

Activity Reading Literature: *The Mitten*



Reading literature: *The Mitten*, illustrated and adapted by Jan Brett

Purpose

To help a child develop a deep understanding of a story, using an inquiry-based model.

Material

The Mitten by Jan Brett.

Globe or Puzzle Map of Europe.

Music player and Ukrainian music.

Age

- 5–6 years old

Direct Aim

- To demonstrate an understanding of the text by answering questions, providing key details about characters, settings, and major events.
- To recognize common types of texts, to name the author and illustrator, and to compare and contrast the experiences of characters in familiar stories.
- To describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear.
- To investigate unknown words in a text.

Indirect Aims

- To develop critical thinking and analytical skills.
- To encourage a love for reading and literature.

Control of Error

- The teacher.

Vocabulary

- Author.
- Illustrator.
- Folktale.
- Words in the text.

Activity Notes

- This activity may be a small group or individual presentation.
- This activity can be presented with any high-quality story.



Ukraine on the Puzzle Map of Europe

Presentation

- Invite a small group of children to join you at circle time to learn about the story *The Mitten*. For Part 1 of the activity, the globe or puzzle map, music, and music player will already be at circle.

Part 1: Discussing the Book Before Reading It

- Show the children the book. Invite them to discuss what they see on the front and back covers. Ask the children what they can learn from looking at the illustration on the front cover. Prompt and support discussion by asking questions such as, “What season is it?” “Where are they?” “Who do you think is going to be involved in the story?” Identify the animals in the illustration with the children. Ask the children about the title: “Why do you think this story is called *The Mitten*?”
- Tell the children that Jan Brett is both the author and the illustrator of *The Mitten*. Show the children where the author and illustrator are named on the book. Explain that Jan Brett is an artist and that her favorite part of telling a story is drawing the pictures. Jan Brett also travels all over the world to visit the places she writes about. (Learn more about Jan Brett on her website: <http://janbrett.com/biography.htm>)
- Introduce the story of *The Mitten* as a Ukrainian folktale. Explain to the children that a folktale is story that has been told over and over again in a community for generations, until the story becomes part of that community’s tradition. Discuss that Jan Brett adapted this folktale, meaning that she rewrote it for children today.
- Place the globe or Puzzle Map of Europe in front of the children. Invite one of the children to help you find Ukraine on the globe or map. Discuss that Ukraine is found on the continent of Europe.
- Invite the children to listen to Ukrainian music on the player to add another sensorial dimension to their discovery of Ukraine.

Part 2: Reading the Book for the First Time

- Show great excitement as you let the children know that today you will read the story of *The Mitten*.
- Read the story with enthusiasm and animation. Show the children the illustrations as you read, but do not stop to discuss the story or illustrations during this first reading. The first time a story is read should be for enjoyment and to allow the children to listen to the words of the story and to form their own interpretations based on the words and illustrations.
- After the first reading, engage in a discussion with the children to identify the characters, settings, and major events of the story.
- Invite the children in turn to examine each illustrated page.
- Discuss the relationship between the illustrations on the page and the moment in the story that the illustrations depict. For example, ask the children what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts.
- Continue in this manner giving each child an opportunity to offer her/his thoughts about an illustration.
- If the children are still interested, discuss unfamiliar and/or interesting vocabulary in the story. For example, words like “burrowed” and phrases like “nosed his way in.” (See textbox for additional ideas.)
- On another day, engage in a discussion involving the identification of words that have multiple meanings, such as “mole,” “lumber,” and “swell.” Ask the children to read these words together. You could write these words on label cards for the children as you go along.
- In addition, work with the children to identify words that provide a sensorial impression, such as “kickers,” “diggers,” and “glinty talons.” Encourage the children to imagine and describe what they see when they hear these words.
- Tell the children that they are now free to read the book on their own.



Teacher reading the story with enthusiasm

Vocabulary to Explore

Here are some ideas for interesting words and phrases from *The Mitten* to discuss with the children:

“mole,” “kickers,” “snuffling,”
“jostled,” “prickles,”
“commotion,” “swooped,”
“grumbled,” “diggers,”
“waft,” “drowsy,” “muzzle,”
“lumbered,” “plumped,”
“swelled,” “bulged,”
“silhouetted,” “safe and
sound,” “glinty talons,” and
“gave him the thumb.”

Grandmothers Around the World

Ukrainian: Baba

Chinese: Nai-Nai

Dutch, German: Oma

English: Nana

French: Grand-mere

Greek: Yaya

Italian: Nonna

Japanese: Obaasan

Spanish: Abuela

Tagalog: Lola

Welsh: Nain

Yiddish: Bubbe



Teacher asking the children “sharing” questions

Part 3: Reading the Book Again

- Share with the children that you will read the story of *The Mitten* to them again.
- Ask the children to focus on the meaning of the words and the ideas in the text while they listen to the story.
- After you have read the story, discuss the meaning of “Baba,” the Ukrainian word for grandmother. Ask the children to think of other names for the word “grandmother.” In the same manner, discuss specific ideas in the story. For example, discuss that the mole discovered that the white mitten was cozy and warm when he burrowed inside of it. Ask the children to describe places that are “cozy and warm” for them. Continue in the same manner with other words and ideas from the story.
- If the children are still interested, further their understanding of the story by asking “sharing” questions, prompting and supporting them to share their ideas about the story. For example, ask each child in turn, “What do you think about the story?” You can also ask simple leading questions such as, “Look at Nicki’s clothes in this illustration. What do you think about when you see Nicki’s clothes?” It is important that you accept all answers provided by the children. This is the time for the children to tell you what they think and how they interpret the story. The children may say that Nicki looks warm in the clothes, that the clothes look old fashioned, or that they look too big.
- To encourage the children to learn to analyze and vocalize their ideas, follow up by asking, “Why do you think Nicki’s clothes look big?” They may say the clothes are handmade or hand-me-downs; or they may refer to the rural setting and say that there are not many stores around so his clothes have to last a long time. Again, accept all answers. If an idea seems incorrect, you may simply say, “What an interesting idea. I hadn’t thought of that,” and move on.
- Tell the children that they are now free to work with the book on their own.

Extensions

Acting Out Part of the Story

- Invite the children to act out their favorite parts of the story.

Drawing Images from *The Mitten*

- Invite the children to draw a picture in their language journals of Nicki finding his lost mitten.

Interpreting the Story

- Invite the children to join you to work further with the story *The Mitten*.
- Read the story to the children again and further explore its meaning by asking interpretive questions. For instance, “Was Baba correct in thinking Nicki would lose his mitten?” “What do you think would have happened if Nicki had not found his mitten?” “What do you think Baba’s reaction would have been when she saw both of Nicki’s mittens when he got home?” and “What happened to the animals after they flew out of the mitten?” Continue in the same manner with other interpretive questions.
- Invite the children to draw a picture of Nicki explaining the new size of his mitten.

Evaluating the Text

- Invite the children to evaluate what they have learned in the story.
- Ask questions such as, “If you were Nicki, what would you have done after you lost your mitten?” Another example is, “If you were an animal in the white mitten and it was becoming very crowded, would you continue to try to make room for more animals to join you?” And, “Do you think Baba wondered why one of the mittens was so big when Nicki returned home?”
- Invite the children to write their responses using the Small Movable Alphabet or by writing in their language journals. Encourage them to expand upon their answer and explain their reasons.



Drawing images from *The Mitten*



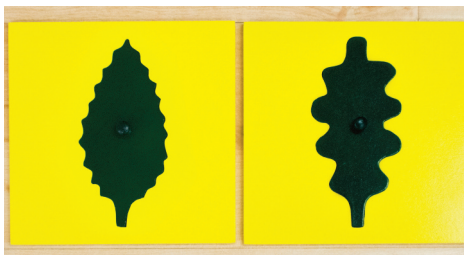
Evaluating the text



Writing about the text



Connect the literature activity to practical life with a knitting activity



Invite the children to work with the Botany Cabinet to identify leaves from trees in Ukraine

Writing About the Text

- Invite the children to write about the story.
- Give each child a Book Report template (see NAMC's Curriculum Support Material).
- Point to each section on the template as you read it, showing them where they will write the title of the book, the author's name, and the illustrator's name.
- Show the children where they will write a brief summary of what happened in the book and where they will draw a picture from the book.
- Finally, show them where they can share their opinions about the book.
- Invite the children to complete the book reports, storing them in their folders when they are done.

Cross-Curricular Activities for *The Mitten*

Practical Life — Knitting

- Invite the children to learn how to knit a scarf or mittens.

Geography — Singing and Dancing

- Invite the children to learn to sing traditional Ukrainian folk songs and to dance a traditional Ukrainian folk dance.

Sciences — Botany

- Invite the children to work with the Botany Cabinet and/or a set of Nomenclature Cards to identify major forest species in Ukraine: pine, spruce, fir, oak, beech, hornbeam, ash, white locust, birch, alder.
- Invite the children to draw examples of the leaves.

Sciences — Zoology

- Invite the children to investigate the typical size and weight of each animal listed in *The Mitten*. Assist the children in creating a scale representation of the animals.