

# Teaching With and Through Children's Literature

~A Resource of Teaching Ideas Compiled in Conjunction with  
a Children's Literature Book Club for Teacher Candidates~

Authored by:

Claire Cameron, Lindsay Dolmage, Madisen Johnston, Jemanica Lapensee,  
Kirsten Solymar, Emily Speedie, Meagan Wills  
with Dr. Tara-Lynn Scheffel

Nipissing University, North Bay, Canada

The teaching ideas shared in this resource were drawn from a research project that brought together seven teacher candidates and one teacher educator as part of a Children's Literature Book Club. As part of this book club, selected children's literature was rotated through the mail across two summers (7 storybooks per summer). Each storybook included a reflective journal for teacher candidates to share impressions, reactions and ideas for using the storybook.

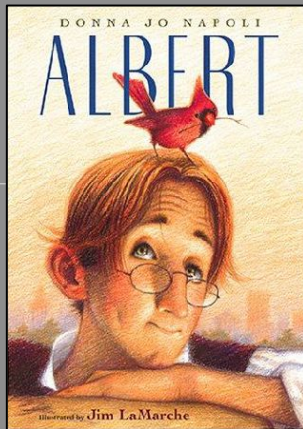
Please note that the ideas shared here are not intended to be all encompassing of the possibilities for teaching with and through literature for each of the selected storybooks. Rather, we share our collective ideas as we learned from one another.

This resource includes teaching ideas for the following storybooks:

1. *Albert* by Donna Jo Napoli
2. *The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Pinkwater
3. *Frederick* by Leo Lionni
4. *The Little Yellow Leaf* by Carin Berger
5. *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae
6. *The Mitten* by Candace Christiansen
7. *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi
8. *Harvey Potter's Balloon Farm* by Jerdine Nolen
9. *Ish* by Peter A. Reynolds
10. *Journey* by Aaron Becker
11. *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey
12. *No One But You* by Douglas Wood
13. *Skippyjon Jones in Mummy Trouble* by Judy Schachner
14. *The Stamp Collector* by Jennifer Lanthier

Please feel free to use, adapt and share with fellow educators!

To learn more about our children's literature book club project, please read our article in *Reading Horizons*:  
[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol57/iss1/2/](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol57/iss1/2/)



# Albert

By Donna Jo Napoli

“Then one sunny day, Albert stuck his hand out the window, and the next thing he knew, a twig appeared in it.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- Why wouldn't Albert go outside?
- What noises do you hear in your community?
- Have you ever overcome an obstacle? Who helped you?
- Have you ever helped an animal?
- What are some ways we can help others?
- What does it mean to show compassion?
- What does it mean to show responsibility for another?
- How did the author come up with the idea for this story?

### Create a Timeline

Create a timeline of Albert's journey as he overcame his fear and helped the cardinals.

### Bird Study

- Find out more about the life cycle of cardinals.
- Observe eggs as they incubate and hatch into birds.

### Depicting Emotions

Study Albert's expressions and the emotions they reveal. For example, look at the shape of his mouth, eyes, and eyebrows when:

- He is cutting pictures out of magazines.
- The cardinals start to build nest on his hands.
- The cats come after eggs.

Practice what you've learned by trying your own character drawings.

**Pictures First:** Try reading the pictures of the book first. Imagine what the story is about based on the pictures.

### Pencil Sketches

Look more closely at the pencil sketch technique used by the illustrator. Pay attention to the direction of the strokes and how smudging is used to create shadows. Try using these techniques as you draw about a time when you overcame an obstacle or fear.

Related Book Recommendation  
*The Little Yellow Leaf* by Carin Berger



# The Big Orange Spot

By Daniel Pinkwater

“My house is me and I am it. My house is where I like to be and it looks like all my dreams.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- Have you ever been laughed at for being different? What did you do?
- Have you ever changed something about yourself for others?
- Which house did you like best? Why?
- What are your dreams?
- Where did the bird get the paint? Why did the bird drop the paint?
- What other ways can we celebrate difference?

### Decorating Rules

Create a before and after list of decorating rules for the people who lived on Mr. Plumbean's street.

### Vocabulary

Take a closer look at the meaning behind the sayings used by the neighbours:

- “Plumbean has popped his cork, flipped his wig, blown his stack, and dropped his stopper”
- “He's got bees in his bonnet, bats in his belfry, and knots in his noodle!”

### Create Your Own House!

Design a house that showcases your dreams. Explain your design.

You might also try using:

- art materials to build your house
- SketchUp to create a digital house design
  - <http://www.sketchup.com>

**Bulletin Board Idea:** Create a street with all of the houses and the phrase from above, “My house is me and I am it...”

### Google Maps

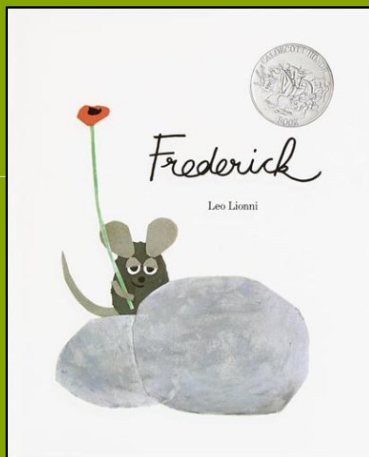
Use Google Maps to find streets that look the same and streets that look different. Can you find your house?

### Letter-Writing

Write a letter to Mr. Plumbean to persuade him to paint over the orange spot. Or, write a letter to Mr. Plumbean's neighbours about the benefits of having different houses.

### Related Book Recommendation

*Purple, Green and Yellow* by Robert Munsch



# Frederick

By Leo Lionni

“Then they remembered what Frederick has said about sun rays and colors and words. ‘What about *your* supplies, Frederick?’ they asked.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature



### For Reflection

How did Frederick use the supplies he gathered? Do you agree with what he did? Why or why not?

How do you help your family?

What does it mean to work?

How are the mice the same but still different?

How do memories help us feel better during sad times?

### Interview

Take the role of Frederick, or one of his family members. Be prepared to answer questions about your role in the family.

### Research

Find out more about the life of a mouse (e.g. where they live, what they eat, how they adapt to seasons, etc.). Think about how you will share what you learn.

Find out how other animals adapt to the seasons.

### Who Are You?

Use Leo Lionni's paper collage technique to create a piece of artwork that reflects who you are or want to be. What are your “supplies” or special talents/strengths?

**Home-Community Connection:** Invite a storyteller to talk about the tradition of storytelling and to share stories with the class.

### What Do You Imagine?

Illustrate Frederick's poem. What do you see as he describes the sun's rays, colours and words?

Read the back cover. Illustrate a dream you have of a happy time.

### Become a Poet

Perform Frederick's poems.

Write your own poem about the seasons. Think about what inspired Frederick and look at the world around you for ideas.

### Book/Movie Recommendation

Watch the movie *A Bug's Life*. How is this movie similar or different to the story of Frederick? Read other books by Leo Lionni.



# The Little Yellow Leaf

By Carin Berger

*“I’m not ready yet, thought the Little Yellow Leaf as a riot of fiery leaves chased and swirled round the tree. Not yet, thought the Little Yellow Leaf... as the afternoon sun beckoned and teased.”*

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

Why was the leaf afraid to let go of the tree?

Think of a time when you were afraid to do something. Who helped you?

- e.g. First day of Kindergarten

What do you like to do in Autumn? What about the other seasons?

What is friendship? What does it mean to be a friend?

### Let's Write!

Write about the journey that the two leaves took as they “danced off and away” at the end of the story. Where will the wind take them (e.g. through a park, to the CN Tower, etc.)?

Write about an adventure you are about to begin (e.g. beginning a new grade). What are you excited about? What are you worried about?

### Acrostic Poem

Create an acrostic poem to share what you know about the Little Yellow Leaf.

### Create a Collage

Use the illustrations as inspiration to make your own collage! Here are some ideas to get started:

- Look at how the illustrator hid newspaper clippings in the pages
- Look at a specific phrase and how the illustrator used the words to inspire the picture – e.g. “as the afternoon sun beckoned and teased”

**Science Connection:** Find out more about the reasons for our changing seasons. Consider why leaves are so vibrant in colour during Autumn. What else can you learn about the seasons?

### Expressions of Encouragement

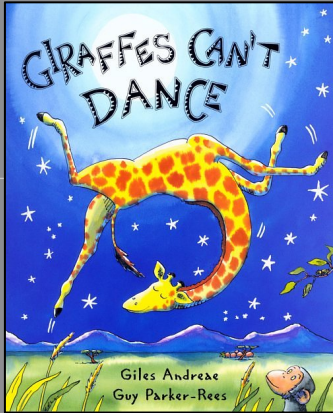
Create a dance to represent the story. Consider the storyline, the changing seasons, and the ways you would show encouragement to the Little Yellow Leaf.

Think about words you would use to encourage The Little Yellow Leaf. Using Autumn colours, create an art piece using leaf rubbings and add your words of encouragement around the leaves.

### Related Book Recommendations

*The Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert

*Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* by Patty Lovell



# Giraffes Can't Dance

By Giles Andreae

“But sometimes when you're different you just need a different song.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- Have you ever felt different like Gerald? Did anyone cheer you up? Who?
- What is something you have had to overcome? How did you overcome it?
- Have you ever had to stand up for yourself? What did you do?
- What makes you unique?

### Rhyme and Alliteration

Take a closer look at the use of alliteration and rhyme in the story. Here are some examples:

- “The warthogs started waltzing and the rhinos rock ‘n’ rolled. The lions danced a tango that was elegant and bold.”
- “The chimps all did a cha-cha with a very Latin feel, and eight baboons then teamed up for a splendid Scottish reel.”

### Class Book

Create an All About Me book with a page for every student. Share facts, pictures and words that represent you.

### Words of Encouragement

On the day of the Jungle Dance, Gerald felt sad because he couldn't dance. Write him some friendly words of encouragement. What can you say to cheer him up?

### Let's Dance!

Learn the different dances performed in the book. Can you think of any other types of dance? Look them up on YouTube.

Find some music you love and make up your own dance!

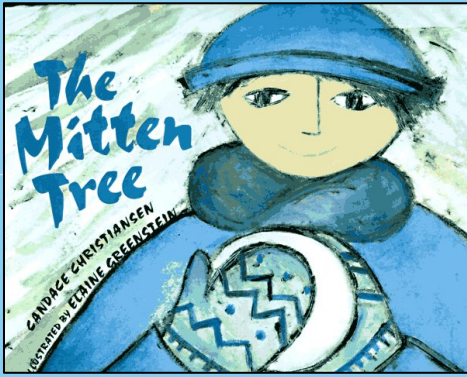
**Animated Version:** Watch the characters dancing as you listen to the story of Gerald on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/33829782>

### Talent Show

It's time to show off your talents! Show everyone something you are good at doing. Or bring in an item that reflects your talents and tell us all about it.

### Related Book Recommendations

*Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* by Patty Lovell  
*The Crayon Box That Talked* by Shane Derolf



# The Mitten

By Candace Christiansen

“Each day now as Sarah went to the mailbox, she watched for children without mittens.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

Why did Sarah want to make mittens for someone she didn't know? Why did she keep it a secret?

Do you think the boy with the blue mittens saw Sarah? Why or why not?

Who leaves the yarn for Sarah? Why do they do this?

What is kindness? How can you show kindness to others?

### Random Act of Kindness

Do something nice for someone without them knowing. Share what you did and how it made you feel.

### Time to Write

Write a letter to Sarah to thank her for the mittens. Is there anything you want to ask her?

Write what happens after the story ends. Do you think the students will ever find out it was Sarah? If you found out, what would you do for Sarah?

### Create a Mitten Tree!

Create your own mitten tree as a class. Here are some ideas:

- Use construction paper/fabric to design your mitten. Sew the sides together with yarn. On your mitten, write what you can do to make the world a kinder place.
- Drawn a mitten tree using pastels. Surround the tree with words that represent kindness.
- Collect toys or winter clothes to put under a classroom tree and donate to those who need it.

**Get Your School Community Involved:** Create a flyer inviting other students in your school to bring in donations for your mitten tree. Keep track of donations with a mitten thermometer.

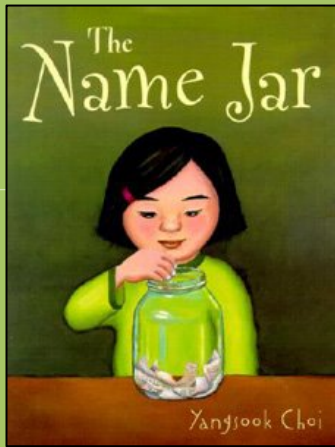
### Get Creative!

Sarah's mittens were a homemade gift. Think about a homemade gift you can make for someone in your family.

Learn to knit! Try making a pair of mittens.

### Related Book Recommendations

*Have You Filled Your Bucket Today?* By Carol McCloud; *Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister; *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein; *Something From Nothing* by Phoebe Gilman; *The Art of Being Kind* by Stefan Einhorn



# The Name Jar

By Yangsook Choi

“Here the moon is up, but there the sun is up. No matter how far apart we are and no matter how different America is from Korea, you’ll always be my Unhei.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

What name would you put in the jar for Unhei? Why?

What do you like about your name? If you could choose another name, what would it be?

How did Joey show friendship?

What makes you different?

Why was Kim’s Market familiar to Unhei?

What would it be like to move to a different country?

### Create a Name Jar

Create a name jar for a class pet or stuffed animal. Look up the meaning of each name before putting it in the jar and explain why it would be a good fit.

### Change Names for a Day

Pick a new name for a day. Write it on a nametag to help everyone remember. At the end of the day, think about how it felt to be called a different name.

### Make Your Own Stamp!

Unhei’s name means Grace. Look up what your name means. Make your own name stamp.

**Home-School Connection: Bring in an item from your culture to share with the class.**

### Learn About Korea

Find out more about Korea. Learn about the culture, climate, food, and language. What other interesting facts did you find? Think about how to share what you learned.

### Letter-Writing

Write a letter to Unhei about why she should not change her name.

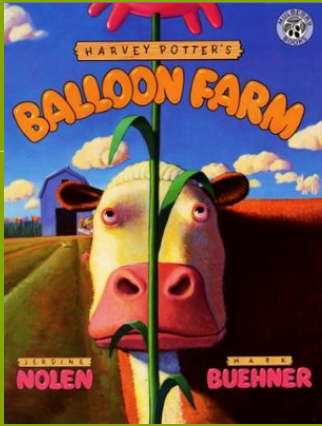
Pretend you have moved to another country like Korea and write a letter to your Grandma.

Write to a pen-pal in another country. Learn about what is similar and different to where you live.

### Related Book Recommendations

*Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes; *My Name is Yoon* by Helen Recorvits;  
*Suki’s Kimono* by Chieri Uegaki





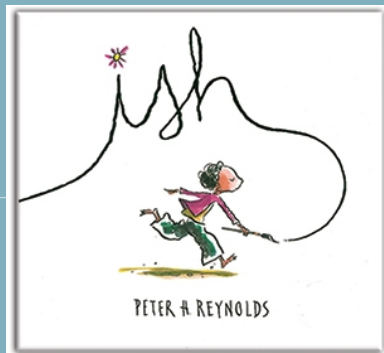
# Harvey Potter's Balloon Farm

By Jerdine Nolen

“No one knew exactly how he did it. Some folks say that it wasn't real – that it was magic. But I know what I saw, and those were real, actual balloons growing out of the plain ole ground!”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

| For Reflection  | Create a Balloon Farm!   |
|---|--|
| <p>What would you grow if you had a farm with magical powers?</p> <p>If you could replace one vegetable on earth with balloons, what would it be?</p> <p>Why did the government care about Harvey's balloon farm? How would you test the balloons to see if they meet government standards?</p> <p>Why did Wheezle Mayfield not like the balloon farm?</p> <p>What would you have done to try and find out Harvey's secret?</p> <p>What made Harvey special/unique? What about you?</p> | <p>Create your own balloon farm. Label the shapes and colours of your balloons. What creative names did you use? Explain/show how you grow your balloons.</p>        |
|   | <p>Growing Plants</p>  |
|   | <p>Find out more about how plants grow. Use what you learn to try growing your own plant.</p>  |
|   | <p><b>Home-Community Connection: Learn more about what farmers do.</b></p>   |
|   | <p>I Spy</p>   |
|   | <p>Find the page when Harvey Potter looks into the sycamore tree. Find the animals hidden in the tree's shadow. Investigate the other pages for hidden features.</p> |
|   | <p>Sequel</p>  |
|   | <p>Write a sequel to the book. Tell us about the woman's farm. What methods does she use? How are they different from Harvey's?</p>                                  |
| <p>Vocabulary</p>   |  |
| <p>Find out more about the Southern expressions used in the story. Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “plain ole ground”</li> <li>• “something in me was a-hankering to know”</li> </ul>  |  |



# Ish

By Peter A. Reynolds

“Ramon loved to draw. Anytime. Anything. Anywhere.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- What is something you love to do?
- How can you help people feel better about themselves if they are upset?
- What would you do if something said something mean to you?
- What positive words/characteristics can you use to describe another person?
- What is bullying?
- How can you turn a negative into a positive?

### Meanings of Laughter

Explore the different meanings behind the ways we laugh. For example, a laugh that is hurtful vs. a laugh that is joyful.

### Self-Image Mirror

- Use a mirror to share positive self-esteem messages to yourself.
- Stand behind a mirror and tell the person looking in the mirror something positive.

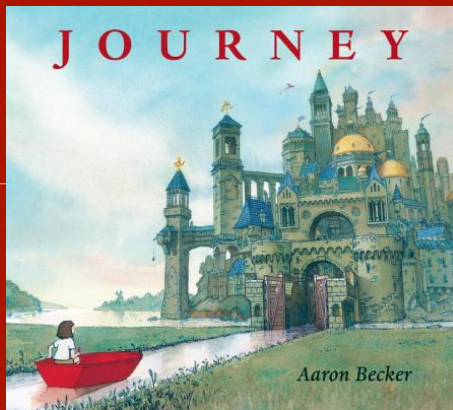
### You Can Be An Artist Too!

- Draw a picture of a chair. How is your chair both different and the same in comparison to your classmates?
- Learn about the importance of colour and hues when creating works of art.
- Use watercolours to create your own “Ish” picture.
- Draw squiggles on a piece of paper. Trade your paper with someone else. What “Ish” drawing do they see in your squiggles?

**School to Community Connection:** Invite a guest speaker to talk about bullying (e.g. Anthony Mclean - <http://www.iengage.ca>)

### Other “Ish” Ideas

- Ramon found that thinking “ish-ly” allowed his ideas to flow freely. What “ish” things can do you? Here are some ideas to get you started:
- Write an “Ish” poem or song
  - Create an “Ish” dance
  - Keep an “Ish” journal with all your drawing and writing ideas.



# Journey

By Aaron Becker

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- What was the significance of the bird in the story?  
 What about the blue lantern?
- What happens after this story ends?
- What is imagination?
- What is symbolism?
- What is the role of the knight in this story? How does this compare to other stories you know?
- If you had a magic crayon, what would you draw?

### Use of Colour

- Take a closer look at the way the illustrator uses colour throughout the story. For example:
- Why did the author use the colour red for the crayon? What does red represent? (e.g. love, strength, energy, danger).
  - What do duller and brighter colours indicate throughout the story?

### Making Inferences

Use individual pages to infer what is happening in this wordless storybook.

### Write the Story!

Individually or with a partner, write the story (or dialogue) that goes with the illustrations. You might also select individual pages to write the accompanying words. When you're finished, consider how your ideas are similar or different to others and why.

Here are some more ideas:

- Make a new book cover for the story.
- Try writing your own adventure story.

**Castle Search:** Try to find the real life places that inspired the ones in the book. To get started, learn more about Aaron Becker and his memorable journeys (see back jacket flap).

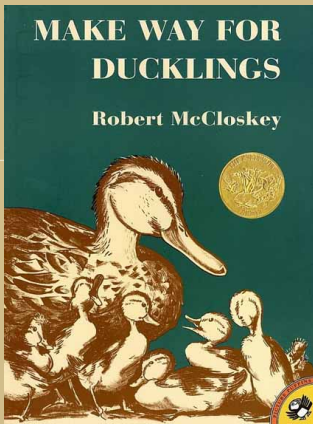
### Create a Wordless Book!

Create your own wordless book! Where will you travel? What adventures will you go on? Consider adding a map to show your travels and what you saw along the way.

Write a sequel to this wordless book by creating the pages that show what happens after the book ends.

### Related Book Recommendations

*The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney; *Bluebird* by Bob Staake; *Black and White* by David Macaulay;  
*The Man With the Violin* by Kathy Stinson



# Make Way for Ducklings

By Robert McCloskey

“Mr. and Mrs. Mallard were looking for a place to live. But every time Mr. Mallard saw what looked like a nice place, Mrs. Mallard said it was no good.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

- What type of community did Mrs. Mallard want to live in?
- What were Mrs. Mallards' conditions for a good neighbourhood?
- What type of community do you want to live in?
- Where is the best place for ducks to live?
- What is family important?
- How can you help others in your community?

### Rhyme

The duckling's names all rhyme and begin with the letters J-Q. Using this example, what other rhyming activities come to mind?

### Mapping Your Own Story

Map out a similar journey as the book but this time, use landmarks around your town.

### Your Perfect Home

Describe your "perfect" home. Where is it located? Why do you want to live there?

**Home-Community Connection:** Invite a police officer to your classroom to talk about traffic safety.

### Observe

Bring ducks to class or try hatching eggs. Keep an observation journal of what you see.

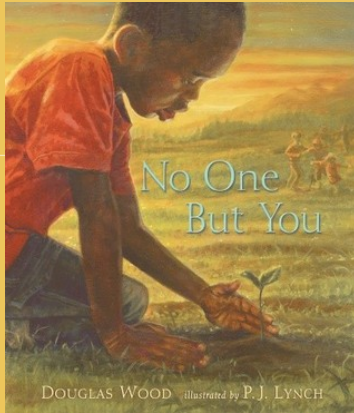
### Research

Learn more about the city where the story takes place.

Research other statues around the world and how they were inspired. Have any others statues been inspired by children's books?

Find out more about where ducks live, how they get their food, their natural predators, and life cycle, etc.

Learn more about the life cycles of others animals.



# No One But You

By Douglas Wood

“But the best things, the most important ones of all, are the ones no one can teach you or show you or explain. No one can discover them but you.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

Have you every discovered something new?  
What was it? What did it feel like?

What is something new you can try doing?

How can you help take care of the world?

Why do people have different reactions to the same experiences?

### Describing Words

Take a look at how the author's words paint a picture for the reader. For example:

- “And who else but you will roll a glistening dewdrop from a rose petal onto your tongue.”

Try writing your own descriptive sentences.

### Warm and Cool Colours

Take a closer look at the illustrator's use of warm and cool colours. How do they remind you of summer nights where you live?

### Acts of Green

Brainstorm how you can help take better care of our world.

### Make a Book!

Here are some ideas for writing your own book after reading this story:

- Recreate the book using pictures of yourself doing things for the first time.
- Use pictures from your nature walk (or draw your own!) to write your own “No One But You” book.
- Make a class book where each students finishes the phrase, “No one but me...”.

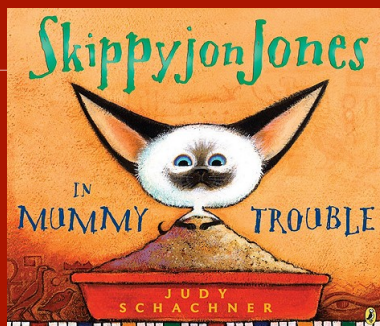
**Bulletin Board Idea:** Create a border with each child's unique smile posted. Hang student's work on the inside of the border.

### Go on a Nature Walk!

Go on your own nature walk. Here are some things you can do on your walk:

- Write down what you see, hear, smell, touch, and feel. Think about what is similar and different to your classmates' observations.
- Take pictures of what you see and feel.
- Try out some of the actions from the book (e.g. walk through rain puddles, watch bees flying, look for a red bird, etc.)

# Skippyjon Jones in Mummy Trouble



By Judy Schachner

“Skippyjon Jones did his very best thinking outside the box.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

What does it mean to “think outside the box”?  
How are the cat and dog similar and different?  
What does it mean to be unique/be your own person?

### Research

Learn more about Egypt (e.g. mummies, pyramids, etc). Compare what you find to the story. Think about how you will share what you learned.

**School-Home/Community Connection:** Invite Spanish speakers within the classroom or community to teach Spanish words to the class.

### Write a Limerick

Learn more about the limericks used in this story. Here's an example:

*“Whose ears are too big for his head?  
And who loves to go bounce on his bed?  
Who creeps on all fours,  
Through his own closet door,  
Straight into the Land of the Dead?”*

Try writing your own limerick about Ancient Egypt or another topic of your choice.

### Text Features & Vocabulary

Why are some words written in different fonts?  
What can you do as the reader to say these words? Look for places where the words are misinterpreted. Here's an example to get started:  
“No, no no,” said the poochitos. “You seely leettle beast! To the **Under World** where mummitos rest in *peas*.”

Study different rhyming words and the patterns used to make similar sounds.

Learn more about alliteration, assonance and consonance. What examples can you find in the story? Try writing a story, poem or song using these features.

Look up new words (e.g. skedaddled, papyrus).

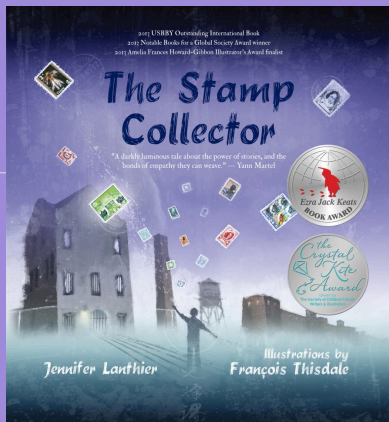
### Other Ideas

Create a mixed media drawing using mostly chalk pastels.

Create a 3-D mummy, pyramid or Sphinx.

Have a mummy-wrapping contest.

Create your own imaginary adventure. Where will you go?



# The Stamp Collector

By Jennifer Lanthier

“This is the story of not long ago and not far away. It is the story of a boy who loves stamps and a boy who loves words. This is the story of a life that is lost. And found.”

## Ideas for Teaching With and Through Literature

### For Reflection

What is friendship? What is compassion?

What does the young boy mean when he says: “The stamp is the key to another world – one that is new and full of adventure. And stories.”

Why do people who try to do good sometimes end up getting in trouble?

Where do you find beauty?

### What are Stories?

Read the Foreword at the front of the storybook. Think about what stories are and how they help us to “see ourselves in the Other and the Other in ourselves”.

### Freedom to Write & Read

Read the final page to learn about the real life writers that inspired this story. Think about what it means to have freedom of speech.

Learn more about other real life people who were imprisoned for something they wrote. Why were they in prison? How will you share what you learned?

### Become a Writer

The author tells a powerful story that stirs the emotions of readers. Write your own short story. What story will you write?

### Use of Colour

Take a closer look at the colours used by the illustrator. For example:

- How is colour used to distinguish two stories?
- What colours represent hope? Imprisonment?
- Why are the stamps the brightest images?

**Home-Community Connection:** Invite a stamp collector to your classroom to share the unique and interesting stamps he/she has found.

### Collect Stamps

Try collecting stamps of your own. You might:

- Check for used envelopes after the mail arrives.
- Write letters to request stamps for your class to learn more about (e.g. ask friends, family or even students in another country).

### Create Stamps

Create your own stamps. Think about what details you can add to describe where you are from, what you like to do and qualities about yourself.

### Related Book/Movie Recommendations

*Have You Filled Your Bucket Today?* By Carol McCloud  
*FernGully: The Last Rainforest* directed by Bill Kroyer