



## A Book of Coupons

By Susie Morgenstern

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The last thing the class expects when they go back to school is for their **new** teacher to be **old!** And then he gives them a goofy present-a book of coupons: one coupon for skipping school for a day; one coupon for not listening in class; one coupon for singing at the top of your lungs whenever you like. The list goes on! What is this wrinkly old teacher trying to do, get everyone in trouble? Susie Morgenstern follows up her award-winning book **Secret Letters from 0-10** with a thoughtful, funny, and very original book that once again shows children that life is for the living.

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## **A Book of Coupons** By Susie Morgenstern **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Originally published in France, Morgenstern's (*Secret Letters from 0 to 10*) brief novel introduces Hubert No‰ol, the new fifth-grade teacher in a French school. Though the students in his class are initially disgruntled that he is old, round and wrinkled, Monsieur No‰ol soon wins them over with his penchant for giving presents. His first gifts to the children are books of coupons, entitling them to such privileges as sleeping in class, losing their homework and getting out of trouble. The second present he gives to the class, one per student, is *David Copperfield* ("My gift to you is the story, the characters, the words, the ideas, the style, the emotions. Once you have read the book, all these things will be yours for life"). Other gifts follow, and his idea of a field trip is to learn everyday lessons; for instance during a trip to the post office, he points out, "See how hard it is to wait your turn? You need a lot of patience in life." The author builds on an engaging premise, yet the story's point of view fluctuates, so that many of the supporting characters remain sketchy. Unlike her previous novel, the children here are overshadowed by the adults, Monsieur No‰ol and his nemesis, principal Incarnation Perez. Still, the uplifting mood and Bloch's Thurber-esque caricatures make this an enjoyable outing. Ages 8-12.

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From School Library Journal

Gr 3-5-On the first day of school, Mr. Noel gives each of his fifth graders a book of coupons—one for sleeping late, another for eating in class, another for giving the teacher a kiss on the cheek. The students quickly discover that he is quite serious in honoring the coupons, whether for missed homework or for a skipped day of school. Not surprisingly, the autocratic principal does not approve of this unorthodox method of classroom management and tries to get rid of Mr. Noel. Unfortunately, both the writing style and the story are uneven. There are some very funny scenes, including a wild classroom dancing lesson, but there are also spots in which the plot stops dead in its tracks. Long, adult-toned digressions about Mr. Noel's absent family or the principal's lonely weekend plans seem to be totally out of place. Character development also focuses on the adults. The principal is a military-style martinet with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Her vendetta against Mr. Noel is personal, vindictive, and, ultimately, successful. Mr. Noel himself is a free spirit who loves his class but makes no effort to understand or defend himself against the principal's attacks. Readers learn the students' names, but there is little else to distinguish them from one another. Despite the slim format and humorous premise, this book promises more than it delivers.-Elaine E. Knight, Lincoln Elementary Schools, IL

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 4-6. With the same ineffable sweetness she displayed in *Secret Letters from 0 to 10* (1998), Morgenstern offers another offbeat tale with a very French accent. The fifth-graders return to school, only to find that their new teacher is the very fat, very old Hubert Noel. True to his festive name, he gives them presents; each child gets a book of coupons. The coupons are for wonderful things: sleeping late, dancing in class, not going to the blackboard when called, and so on. The children are dazzled, and even more so by his other gifts: the gift of reading *David Copperfield*; the gift of seeing how hard it is to be patient when waiting in line at the post office. The school's dragon principal, Incarnation Perez, is not pleased with any of this and begins a

campaign to make Noel retire, ignoring his subversive attempts not only to win her over but also to make her life gentler. She wins, of course, and the children end the year by giving the teacher a coupon of his own for "a happy retirement." Then off he goes to his favorite restaurant. There's a great tenderness in Morgenstern's treatment of the elderly teacher, his students, and even the prickly principal, and the bittersweet resolution is one that children will accept, for they will know what gifts Monsieur Noel has left behind. Serge Block's sketches are just right. *GraceAnne DeCandido*

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