

Teaching Unit for:

Adam's Atomic Squirrel

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This Unit is written by Deborah K. Frontiera utilizing Common Core Language Arts Objectives, and integrating other subject areas.

Special note for teachers and home-schooling parents:

The numbers assigned in Common Core are not listed on these activities because there are some states that do not use Common Core, but curriculum in those states teach the same concepts. (The people in various states, and the nation as a whole, who put these things together, simply use their thesauruses to make others think their curriculum is different/better/whatever, but it's all the same thing.) In addition, many objective lists put the same objective multiple times at multiple grade levels, with such broad generality, that almost anything will meet the objective. As a teacher in Houston Independent School District from 1985 until 2008, the writer of this unit watched (and at one point in her career helped develop curriculum for HISD) the semantics change several times but nothing was ever really different—teachers just all had to memorize a new set of numbers and semantics. SO, the CONCEPTS covered in each activity are listed and teachers will see how the activities fit their district/state/Common Core curriculum numbered objectives. For every concept stated, three or four more probably could be because all such curriculum objectives have redundancies. Teachers may add these on their own according to their school/district policy for writing lesson plans.

The activities include a wide range of ease and difficulty to meet the needs of multiple grade levels. Those who work with younger children will do most of the activities orally, rather than in writing. There may be activities teachers of younger children will prefer to skip. Teachers of any age may choose to do or not do all the activities depending on the time available to them.

KEY CORE CONCEPTS COVERED IN THIS UNIT:

- Problem solving
- Friendship
- Animals
- Reading Comprehension
- Writing

BEFORE READING THE STORY:

Teachers or home-schooling parents should set a background for children by asking the following questions and filling in key points the children may not know:

Have you ever seen a squirrel and watched it play?

Have you ever had an animal that belongs outside get into your house? What Happened? What might happen?

Reading the story and discussing the comprehension questions with children builds on the following Common Core Language Arts concepts:

Demonstrate command of Standard English in speaking.

Use sentence level context as a clue to the meaning of new words.

Participate in collaborative conversation with peers and adults.

Ask and answer questions.

Produce complete sentences.

Retell stories including key details.

Identify words and phrases that suggest feelings and appeal to the senses.

Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting and events.

Identify the main idea and details of a text.

AS YOU READ THE STORY, STOP ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO ASK QUESTIONS OR TALK ABOUT THE MEANING OF NEW WORDS:

Pg. 5— How do you think the squirrel in the illustration feels? How can you tell?

Which of your senses do you use with words like thump, kerplump, and boom?

Pg. 6— What is a slinky?

Pg. 7— Have you ever been frightened by a noise in the night? What did you do?

Pg. 9— What other small animal besides a squirrel might get into the house?

Pg. 11— What does “atomic” mean? If children do not know, tell them that the powerful blasts in the sun that give us heat millions of miles away, and travel in a very short time, are atomic energy.

Pg. 12&13— What might Animal Control be able to do? What do you think “erupt” and “disappear” mean?

Pg. 16&17— Explain how a live animal trap works: the trap has a little platform to put food on. When the animal presses down to get the food, the door behind it drops shut. (If possible, borrow such a trap from your local humane society or animal shelter to show the children.) Then say, “Many people use peanut butter on bread to catch squirrels. Why do you think that might work better than nuts?”

What are “instructions”?

Pg. 18— What are the two friends doing in the picture that shows they know how to cooperate.

Pg. 19— Would a “real” squirrel dance on a piano?

What do “thunderous”, “blasted”, and “peeped” mean? Have students make a sound or demonstrate possible meanings.

Pg. 21— What are invitations?

Pg. 22&23— Why would the flower garden be a good place to put an invitation for a squirrel? Where else might the boys put them?

Pg. 24&25— How do you think the squirrels feel at the party? How can you tell?

Pg. 26&27— What does “exhausting” mean? What is a patio?

AFTER READING THE STORY, DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS:

Do you think the squirrels will come back inside looking for another party? Why or why not?

Who can tell me the main idea of this story?

What happened first? And after that? And then? (Different children may answer to fill in the sequence of the story in their own words.)

Have you ever planned something with a friend? How did you cooperate with each other? Tell about that.

Some parts of this story could really happen and some parts are imagined or could not happen.

Which parts do you think could happen? Which probably couldn't happen? (Example: squirrels and other “wild” animals do sometimes get inside houses. The party for squirrels probably could not happen.) Go through some of the events in the story and have children say whether they are real or not real, true or not possible, or whatever vocabulary fits the children's level of understanding. If desired, the teacher could write the student's responses down on a chart: event/real/not real.

CONNECTING TO SOCIAL STUDIES

Social Studies objectives involving small group cooperation, speaking, performing in front of a group and others depending on grade level, state or district.

Have small groups of students dramatize various scenes in the story. Each group would have to look at which characters were in that scene, decide who will play which part, plan what each should say, etc.

Project idea: have children, with the help of their parents, make a map of their home and yard. What places might attract squirrels? If a squirrel got in their home, and they wanted to have a squirrel party, where might they place the invitations? If children live in apartment areas, would they have a squirrel problem? Extend the map—where is the nearest park in which squirrels might live?

CONNECTING TO SCIENCE

This activity utilizes the following Language Arts Core Concepts:

Define words by category, and by one or more key attributes.

Compare and contrast.

Related science objectives that involve mammals and observable likenesses and differences. Teachers may match these to their state or district objectives.

Squirrel or Chipmunk?

Find good photos of a squirrel and a chipmunk—many images are available on the internet. Also help students find out through the internet or library books where each of these small mammals lives and what it eats.

Describe each briefly using the sample phrase like this: a duck is a bird that swims.

A squirrel is a mammal that _____

And: A chipmunk is a mammal that _____

Draw a set of large double circles on the board, chart paper, smart board, or whatever is available. (Venn diagram) Label one “squirrel” and one “chipmunk”. Have students tell features of each and where those features should go.

Examples: both have fur—would go where the circles intersect. Squirrels have bushy tails—would go in the “squirrel” circle. Chipmunks have a shorter tail that is NOT bushy—would go in the “chipmunk” circle. Record other physical features as well as habitat and eating habits.

Observe the area around the school and playground. Would it make a good habitat for squirrels? Are there trees with nuts (like oak) nearby? Or are there pine trees with cones? (Squirrels like the seeds from pine cones.) What other small animals might live in the area?

CONNECTING TO MATH

This activity includes adding, problem solving, higher order thinking skills, and possibly others. It can be done individually, as a small group, or as a whole group. Teachers of younger children may choose to demonstrate it to a whole group.

Plan a party:

Ahead of time, teachers will need to prepare a poster with a price list appropriate to their students. Example: balloons: \$1 for a bag of 5, cupcakes: \$2 for package of 5, jar of nuts: \$1, bag of chips: \$1, roll of streamers: \$2, etc. Prices should be in whole dollars and smaller numbers so students will be able to add up their total. Pictures might accompany each item for students with lower reading skills.

Decide what to celebrate: birthday, Halloween or other holiday, end of season soccer/softball/other sport, etc.

Determine out how many people will be there.

Decide what foods to have, what decorations may be needed, prizes for games, etc.

Use the price list to figure out how many packages of balloons, etc. they need and total up the cost of their party.

CONNECTING TO ART:

Especially for younger students (pre-k or k). Have children draw and color their favorite part of the story. As the children are doing this, the teacher should walk around asking various children to tell about their picture. The children's answers will let a teacher know how well each child comprehended the story and their ability to speak in sentences, etc.

CONNECTING TO WRITING:

Teachers and home-schooling parents who do the following writing activities will utilize the following Core Concepts Language Arts requirements:

Print in upper and lowercase letters.

Produce and expand simple and compound sentences.

Demonstrate a command of English, using capital letters, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Spell unfamiliar words phonetically.

Write narratives recounting 2 or more appropriately sequenced events; include some details and a sense of closure.

With guidance and support from adults, add details and strengthen writing.

Pre-writing:

As a whole group, directed by the teacher, point out that the author of the story uses a literary device called a **simile** on **page 6: *My legs were shaking like a slinky***. Ask students to think of other things like this they could use to show when they are afraid. Have them remember a time when they were afraid and what their body was doing. Write their responses on the board. (*examples: My hands shook like a leaf in the wind. My hair stood on end like a porcupine's quills.*) Have the students recall a time when they were really happy or excited. Suggest similes for these and write them on the board, too. (*example: I was so excited, I bounced up and down like a big ball*). Write several examples on the board. Young children need a good list of words and phrases at hand when beginning to write.

Continuing the discussion, have the children expand these sentences: My hands shook like a leaf in the wind when _____. Write several of these on the board, too.

Drafting:

Instruct students to use the ideas on the board and their own ideas to tell about a time when they were very frightened or very happy or excited. The sample sentences can begin their stories but then they must add more.

A possible format might be:

I bounced up and down like a big ball when I saw the bicycle my grandma gave me for my birthday. First we _____. After that I _____. That's why I had such a good time that day.

Allow the children plenty of time to complete their stories. This might take place over more than one day. Invite students to illustrate their stories and share them with each other.

Revision and publishing:

Within a few days, meet with each child and suggest details they could add to their stories. For example if they mentioned eating cake at a birthday party, ask them what kind of cake it was and how it tasted. Have them add one or two sentences with such details to their stories. Have them recopy their story to include the new details.

Once the story is complete (nothing is "perfect" at this age) all the children's stories can be gathered into a "book". Three-hole punch the pages and place them in a bradded folder and place in the class library. Or put all the stories up on the bulletin board.

OPTION FOR PRE-K AND K:

This takes time, and sometimes volunteers, but it can be very worth it. As children draw a picture of that time they were happy or afraid, adults circulate and have children dictate their stories. These “scribes” then write down the children’s words to be placed with their pictures and made into a “book” or put up on the bulletin board.

WORDS AND DEFINITIONS FOR PUTTING INTO A CROSS-WORD:

Erupted: blew up like a volcano

Invitation: a card or note asking you to come to a party

Instructions: a list of things that tell you how to do something

Thunderous: a very loud rumbling noise

Atomic: exploding energy like the sun with a lot of heat

Disappear: when you can’t see something anymore.

Exhausting: doing something that makes you very tired.

(words should also be placed in a “box” so children can use the list to match where the words go in the puzzle)