

Minnesota Writing Project Demonstration Lesson

Bag Stories

Grades: 3-4, but can be easily adapted to younger students. Adaptation for older students using different books and scheduling considerations should be possible.

Length of time: Approximately a month as each student will take home the activity once overnight.

Objectives:

- To get students, including the reluctant, to write
- To create and contribute to a learning community project
- To share their writing orally if they wish
- To create a personal experience by writing and illustrating
- To make a writing connection to family (or other thematic unit)
- To use descriptive words in writing
- To write using a different perspective (optional)
- (To take responsibility of taking home and returning bag story)
- (To express creatively other things for Gorky)

Summary of activity:

1. Introduce activity:

Introduce Gorky to the class. Where do you think he comes from?
What are some things you know about gorillas? Etc.

Gorky is going to be a part of our writing for the next month.

Everyone will have a chance to take home Gorky for an evening;
some will have a chance to have him for the weekend. We'll take
care of scheduling later this morning.

Using this spiral-bound sketching pad, you will write about and
illustrate what Gorky, you and possibly your family do this evening.

Maybe there's a special visitor. Maybe it's your birthday. Maybe
you have a chance to go to the movie or library. Tell us about your
evening together! Add illustrations, too.

1. To get started, read Taxi Dog by Debra and Sal Barracca.

“His name is Maxi and he rides in a taxi with his beloved Jim all day!

Maxi, a homeless mutt, has fended for himself in the city until one day he meets taxi driver Jim who invites him to come home and live with him. He can hardly believe his good luck, and from that point on, he and Jim share their adventures. They revel in the sights and sounds of the city: Maxi tells of rushing a young couple to the hospital, in a frantic effort to beat the stork; of the day when two circus clowns and a chimp jump into their cab; and about the times when Maxi puts on his Groucho Marx nose, mustache, and glasses for the entertainment of the back seat passengers.

These and other adventures are brilliantly depicted in Mark Buehner’s stunning and joyful paintings of a dog’s-eye view of city life.”

--Taken from book description

3. After reading, ask students if they have any comments or questions. Make the schedule for the month. Post the schedule. First student takes the bag home.
4. The next day, the student may like to read their entry during the community time first thing in the morning. A round of applause for sharing and returning Gorky!

Materials:

- Gorky (or other stuffed interesting critter)
- Sturdy bag
- Colors or markers (include in bag)
- Spiral-bound sketch book which fits in bag

Assessment:

Students write a self-reflection about this activity. This could be included in their portfolio. Being reflective about a more open activity...enjoyment, etc. Take a picture of each student with their contributing page and Gorky.

Extension:

- What other stories are currently available which would fit with grade literature and thematic units?

For younger students:

Flat Stanley by Jeff Brown

A Day in the Life of Murphy by Alice Provensen__

Don't Take Your Snake for a Stroll by Karin Ireland_

Bigmama's by Donald Crews

For upper elementary students:

Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar__

For middle and high school students:
Traveling Man: A Journey of Ibn Battuta, 1325-1354 by James Rumford
The Traveler: A Magical Journey by Daniel Page Schallau, told by James Keller

Helpful websites:

- “Looking Critically at Picture Books” by Carol Hurst
www.carolhurst.com/subjects/criticalpicture.html
- ***“Featured Subject: Picture Books in the Classroom, PreK-9” by Carol Hurst
www.carolhurst.com/newsletters/21newsletters.html
- ***“Picture Books for Older Readers”
Sophisticated, complex picture books are a resource waiting to be used by middle and high school teachers. This webpage links with the categories provided.
www.srv.net/gale/older.html
- ***“Children’s Literature in the Middle and Secondary Classroom” by Bill Young
www.usd.edu/engl/young97/ar1.html
- ***“Picture Books Can Help Middle Schoolers Write Better” by Ruth Culham
www.nwrel.org/nwreport/aug00/picture.html

**These articles may be informative about using picture books in the upper grades.