

Something from Nothing

Written and illustrated by Phoebe Gilman

Big Books are a wonderful way to share picture books with a group of children. Shared book experiences help model the reading process for beginning readers and encourage use of critical-thinking skills through lively discussions. This guide offers some suggestions for using the Big Book *Something from Nothing* in your classroom.

For a general guide to using Big Books, along with additional activities for *Something from Nothing* and teacher resource books that provide background information on the Eastern European shtetl setting of the book, go to www.scholastic.ca/bigbooks

Summary:

When Joseph is a baby, his grandfather makes him a wonderful blanket. After a while his mother tells him that the blanket is worn out and should be thrown away. Joseph does not want to give up his blanket and tells his mother that his grandfather can fix it. Sure enough, Grandpa has "just enough material" to make a wonderful jacket. Over time, Grandpa uses the material to make a vest, then a tie, then a handkerchief, and finally a button. When Joseph loses the button, his mother declares that even Grandpa cannot make "something from nothing." The next day Joseph goes to school and starts to write. He realizes he has "just enough material" to make a wonderful story. This warm story was adapted from a Jewish folk tale and offers a loving portrait of shtetl life in Eastern Europe.

Preparing to Read the Big Book:

Talking about Extended Families

Tell the children that this story takes place in a small village in Eastern Europe long ago. Show them where Eastern Europe is on a map or globe and discuss how far away it is from where they live. Mention that in the story the children, parents and grandparents all live in the same house. Ask the children if any of their grandparents live with them. Discuss what they like and don't like about this situation. If the children do not live with grandparents, have them speculate how they would feel about this situation.



Discussing Favorite Possessions

Ask the children if they have ever owned something that they loved so much they didn't want to give it up, even when it was worn out. Discuss whether there was anything they could do to repair this possession so they could keep it longer. What finally happened to the object? Have the children draw a picture of their special possession and write a sentence to describe how they felt about it.

Reading the Big Book:

Display the cover of the Big Book and have the children describe what they see. Ask what the man has around his neck and what it could be used for. Read the title of the book and the name of the author/illustrator aloud. Explain that Phoebe Gilman wrote the words and painted the pictures.

Turn to the title page and read the title and author's name, pointing to each word as you say it. Read the phrase: Adapted from a Jewish folk tale. Explain that this means that the author is telling her own version of an old story. Ask the children to describe the picture. Ask them what they think the relationship might be between the man and the young boy. Write their predictions on the chalkboard.

Turn to the dedication page and read the inscription. Ask the children why the author might have dedicated this book to her uncle. Tell them that the author's uncle was known as Uncle Sunny, and discuss how the drawing of the sun is used to represent the name. Direct the children's attention to the picture at the top of the page. Ask them what the mice are doing.

Now read the book through to the end. Afterward, compare the children's predictions about the relationship between the man and boy to the actual relationship in the story.

Rereading the Big Book:

Rereading a book helps build children's confidence in reading. When you set different purposes for rereading a story, children discover new information and review what they have already learned. As a book is reread, children begin to see patterns in the structure of the words and the story, and these cues are an important part of learning to read.

Using the Cloze Procedure

Invite the children to read the Big Book with you as you read it again. One effective way for beginning readers to read aloud is the cloze procedure. As you read a page, leave out a word by pausing and allow the children to fill it in. Omit words that occur often in the story or that are predictable due to the picture details or story pattern (for example, "Grandpa can fix it."). Point to each word as it is read. You can do the cloze activity as a group or have volunteers take turns reading each page.

Looking for Repetition and Story Patterns

Reread the book and have the children look for repetitive phrases and patterns. Each time they hear a repetitive phrase, have them raise their hands. Invite them to join in as they recognize and anticipate repeated phrases and patterns. Note the rhyming phrases the mother uses each time she tells Joseph that an item is worn out.

Focusing on Picture Details

Look at each picture in the book, encouraging the children to identify details that show what life was like in this small village. Discuss details that may be unfamiliar, such as the organ grinder and the Sabbath table. Have the children take time to look at and enjoy the pictures of the mouse family.

Evaluating the Learning Experience:

Following are several techniques that you can use when evaluating what the children in your class are gaining from their experience with *Something from Nothing*.

Observe the children as they respond to the Big Book, paying particular attention to changes in their interest, attention and enjoyment.

Collect samples of the children's personal responses to the book, such as pictures, stories, poems and so on. Date each sample for evidence of growth in various areas, including their understanding of a book and their ability to relate personal experiences to the book.

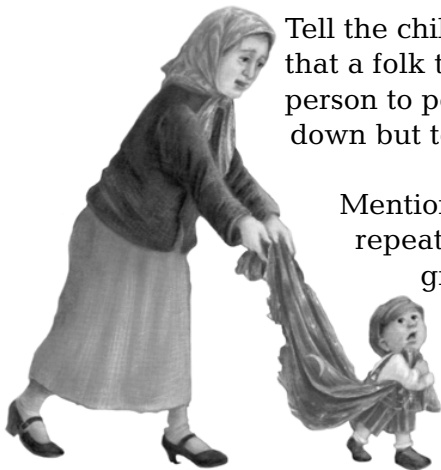
Arrange a conference time to talk with the children individually about the Big Book and their responses to it. Ask questions such as: What did you think of the book *Something from Nothing*? What happened in the book? What was your favorite part? What other books does this remind you of? Why?

Activities:

Language Arts: Making accordion books

Ask the children to recall the various transformations of Joseph's blanket: jacket, vest, tie, handkerchief, button and story. Distribute strips of paper approximately 50 cm x 10 cm. Help the children fold the strips like an accordion. Then ask them to draw a picture of Joseph and his blanket on the first page of the accordion book and a picture of each of the other items in sequence on the other pages. Display the accordion books in the classroom.

Language Arts: Folk tale patterns



Tell the children that *Something from Nothing* is a folk tale. Remind them that a folk tale is usually a very old story that has been passed down from person to person for many years. Originally, folk tales were not written down but told orally.

Mention that folk tales often follow a pattern and have parts that repeat. Ask whether they guessed that Joseph would ask his grandfather to fix each item as they wore out. How did they know? Ask the children to speculate about why there is often repetition in folk tales. Discuss how the repetition helps people remember the story, and adds a rhythm to the story that they find enjoyable and satisfying.

Social Studies: A different way of life

Tell the children that the small village in the story is called a shtetl. Ask them to compare life in this village to life in their own community. You can ask questions like: what does the family use for lighting? What kind of transportation do they have? How do they do their shopping? What kind of houses do they live in?

Talk about the male and female roles in the story. What jobs do the women do? What jobs do the men do? Explain that long ago men and women did not have many choices about what their jobs and responsibilities would be. Point out that in many places, only boys went to school, because schooling was considered something that only boys would need — girls could learn what they needed to know from their mothers.

Social Studies: All kinds of collections

Remind the children that Joseph uses his wonderful handkerchief to hold his pebble collection. Talk about various items that can be collected, including rocks, stamps, hockey cards and coins. Ask the children whether they have any collections. Do they keep the collection in a special container? Invite them to share their collections with the class.

Science: More about mice

Have the children find out more about mice and their habits. Look for information about where they live, what they eat, how long they live and how they behave. If possible, bring in a mouse from a pet shop and observe the animal's behavior. Have the children share experiences with related animals, such as hamsters and guinea pigs.

Science: Don't throw it out!

Mention that whenever the grandfather takes the worn-out piece of cloth and makes it into something new, he is recycling. Discuss the importance of recycling. Have the children name ways that their school and families recycle. If your school does not have a recycling program, set one up with your class.

Creative Arts Humanities: A slice of life

Turn to the picture of the house on page 4. Tell the children that this view of a house is called a cross-section. Mention that the back of a dollhouse also shows a cross-section of the house. Have the children make their own cross-sections of a house. They might want to use their own homes as models or create imaginary houses. Encourage them to include furniture, wallpaper, paintings and other accessories. They can build their cross-sections out of small boxes, stacking the boxes on top of each other or beside each other and gluing them together.

ISBN-13 978-0-545-99303-6/ ISBN-10 0-545-99303-2x

Copyright © 2008 Scholastic Canada Ltd. Illustrations copyright © 1992 Phoebe Gilman. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher, Scholastic Canada Ltd., 604 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1E1, Canada.