

Just Us Two: Poems About Animal Dads

By Joyce Sidman



Reader's Guide

These teaching suggestions are for grades 3-5.

SCIENCE ACTIVITIES

More Animal Dads

Use this book as a springboard for discovery of other interesting animal fathers. Here are a few I came upon during my research:

Birds: phalarope, albatross, kookaburra, emu, rhea, kiwi, swan, goose, jacana, woodpecker, wren, snipe, owl, Chilean flamingo

Fish: seahorse, seadragon, pipefish, sea catfish, lumpsucker, stickleback, siamese fighting fish, South American lungfish

Amphibians: midwife toad, hip-pocket frog, Darwin's frog, Smith frog

Mammals: fox, beaver, monkey, tamarin, marmoset, gibbon

WRITING ACTIVITIES

If I Were a . . .

This poetry exercise can be used to supplement an animal/habitat unit, emphasizing imaginative, descriptive writing.

1. Read "If I Were An Egg." Ask your students: What does this egg look like? Where does it live? How does it feel about itself? Which parts of the poem tell you this?
2. Choose an animal your class has been studying (say, an elephant) and brainstorm:
 - a) interesting elephant characteristics
 - b) cool stuff an elephant can do
 - c) where an elephant lives and what that looks like
 - d) why they're proud to be elephants.

3. Ask them to imagine they are elephants! Together, write a poem on the board using these brainstormed ideas, starting (and ending) with the words, "If I were a _____"

If I were an elephant,
I'd be an old granddaddy elephant
with a long, loose trunk
and wrinkly gray skin.
I'd pick all the best fruit from the tops of trees
and trumpet LOUDLY
whenever I felt like it.
I'd wallow in all the deepest mudholes . . .

4. Ask each student to pick their own animal and write their own "If I Were a . . ." poem, trying to include each of the elements in #2.

5. Share!

Two-Part Poems

This poem can also supplement a habitat unit--and it's done with partners! (The classic book of two-part poetry is *Joyful Noise*, by Paul Fleischman, worth checking out.)

1. Read "Song of the Night" and "Rules of the Pack," using pairs of students for each poem.

2. Brainstorm a list of animals/plants/landforms in your local habitat (or any habitat you have been studying).

3. Choose two that are related to one another--say, squirrel & tree.

4. Then create two different lists on the board:

- a) what a tree looks like to a squirrel: what it means to him; why it's important, what metaphors he might use to describe it, and
- b) what a squirrel looks, feels like and means to a tree.

5. Using two columns (one column for each alternating voice), build a two-part poem, a back and forth of squirrel & tree:

(S) "Your branches are my highways."

(T) "Your claws tickle my bark."

6. Pair up students. Have them choose their own two animals/plants (perhaps books could be available for ideas) and work on a two-part poem, using the guidelines in #4.

7. Encourage them to practice performing their poem before the general sharing time.

ART ACTIVITIES

Build an Animal

This is a good project to accompany writing about or studying an animal. Check out illustrator Susan Swan's website for inspiration!

You will need:

- Various colors of construction paper
- Scissors, glue for each student
- A package of large "googly eyes" for pasting on each animal
- Clear photos or drawings of various animals

1. Show students the illustrations in *Just Us Two*. Study several pages. How many different pieces are used for each animal? Which pieces are painted? Why? Which pieces are smoothly cut? Which are "feathered"?

- 2.** Have students choose an animal to build (perhaps one that they have studied). Make sure they have a clear photograph or drawing for a model.
- 3.** Let them choose 4 colors of paper from a variety you have on hand: one for a body color, one for a contrasting body color (stripes, etc.), and two for background objects (grass, trees, etc.). They may use markers/crayons to "texturize" one or two.
- 4.** Have them build the animal in layers, cutting out and pasting down each layer at a time, so that sizes match.
- 5.** Draw in teeth, feet, claws, etc.
- 6.** Paste on "googly eyes."

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