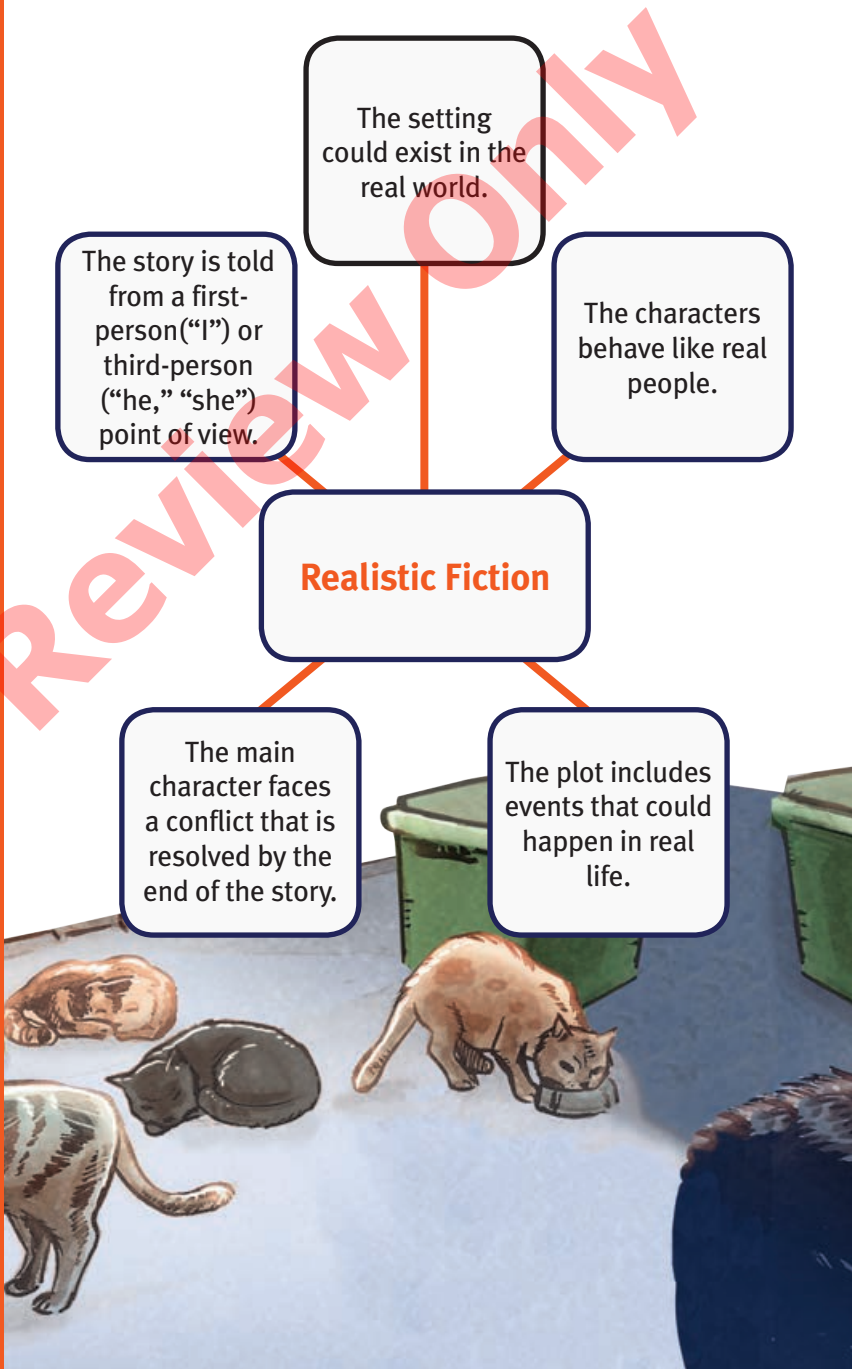
by Nancy Weber • illustrated by Judit Tondora



Level	R/40
Lexile®	600L

Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Princess Teatime

“Can you believe how big the middle school is?” Katia Mills asked.

“I know! It has to be at least five times bigger than our elementary school!” her cousin, Kyle, replied.

“And so many students! I’m glad I found the two of you during chorus,” said Jeffrey.

It was a day for new places, people, and things. Katia and Kyle decided to walk a new way home with their new friend, Jeffrey Pierre. As they walked through their Brooklyn neighborhood, passing a block of high-rise apartments, they came across an older woman bent over near a tall iron fence as if she were about to be sick.

“Is she okay?” Jeffrey asked.

“I recognize her. That’s Althea. She’s in my mother’s book club,” Katia said.

“Maybe she doesn’t feel well,” Kyle said.

“Do you need help?” Katia asked Althea.

“No, I’m fine,” Althea said. “I’m just feeding my kitty friend here.”

Katia, Kyle, and Jeffrey looked down and saw a beautiful gray cat with big gold eyes, eating from a teacup saucer.

“What is the cat’s name?” Katia asked the woman.

“This is Princess Charming. I’ve been feeding her every day at three o’clock at this fence for the last nine years,” the woman said.

“Nine years!” they exclaimed.

“Yes,” Althea said. “Every day at three. She’s a stray. I like to call it Princess Teatime.”

Katia knelt down for a closer look, but the cat shied away.

“She’s very friendly, but she doesn’t know you. Come back tomorrow and maybe she’ll remember you,” Althea said.



The next day at three o'clock sharp, Katia, Kyle, and Jeffrey stopped by the high-rise on their way home from school. This time, Princess Charming meowed when she saw them.

"She remembers us!" Jeffrey said.

"Tomorrow, you kids should bring some music," Althea said. "Princess Charming loves music."

"How did you find that out?" Katia asked.

"I used to be a music teacher. Back when I was teaching at the middle school, I used to bring my violin to play for Princess Charming. But I don't play anymore," Althea explained.

"We all just joined chorus at the middle school," Katia said.

"You don't say," Althea said. "I'll have to make it to one of your concerts."

One day, Katia, Kyle, and Jeffrey arrived at the fence. They noticed Althea drumming her fingers on the fence, like it was a piano. She looked nervous.

"Is something wrong, Althea?" Jeffrey asked.

"I'm worried about Princess Charming," Althea replied, pulling a business card out of her pocket and showing it to them. "A woman from a neighborhood cat rescue came here yesterday. She said Princess Charming is getting old and should be taken off the streets. She's coming back in ten days to take her to a foster home."

"Oh, no!" Kyle said.

Althea handed the business card to Jeffrey. "Rosa!" Jeffrey exclaimed.

"Who is Rosa?" Kyle asked.

"She's a friend of my dad's," explained Jeffrey. "She helped us adopt our cats, Sprinkle and Spot."

Althea shook her head. "I wish I could take the cat, but I can't. Carrying bags of food and litter would be too much for me. "





Princess Charming came out from behind the fence and stood at Althea's feet.

"I know she's older now, and it's getting harder for her out there, but I will miss her," Althea said as she shook her head slowly.

As Katia, Kyle, and Jeffrey headed home, they agreed they would speak to Rosa about Princess Charming. Maybe they could convince her that the cat was happy and healthy enough to stay on the streets, with Althea caring for her.

Stray

On Saturday morning, Rosa came over to Jeffrey's brownstone to speak with the friends. They all sat outside on the steps, sipping tall, icy glasses of lemonade.

"Thank you for coming over, Rosa," Jeffrey's dad said. "I know the kids have some questions about your job."

"I am happy to tell them," Rosa said. "At the animal rescue where I work, I specialize in caring for feral animals."

"What's feral?" Katia asked.

"Cats like Princess Charming are called strays," Rosa explained. "That means they've been raised by humans at one time. Feral cats were born in the wild. They have very little contact with people. Tens of thousands of feral cats roam the the city."

"Why have I never seen one?" Kyle asked.

"They're afraid of humans and know how to hide," Rosa replied. "There are four feral cat colonies in this neighborhood alone. Want to see one?"

Rosa took them down the block where there was an abandoned garage. The garage door was slightly raised. Rosa walked up quietly and knelt in some weeds by the door. The kids followed, peeking under the garage door. Inside, they saw cats everywhere, bins of extra food and bowls of water.

“At one time or another, I’ve captured all of these cats,” Rosa said.



“Why do you capture them?” Kyle asked.

“We get them medical care, and then we return them to their colony,” Rosa said. “Feral cats are protected under the law, just like house cats. I make sure they are safe and cared for.”

“Why can’t you find them homes?” Kyle asked.

“Feral cats can’t be adopted because they are not used to humans,” Rosa explained. “But if we find kittens in a colony we’ll take them in,” she said. “We can easily find them a home,” she said, pointing to the back of the garage where two cats were sleeping. “Sprinkle and Spot came from here.”

Jeffrey took a few steps closer to get a better look. “What’s wrong with their ears?” he asked.

“Not so close,” Rosa warned. Jeffrey stepped back. “They might bite or scratch to protect themselves. We clip their ears when we catch them so we can tell these cats have been caught, and then we release them back outside.”

Later, as they walked with Rosa back to Jeffrey’s house, Katia said, “Princess Charming is being fed—every single day!”

“Yes, but Princess Charming is getting older. And it will get harder for Althea to get out there every day,” Rosa explained. “I have to make sure the cat is well cared for.”