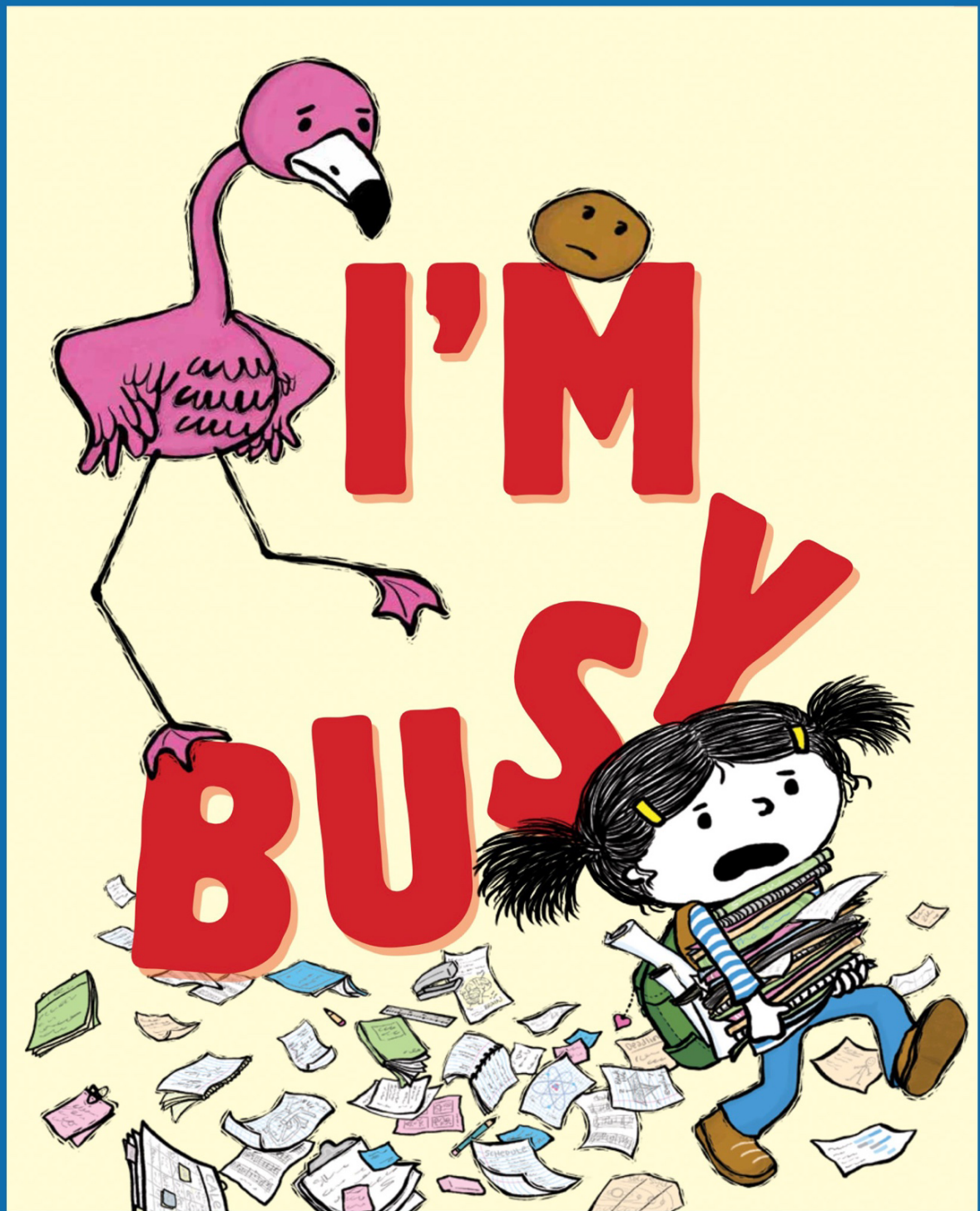


CLASSROOM GUIDE for



A Teacher's Guide written by Marcie Colleen,
illustrated by Debbie Ridpath Ohi



Michael Ian Black

Author, *I'm Busy*

Noted comedian and actor Michael Ian Black is the author of several books for children, including *I'm Bored*, *Chicken Cheeks*, and *A Pig Parade Is a Terrible Idea*. His most recent book for adults is *A Better Man: A (Mostly Serious) Letter to My Son*. He lives in the wilds of Connecticut with his wife and children. You can find out more about Michael and his projects at MichaelIanBlack.org.



Debbie Ridpath Ohi

Illustrator, *I'm Busy*

Debbie Ridpath Ohi is the author and illustrator of *I Want To Read All The Books*, *Where Are My Books?* and *Sam & Eva*. Her illustrations also appear in other I'm... Books by Michael Ian Black (*I'm Bored*, *I'm Sad*, *I'm Worried*, *I'm Sorry*), *Gurple and Preen* written by Linda Sue Park, as well as books by Judy Blume and others. For more info about Debbie, see DebbieOhi.com. You can find Debbie on Bluesky at @DebbieOhi.com.

Marcie Colleen, Curriculum Writer

This guide was created by Marcie Colleen, a former teacher with a BA in English education from Oswego State and a MA in educational theater from NYU. In addition to creating curriculum guides for children's books, Marcie can often be found writing books of her own at home in San Diego, California. Visit her at ThisIsMarcieColleen.com.

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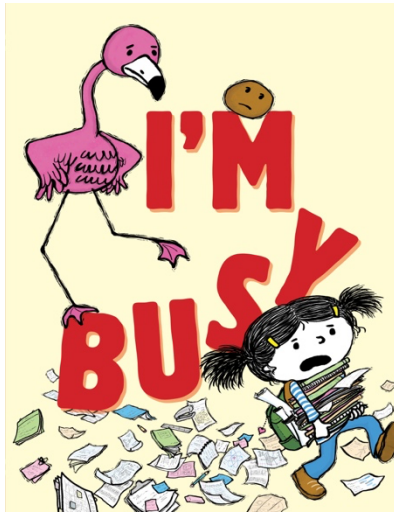
How to Use This Guide

This classroom guide for *I'm Busy* is designed for students in preschool through third grade. Teachers can adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

The guide offers activities to help teachers integrate *I'm Busy* into English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies curricula. Art and drama are used as a teaching tool throughout the guide.

All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in ELA, math, science, social studies, art, and drama.

Extra activity sheets and other bonus material can be found at DebbieOhi.com/Im-Books.



Title: *I'm Busy*
Author: Michael Ian Black
Illustrator: Debbie Ridpath Ohi
Ages: 4–8/Grades: P–3
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
ISBN: 978-1665915243

In this fifth book in the series from *New York Times* bestselling author Michael Ian Black and celebrated illustrator Debbie Ridpath Ohi, a flamingo, a girl, and a potato tackle what it's like to feel super-busy-all-the-time.

So much to do and so little time! How can a girl get everything done?

Especially when Potato and Flamingo are asking her to hula hoop or play superheroes, when she has more important things to do, like piano practice, Spanish lessons, solving mysteries, and getting into the right college. Okay, that *might* be too much...

Can friends can help her find some balance and understand that no matter how busy you get, you should always find time for your friends?

Table of Contents

English Language Arts (ELA)

Reading Comprehension: Prereading 4

Reading Comprehension: Post Reading 5

The Book's Creators 6

Critical Thinking

Writing Activities

My Busy Life 8

"Can I Take a Break?": Writing a Persuasive Essay 7

Point of View: Exploring the Story
from Flamingo and Potato's Perspective 9

Language Activities

New Vocabulary: Balance 10

Synonyms and Antonyms for "Busy" 11

Speaking and Listening Activities

Choral Reading 12

Busy or Balanced? (A Movement Game)

Talk Show: Busy vs. Balanced 13

Math

Time Management Word Problems

Tracking Time 14

The Very Busy Soufflé: A Lesson in Fractions

Science

What Happens When You Are Too Busy? 15

Balance and Motion: Finding Calm in a Busy World 17

Social Studies

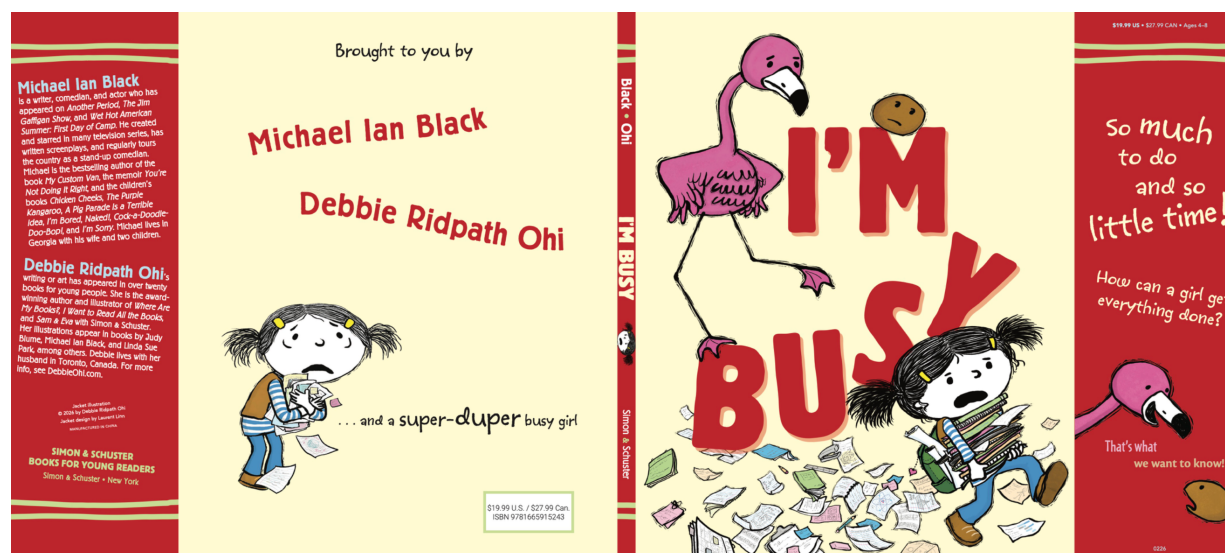
Me & My Schedule

Create a "Not-So-Busy" Poster 18

English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension: Prereading

Before reading *I'm Busy*, help students identify the basic parts of a picture book: front cover, back cover, title page, spine, endpapers, and jacket flap. Then ask them to discuss and answer the questions below.



- Describe what you see.
- Who are the characters?
- How would you describe the girl? How do you think she feels? Mimic what she is doing. How does that make you feel?
- How would you describe the potato? How do you think he feels? Mimic what he is doing. How does that make you feel?
- How would you describe the flamingo? How do you think she feels? Mimic what she is doing. How does that make you feel?
- What does "I'm busy" mean? Which of the three characters do you think would say "I'm busy"? Read the back cover. Were you correct?
- Can you guess what the story might be about? What are some clues you can find on both the front and back covers?

Then have students read or listen to the book.

Reading Comprehension: Post Reading

Help students summarize in their own words what the book was about and define the events in terms of a plot arc by using the following chart.

Beginning	Middle	End
Introduce characters:	Describe the plot:	Resolution. How are things solved?
	Describe the climax, and how things start to change.	

- Bonus: Using the basic plot structure above, students can create an original story about the girl, Flamingo, and Potato. Students can work individually or as a class.
- Art Center: Provide a variety of art materials including crayons, pencils, markers, paint, scissors, colored paper, old magazines, and glue for students to illustrate the scenes in *I'm Busy*.
- Drama Center: Provide puppets, costumes, and props so students can recreate *I'm Busy* or their new stories.
- Ask students to create a ten-word description of the book. Then they can make a bookstore poster for the book and include their ten words.

The Book's Creators

Talk with students about the people who made *I'm Busy* and ask them the following questions.

- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?
- What kind of work did each person do to make the book?

Critical Thinking

Extend the experience with students by discussing the following questions to work on the following skills:

- In fictional stories, a character usually changes in some way. Do you think the little girl changed by the end of the story? If so, how?
**This question focuses on analyzing character development, inferring, and supporting an idea with evidence from the text.*
- How would the story be different if Flamingo and Potato hadn't kept asking the little girl to play?
**This question focuses on cause and effect and making predictions.*
- What do you think is the message or lesson of this story?
**This question focuses on themes of balance, friendship, self-care, and making time for what's important.*

Writing Activities

My Busy Life

In *I'm Busy*, the little girl fills every moment of her day with tasks, leaving no time for play—or even her friends. Have students explore the idea of being “busy” through personal reflection or creative storytelling. Whether writing about a real day when their schedule felt overwhelming or inventing a character with an over-the-top to-do list, students can practice using descriptive details, dialogue, and emotional reactions to bring their stories to life.

Begin with a group discussion.

- What does it mean to be “busy?”

- What kinds of things make people busy?
- How did the little girl in the book act when she was busy?
- How do you think the little girl felt? How did her friends feel?

Create a chart titled “Busy Looks Like, Feels Like, Sounds Like” to help gather sensory details for writing.

Ask students to think of a time when they felt too busy—maybe it was a school day, a weekend, or a holiday.

- What made you feel so busy?
- How did it feel in your body or mind?
- Did you want to do all the things, or did it feel overwhelming?
- What (or who) helped you feel better?

Then create a story about a character—real or made up—who is overwhelmed with wild, silly, or exaggerated tasks.

- Narrative option: What about a real day when you felt too busy. Include what you had to do and how you felt.
- Fictional option: Create a story about a character who is overwhelmed by busyness. What wild or silly tasks are they doing? What helps them find balance?

Encourage students to include dialogue and descriptive, sensory details.



Art by Debbie Ridpath Ohi, from *I'M BUSY* written by Michael Ian Black (Simon & Schuster)

“Can I Take a Break?”: Writing a Persuasive Essay

In *I'm Busy*, the main character is constantly on the go—she's juggling school prep, hobbies, and endless to-dos. But what if she started to feel overwhelmed and realized she needed to take a break? The problem is, she's so used to being busy, she might have to *persuade herself* (or someone else, like a parent or teacher) that taking a break is actually a good idea.

Before writing, ask your students:

- Do you know what “persuade” means?
- Think of a time when you tried to persuade someone to do something—or when someone tried to persuade you.

Discuss:

- What it means to persuade (to convince someone to agree with you or see things your way)
- Times in life when you might try to persuade someone (e.g., asking for a later bedtime, more screen time, or a longer recess)
- Why someone might need to be persuaded to slow down or take a break

Then, pretending to be the little girl from *I’m Busy*, students will write a persuasive essay convincing someone (a parent, teacher, or even herself) that she needs to take a break from her nonstop schedule.

Introduce the TREE Structure:

T = Topic Sentence

Start with a strong statement that explains what you believe.

Example: I know I have a lot to do, but I believe I should take a break today.

R = Reasons

Give at least three reasons why taking a break is important.

Write 2–4 sentences about each reason.

Encourage students to use examples from the book and/or their own lives (e.g., “When I’m too busy, I feel tired and grumpy,” or “In the story, she didn’t even have time for her friends”).

E = Ending

Wrap it up with a strong conclusion that reminds the reader of your main point.

Example: Taking a break is good for my body, my brain, and my friendships.

E = Examine

Look back at your work. Do you have all the parts?

Did you clearly state your opinion and support it with reasons?

Have students read their persuasive essays aloud to a partner or the class.

- Whose essay was the most convincing?
- What made it persuasive—strong reasons, examples, or emotions?

Optional Speaking & Listening Extension:

Invite students to turn their persuasive piece into a short video, skit, or slideshow encouraging others to take breaks and find balance—just like the girl learns to do in the story!



Art by Debbie Ridpath Ohi, from *I'M BUSY* written by Michael Ian Black (Simon & Schuster)

Point of View: Exploring the Story from Flamingo and Potato's Perspective

In *I'm Busy*, the little girl is overwhelmed with activities and too busy to spend time with her friends. How do you think this makes her friends, Flamingo or Potato, feel?

Choose key scenes from the book and, either as a class or in small groups, imagine what Flamingo or Potato might be thinking and feeling. Ask:

- What are Flamingo or Potato doing in this scene?
- How do they feel when the girl says she's too busy?
- What might they say to each other when the girl isn't listening?
- How do they try to be patient or supportive?
- How do their actions help the girl eventually realize what's important?

Caption It:

Choose a few illustrations from the book and have students write captions or thought bubbles for Flamingo and Potato. What might they be thinking or whispering to each other while the girl is rushing around?

Write It:

Older or advanced students can rewrite one or more pages of the story from the point of view of either Flamingo or Potato. Encourage them to:

- Include inner thoughts and emotions
- Add dialogue between the two friends
- Reflect on how it feels to be left out—and why they keep trying

Act It Out:

Have students act out key scenes from Flamingo or Potato's point of view. Let them add their own dialogue to express what the characters might really be thinking or feeling.

- How does changing the point of view affect the story?
- Do you feel differently about the girl when you see the story through Flamingo or Potato's eyes?
- Why is it important to understand how other characters feel, even if they don't say it out loud?

Language Activities

New Vocabulary: Balance

In *I'm Busy*, the little girl fills every moment of her day with activities—but she learns that being busy all the time means she's missing out on other important things, like rest and friendship. What she really needs is balance.



1. What is Balance?

Help students define the word both literally (like balancing on one foot) and figuratively (having a healthy mix of different activities in your life).

Balance means giving the right amount of time and attention to different things, like school, fun, rest, and friends.

2. Why is Balance Important?

Use discussion prompts to connect balance to real life and the story:

- What are some things the girl in the story spends all her time doing?
- What did she forget or miss out on by being too busy?
- What are some things *you* do that take up a lot of time?
- What helps *you* feel more balanced?

3. Personal Reflection:

Ask students to finish the following statements:

- "The girl in *I'M BUSY* needed more balance because..."
- "One time I felt too busy and needed more balance because..."
- "When I take time to _____, it helps me feel more balanced."

4. How Does Balance Help Us Be Good Friends?

- What might happen if you're always too busy for your friends?
- How did Flamingo and Potato feel when the girl had no time for them?
- How can having a more balanced schedule help you be a better friend or family member?

5. Creative Extension: "Balance Is..." Poster

Have students create a classroom poster (individually or in small groups) that shows what balance looks like. Include:

- The definition of *balance*
- Examples of balanced activities (e.g., playing, learning, relaxing, helping others)
- A slogan or message: "*Balance Helps Us Be Our Best*" or "*Busy Is Good... But Balance Is Better!*"

Display the posters in your classroom or around the school as a reminder of how important it is to make time for the things—and people—that matter most.

Synonyms and Antonyms for "Busy"

In *I'm Busy*, the main character uses the word "busy" repeatedly to describe how full her schedule is—but there are many other words that can express similar or opposite ideas, each with its own feeling or tone. In this activity, students will explore synonyms (words with similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings) for *busy* to expand their vocabulary and better understand how word choice can affect meaning and mood.

- What are other words that mean something similar to *busy*? (*Synonyms*)
- What are words that mean the opposite of *busy*? (*Antonyms*)

Synonyms – active, swamped, overwhelmed, occupied, scheduled, frantic, booked, overworked

Antonyms – calm, relaxed, free, still, unhurried, peaceful, rested, quiet

Encourage students to think about not just meanings but how each word feels—some synonyms for "busy" might feel fun and energetic, while others might feel stressful.

Choose a page or sentence from *I'm Busy* where the girl is talking about her packed schedule.

Example:

"I'm even BUSIER tomorrow!"

Have students choose a synonym or antonym to replace the word "busy" and read their revised sentence aloud.

Examples:

- "I'm even more overwhelmed tomorrow!"
- "I'm even more swamped tomorrow!"
- "I'm calmer tomorrow."

Discuss:

- How does the meaning or mood of the sentence change when you swap in a new word?
- Which words make the character sound stressed? Which ones sound more positive or playful?

Make a pile of vocabulary cards with a mix of synonyms and antonyms for *busy* and sort them into "Busy Words" and "Balance Words" columns. Which kind of words do you want more of in your life? Why?

Speaking and Listening Activities

Picture books are written to be read aloud. Here are some other ways to bring *I'm Busy* to life in your classroom while having fun with speaking and listening skills.



Art by Debbie Ridpath Ohi, from *I'M BUSY* written by Michael Ian Black (Simon & Schuster)

Choral Reading

The teacher takes the role of the little girl while the students take the roles of Potato and Flamingo. Read the book aloud together. Emphasize memorization of the students' parts as well as good vocal expression.

Busy or Balanced? (A Movement Game)

A twist on *Red Light, Green Light*—students act busy or balanced depending on your call!

- When the caller says “Busy!”, students rush around acting wildly busy pretending to check to-do lists, juggle tasks, or talk fast.
- When the caller says “Balanced!”, students must freeze in a calm, relaxed pose—maybe doing yoga, breathing deeply, or standing still with a smile.
- Anyone who moves during *Balanced* is out for that round.

Play until one student remains, then switch callers!

Talk Show: Busy vs. Balanced

In this fun role-play activity, students will step into the shoes of characters from *I’m Busy* to explore the difference between being busy and finding balance.

1. Set up a mock talk show space in the classroom with chairs for a host and “guests.”
2. One student acts as the host, while others take on roles from *I’m Busy*—the Girl, Potato, Flamingo, or even someone like a Time Management Expert.
3. The host interviews each guest with questions like:
 - “Why do you think you’re so busy?”
 - “How does being busy affect your friendships?”
 - “What would help you find more balance?”
4. Encourage students to answer in character, using what they know from the book and adding creative flair.

Math

Time Management Word Problems

Use the word problems below as inspiration to write your own, based on the little girl’s “to-do” list in *I’m Busy* (i.e. trumpet practice, juggling practice, Spanish lessons, soufflé baking, gerbil sitting, puzzle building).

- 1) Trumpet practice takes 45 minutes. Juggling practice takes 30 minutes.
How much time does she spend practicing both?
- 2) Spanish lessons last 1 hour. Making a soufflé takes 20 minutes.
If she starts at 2:00 p.m., what time will she finish both activities?

- 3) She spends 15 minutes feeding her grandma's gerbil. Then she works on her 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

How much total time does she spend on these two activities?

- 4) She practices trumpet for 45 minutes, then spends 25 minutes working on her book. After that, she takes a 10-minute break.

How much time has passed from the start of trumpet practice to the end of her break?

- 5) She has juggling practice from 1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Then she starts Spanish lessons right after and works until 3:00 p.m.

How long does she spend on activities that afternoon?

Tracking Time

In *I'M BUSY*, the main character has a jam-packed schedule—so full that she hardly has time for friends. This activity invites students to think about their own daily routines and see how their time is spent. By making a visual chart or pie graph, they can better understand the balance (or imbalance) between schoolwork, chores, hobbies, rest, and fun. It's a great way to connect the story's theme of busyness to real-life time management.

- 1) Have students list all the activities they do in a typical day and estimate how much time they spend on each.
- 2) Using those numbers, create a visual chart—this could be a simple bar chart, a pie graph, or a color-coded schedule.
- 3) Compare and discuss: Do they feel their day is balanced? Which activities take up the most time? Is there something they'd like to add, reduce, or rearrange to make their day more balanced—like the girl in the story does?

The Very Busy Soufflé: A Lesson in Fractions

In *I'M BUSY*, the girl's packed schedule includes making a soufflé—though we never see her recipe. In this activity, students will use a playful "pretend recipe" to practice working with fractions. They'll imagine whipping up The Girl's Very Busy Soufflé while doubling or halving ingredients to serve different numbers of "busy people."

The Girl's Very Busy Soufflé

(Serves 4 very busy people — or 1 extremely busy girl)

- ½ cup magic marshmallow fluff

- ¼ cup cloud sprinkles
- ¾ cup giggleberries (blue ones work best)
- 1½ cups puffed-up pancake mix
- ⅓ cup rainbow milk
- ⅛ teaspoon unicorn dust

Directions:

- 1) Preheat your imaginary oven to “very toasty.”
- 2) Mix all ingredients in a big bowl while standing on one leg (optional, but highly recommended).
- 3) Shout “Soufflé!” three times for good luck.
- 4) Pretend bake for 22½ minutes. Serve with friends.

Challenge students to double the amounts so the soufflé will serve eight busy people instead of four. Next, have them halve the recipe to make enough for just two. For an extra sensory and hands-on experience, provide real measuring cups and spoons, along with safe stand-ins like dry beans, water, or flour, so students can “cook” their adjusted recipes and see the fractions come to life.



Science

What Happens When We're Too Busy?

When people get really busy or feel like they have too much going on, their brain and body can start to feel overwhelmed and stressed. This activity will help students understand what happens inside a person's body during those times and explore simple, practical ways to calm down and take care so everyone can feel balanced and ready to handle whatever comes next.

1) Discuss:

What does it feel like when they have too many things to do or when their day feels busy. Guide the conversation toward identifying physical and emotional signs of stress and overload.

- a. Explain in simple terms how the brain reacts to too much stress—like feeling distracted, overwhelmed, or “wired.”
- b. Describe how the body might respond—racing heart, tense muscles, or feeling tired.

2) Introduce Calming Strategies:

Share and demonstrate a few easy techniques that students can use when they feel overwhelmed.

- a. Deep Breathing: Show how slow, deep breaths can help calm the nervous system. Try a simple “balloon breath” exercise—breathing in to fill the belly like a balloon, then slowly letting the air out.
- b. Movement Breaks: Explain how gentle movement or stretching can help release tension. Invite students to stand and do a few stretches or shake out their arms.
- c. Mention other simple strategies like mindfulness (noticing sounds or sensations), listening to calming music, or taking a short quiet break.

3) Create a Calmness Chart:

Have students brainstorm and share what activities or habits help them feel calm, happy, or balanced. Write their ideas on a large chart or whiteboard. Examples might include reading a book, playing outside, talking to a friend, drawing, or listening to music.

- a. Encourage students to think about what works for them personally.
- b. Discuss how everyone’s “calm toolbox” can be different and that it’s important to find what helps them.

4) Reflection or Journaling:

Invite students to draw or write about a time they felt overwhelmed and what they did to feel better. This helps deepen their awareness and connection to the strategies.

Balance and Motion: Finding Calm in a Busy World

Explore the idea of balance—both physical and mental—and how staying centered can help us handle busy, overwhelming moments, just like the characters in *I'M BUSY* learn to do.

1) Balance Challenge:

Begin by inviting students to stand on one leg like a flamingo, Encourage them to feel their feet rooted to the ground and find their “center.”

2) Increase the Challenge:

Once they feel steady, ask them to try balancing with their eyes closed or standing on a soft surface like a pillow. This makes it trickier and shows how we need to focus even more when things get difficult or when distractions pop up.

3) Group Discussion:

After trying the balance activities, come together to talk about what made balancing easier or harder.

- a. What helped them stay steady? (Focus, calm breathing, steady footing.)
- b. What made balancing harder? (Closing eyes, moving surface, feeling rushed.)

4) Reflection:

Encourage students to think about their own “balance” when life feels busy or overwhelming. What are some ways they can help themselves stay steady and calm, just like they did in the activity?

Social Studies

Me & My Schedule

Everyone’s day is full of different activities—some fun and relaxing, others busy and maybe even a little stressful. This activity invites students to take a closer look at their own daily schedule by drawing or writing out what a typical day looks like for them. By exploring which parts of their day they enjoy and which parts feel too busy or overwhelming, they will start to understand more about how to balance their time and take care of themselves.

Create Your Day:

Invite students to draw or write a schedule of their typical day from morning to

bedtime. They can include things like school, playtime, chores, meals, hobbies, and rest. Encourage them to be as detailed as they want—using pictures, words, or a mix of both.

Identify Enjoyment and Stress:

Once schedules are complete, ask students to look over their day and think about these questions:

- Which parts do you look forward to or really enjoy?
 - Which parts feel rushed, busy, or stressful?
 - Are there moments when you feel calm or relaxed?
- They can mark or color-code these parts however they like—happy colors for fun times, and maybe a different color for stressful moments.

Group Sharing and Discussion:

Invite volunteers to share parts of their schedule if they want. Talk about how everyone's day is different and how some days feel busier than others.

Discuss how knowing what makes us feel good or stressed can help us plan better and take care of ourselves.

Planning for Balance:

Encourage students to think of one small change or addition they could make to their day to help balance busy times with calming or fun moments. This could be a quick movement break, reading a favorite book, or spending time with a friend.

Optional Follow-Up:

Have students revisit their schedules after a week or so to see how their balance has changed or what new things they tried.

Create a "Not-So-Busy" Poster

When life feels hectic and busy, it's important to find moments to slow down and take a breath. Creating a "Not-So-Busy" poster gives students a chance to think about what helps them relax and feel calm. Have students design a colorful poster filled with their favorite tips and reminders for how to take a break, so they can remember to pause and recharge whenever things get overwhelming.

- 1) Think about the ways you like to slow down or feel calm. These could be deep breaths, listening to music, taking a walk, or anything else that helps you relax.
- 2) Design a poster that shares these tips with others. Use calming visuals like peaceful colors, nature scenes, or soothing shapes to make your poster inviting.

- 3) Add short, easy-to-remember phrases or mantras, such as "Breathe Deep," "Take It Slow," or "Pause and Smile."
- 4) Include simple step-by-step instructions for taking a break, like "1. Stop what you're doing, 2. Take three deep breaths, 3. Stretch your arms, 4. Smile."
- 5) When finished, share your poster with the class or hang it somewhere as a helpful reminder for everyone to find their calm during busy days.