

For Educators
(at school and at home)

social studies

mathematics

social themes

thinking skills

professional resources

social studies

community helpers – If you’re studying community helpers, from fire fighters to zookeepers, Cat Up A Tree has them all. Of course none of them can fix Nana Quimby’s special problem, but teachers and parents have said that Nana’s phone calls are a great way to introduce what these helpers really do provide.

Go to HYPERLINK "http://nancypolette.com/LitGuidesText/catupatree.htm" <http://nancypolette.com/LitGuidesText/catupatree.htm> for Nancy’s literature guide “Discovering Community Helpers with Cat Up A Tree.”

transportation – In The Three Silly Girls Grubb three silly sisters miss the school bus one morning, and find themselves in big trouble. “How did you get to school today?” is a perennial favorite question for primary classrooms, and it can generate activities including lessons about bus or pedestrian safety and bus graphs for math.

maps and directions - Charles, the small, pampered dog from Charles of the Wild, follows streets east, north, south, and west to find high adventure in a big city park. A primary classroom teacher once shared that she and her class drew a map to help Charles find his way home, and they learned about the points of the compass in the process.

prejudice and superstition - In Father Sun, Mother Moon, a stranger arrives in a fearful village where a unique superstition that has guided the villagers’ lives for longer than anyone can remember. Although it seems a silly, harmless belief, it can lead to some important discussion about how prejudice and superstition change people’s lives, and more importantly, how overcoming them can set you free.

mathematics

counting – Children of all ages have challenged John’s counting skills by checking the math in his illustrations for Cat Up A Tree. When read aloud, Cat Up A Tree provides a raucous way of counting by 5’s when the audience is encouraged to “shout out” the number of cats on each page. To support younger children’s counting, it helps for the reader to “do the math” by counting up to the number of cats – “5,10,15...and ____!” to help listeners to the correct number. For cozy, at home read togethers, pointing to and counting each cat works well.

concepts – **Big, bigger, biggest!** For the very young listeners, sizes from small to big, bigger and biggest can be explored as the Quimby family tries ever larger

solutions to take care of their absurd animals problems in Mouse in the House. And of course the three sisters in The Three Silly Girls Grubb illustrate this concept as well.

How much is a dozen? What better way to teach the concept of dozen and half dozen than with the jelly doughnuts in The Three Silly Girls Grubb? Who do you suppose packs those Grubb girls' lunches anyway?

social themes – Even silly characters can find themselves dealing with serious matters including naughtiness, frustration, bullying, and conflict. Ugly Boy Bobby, the Grubb sisters, and Charles discover that there are consequences for testing their boundaries. But they all end up safe, and readers can feel comfortable living vicariously through the characters. In Can't Catch Me the Ice Cube is the personification of selfishness and carelessness – He comes to a bad end. But the Boy in the story only does a naughty thing. The reader imagines that there's going to be a consequence for the Boy's behavior, but everything will turn out all right for him in the end.

Learning a lesson and becoming civilized could be rather dreary results if they were presented didactically...One of the best articles on dealing with social themes by using picture books can be found online at HYPERLINK "http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/newsletter/11_2NL_1.asp" www.responsiveclassroom.org/newsletter/11_2NL_1.asp It's the spring 1999 online issue of the Responsive Classroom Newsletter, and the article is by Carol Otis Hurst and Rebecca Otis. It includes excerpts from Friends and Relations: Using Literature with Social Themes k-2 by Carol Otis Hurst and Rebecca Otis (2000).

thinking skills – Using read alouds with accompanying discussion is a class or home activity that lends itself to children's **prediction** and **problem solving**. Here are a few questions to try –

For Charles of the Wild after the story is finished -

What other adventures might Charles and his new friend have in the city?

For Can't Catch Me after the story is finished -

Will the Boy finally get his lemonade? Should he?

For The Three Silly Girls Grubb after reading p. 26 -

What will Ugly Boy Bobby do now??

For The Finest Christmas Tree after reading p. 14 -

What do you think the Tuttles will decide?

For Father Sun, Mother Moon after reading the story –

How would you feel if you could only wear white clothes – shirts, pants, skirt, socks – everything?

For Cat Up A Tree after reading the stories -

How would you get a cat (or 40 cats!) out of a tree?

For Mouse in the House after reading the stories –

What would you have done if you had animal problems like Nana Quimby's?

What better way to teach **comparing and contrasting** than with new, silly versions of old familiar tales? Three Silly Girls Grubb (Three Billy Goats Gruff) and Can't Catch Me (The Gingerbread Man) provide new twists on classic stories.

A discussion of Charles's two friends – the lady at 9 Belknap Street and the man with two coats is another interesting exercise in comparison and contrast.

A venn diagram to point out similarities and differences is a tried and true way for students to begin sharpening their critical thinking skills. Following up with an interactive writing assignment (see professional resources) can help younger students begin to understand how to construct a written response to a reading assignment.

professional resources to help you – The web is filled with articles and books on reading instruction and other education topics. There's simply no time to read, digest and utilize them all!

Here are a few proven sources to help guide you in using children's literature in your classroom or your home –

**Visit your local school or public library!
It's the best resource around, and it's free!**

Carol Otis Hurst and Rebecca Otis–

Friends and Relations: Using Literature with Social Themes K-2. Responsive Classroom Series. Northeast Foundation. 2000.

Picture Books in the Math Curriculum Prekindergarten through Second Grade. SRA/McGraw Hill, 1996.

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell–

Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children, Heinemann, 1996.

Interactive Writing: How Language and Literacy Come Together. Heinemann, 1999. (with Andrea McCarrier)

Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing about Reading K-8, Heinemann, 2006.

Janet Allen -

Yellow Brick Road: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4-12. Stenhouse Publishers, 2000.

Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12. Stenhouse Publishers, 1999.

