



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Willie Sunday Takes Us on a Journey of Reading and Writing with Humorous Poems by Jack Prelutsky**

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Rhymes, jingles, and verse through the humorous poetry of Jack Prelutsky become the basis of analysis for enrichment and enlightenment as young children listen to puppet Willie Sunday read silly poems and then write their own originals. Growing up as a young child in Brooklyn, Jack Prelutsky denies having felt any love for poetry as a young child. His rediscovery of poetry in later life led him to write specifically for children. He takes a fresh, humorous approach and allows his agile imagination to conceive and conjure up hilarious thoughts through poetic words. For example, who would think of crafting a poem about being glad your nose is on your face? Already I can hear the roars of laughter as we read about imagining our noses sandwiched between our toes and having to smell our feet. The children will have fun thinking about a nose attached to the top of their head where it would become a constant source of despair by being tickled by their hair. He even admonishes the reader to be thankful that their nose is on their face.

Just think of the possibilities from just this one poem. We don't have to imagine hands coming out of our heads. Many kindergarten and first graders for developmental reasons actually draw such pictures. Now those drawings can be used for writing a nonsensical poem or as a theme for writing. Perhaps at the same time the children can be helped to adjust their drawings to the proper perspective. Dare we as teachers use this approach to capture the attention of our children who may wish to daydream in order to escape the boredom of our classrooms? Imagine the interest in reading a poem that tells about a lady kangaroo who was an awful grouch because things in her pouch always fell out. Finally she went to a tailor who fitted her with a zipper and now she is calm and chipper. Or just imagine Sadie Snatt who is big and fat. Wait till you hear what she eats. A few of her delicious entrees include buzzard beaks, French-fried fleas, bees with cheese, tomato rat surprise. I am sure that you have already gotten the picture – Prelutsky's poems are sure to capture attention and spark interest for children writing their original jingles or expounding upon a theme through a written essay.

With these thoughts in mind, I will present a unit in which poetry and the art of puppetry will provide students with sample poems, plus writing tips, strategies, and challenges to help them create their own poetry. In other words, students will learn how to shape their ideas and words into creative, descriptive, and silly poems by using Prelutsky's poems as models for their writing. In addition, the poems will generate themes that the children will use for writing expository essays in class. The unit, whose primary emphasis is reading and writing, will also integrate various art forms such as drawing, drama, dance, and crafts.

Why would I choose Jack Prelutsky's humorous poems from the many anthologies that he has written as a

basis for my unit of study? I teach first graders in a self-contained classroom with varying abilities in the six-to eight-year old age range. Along with a need for improved vocabulary, many children exhibit poor self-images and have difficulty conveying their thoughts and feelings. They come from varying social-economic backgrounds, and have varying academic abilities. The troubled lives of many of them seemingly overpower their efforts in the classroom.

I feel that Jack Prelutsky's funny rhymes, jingles, and verse will enhance the children's reading skills while allowing them to forget their troubles briefly. Those children who are having difficulty differentiating speech sounds will be helped to generate good listening skills as they focus on the word segments that rhyme in Prelutsky's poems. Additionally, in order for children to become fluent readers they must be able to achieve fast word recognition in the context of a story or poem. One way to build accuracy and word recognition is to build segments of words that are alike. Many of Prelutsky's poems contain clusters of rhyming words from the same word families. Listening to and reciting the poetry will help the children not only to read the rhyming words in Prelutsky's poetry but to develop additional lists of word families that they will encounter in other readings. My unit will also encourage young children to become prolific writers. In our district's writing curriculum, "Empowering the Writer," the children are encouraged to expand their use of descriptive language. Prelutsky's use of extravagant language in describing his exemplary imaginary beings and settings will easily inspire young children to recognize themselves in his collections and use descriptive language for writing their own poetry. In addition, I feel this unit will help to draw upon the inner strengths of the children by enhancing their academic skills and as a result strengthen their overall social-emotional development.

More specifically, my unit will include activities suitable for children in kindergarten through third grades with an emphasis on literacy and writing for the first grade child. Along with reading and the language arts, the lesson plans will cover curriculum areas such as social studies, science, drama, and art.

This unit will be part of a team effort where a fourth grade teacher, a music teacher, and myself (first grade teacher) collaborate in each writing a unit under the common theme of "Using the Poetry of Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein to Further Develop the Narrative, Expository, Rhythmic, and Poetic Writing Skills of Elementary Students." Collaborative teaching across grade levels will be used, as students from the fourth grade classroom become tutors for first graders writing their poetry. In addition, a culminating activity will be held where the children display, recite, and dramatize their written work in a performance for a school-wide assembly, including parents and the community at large.

## Objectives

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My overall objectives for the course of my curriculum are:

- (1) To provide an interactive experience through the use of puppetry and Jack Prelutsky's collections of poetry:
  - a. as individuals
  - b. in small groups of two or four
  - c. in whole group instruction
- (2) To help stimulate children's intellectual and cognitive development through rhyming verse:
  - a. through the written and illustrated works of Jack Prelutsky

b. with creative puppetry

c. by a drama production

(3) To improve the auditory reading and listening skills of participants through:

a. written works of Jack Prelutsky

b. spoken language

(4) To encourage the development of self-assurance while participating in classroom activities:

a. as listeners in a group setting

b. as narrators reading stories and a play

c. as members of an audience

(5) To connect the unit with our school's Comprehensive School Plan and the overall district's standards for curriculum:

a. reading, and language arts

b. the arts - theater, drawings (illustrations)

c. socialization skills

## Examples of Strategies

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How will I tie the art of puppetry into a unit for reading and writing poetry? The art of ventriloquism has been in my teaching repertoire for more than twenty-five years. As a result, many puppet characters have evolved along with my first grade curriculum. For example, Willie Sunday, a favorite in the classroom, keeps the children spellbound by his expertise in phonics, or lack of it, as he misses letters and letter sounds to the squeals and delight of the children. Tuesday's Cup of Sugar, Alphabet Thursday, and Blue Monday have all gained a stronghold in the classroom through their initiation of the writer's workshop, story mapping, interactive writing and modeling classroom stories. Miss Wednesday Delight has been used over the years for introducing new poems in the classroom. Most of her poetry pertains to various seasons or themes for the months of the school calendar. Freddie Friday loves to hand out awards for good behavior and effort in the classroom from his trash bin. And last, but not least, Friday Funtastic helps the children brainstorm about using descriptive language for writing about characters in their stories. All of the puppets display unique personalities, interesting voice variations and a flair for bright colorful appearances.

Although for the most part my puppets are full size ventriloquist puppets (i.e. dummies with either soft sculptured or hard plastic faces) hand puppets could just as easily be used for introducing stories and leading the class in discussion. If one chooses to omit puppetry entirely from the lessons, this will not necessarily weaken the unit. I feel that a puppet enhances the poetry. For example, Willie is funny and the poetry is funny. Together both puppet and poetry help to hold the attention of the children. However, the teacher can easily adapt the lessons by introducing the poetry in class.

With all of these characters in mind, I would like to pull out Willie Sunday and give him the opportunity to assist the classroom teacher in reading Jack Prelutsky's poems to the children. His charming personality, witty humor, and comical features make him a sure hit for reading Prelutsky's poetry. He will also help brainstorm language used for writing poetry and essays in class. Puppetry will also be used in the classroom art center where the children make their own puppets and write stories within a less structured setting. For example, the children are given examples or ideas and then given the option of choosing and making their own crafts or writings. In other words, the teacher at the art center is more of a facilitator than a mentor in guiding the children once they have made their selection.

Although Jack Prelutsky's poetry is not specifically written for the urban child, one can surmise that he is able to relate to this population, having been born in Brooklyn and lived in cities such as Boston, Albuquerque, and Manhattan. Actually themes entwined throughout his poetry cross all cultural barriers and relate to everyday events and people that most of us encounter in our daily lives. However, one of Prelutsky's poems, "The New Kid on the Block," has appeal to children from an urban or small town setting. (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block*, page 7) The new kid who moved on the block is tough, punches hard, stomps on toes, swipes balls and picks on guys. Children will love Prelutsky's surprise ending where he reveals that the new kid is a girl. Perhaps the children have not had an experience where a new kid has moved into their neighborhood, but they have all encountered bullies in their lives. Willie Sunday will help to lead a discussion in class whereby the children discuss such questions as: Would you call the kid in the poem a bully? Why or why not? Have you had any experiences where children treated you as the child was treated in the poem? What did you do? What do you think the kid in the poem did? The class will write a new poem. This time the poem will replace the bully traits with respectful characteristics. The children will make a chart of words that show respect and fit them into a poem modeled on Prelutsky's poem.

Dreams are another appealing theme for young children. Although they tend to remember those that are frightening, a funny poem, "Last Night I Dreamed of Chickens," found in Prelutsky's book *Something Big Has Been Here* (44-45) will surely bring squeals of laughter and spark discussion around funny dreams that they may have experienced. In this poem the poet describes a dream that he had where chickens were standing on his stomach, nesting in his hair, pecking at his pillow, hopping on his head, and racing about his bed. After Willie Sunday reads the poem to the children, they will brainstorm about a make-believe dream that they could have had about an animal. They will discuss the various body parts that Prelutsky used in his poem and think about the body parts that they want to use in their writing. Prelutsky writes that when he woke in the morning he found eggs on top of himself. The children will help make a list of make-believe things that they may find upon waking in the morning. Now the children are ready to write their own silly poem: Last night I dreamed of...

A nose is a funny creature when looked at aside from other body parts. Prelutsky's funny poem "*Be Glad Your Nose is on Your Face*," will bring lots of laughter as Willie Sunday reads this one in class. (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , pages, 64-65) Willie has a funny nose that is twice the size it should be for his face. In fact, it is so big that the children love to plant a kiss on his nose when he talks to them personally about their secrets and wishes. I can almost hear Willie agree with Prelutsky that he is glad that his nose is not in his hair cause it would surely cry in despair as it was tickled up there. The children will discuss various body parts that they may want to write about - an arm coming out of a head, an ear on a hand, an eye on the back of a head, etc. They will proceed to tell why it would not be good to have an arm on a head or an ear on a hand. It should be a lot of fun to tell what would happen if one had an arm on one's head or a nose on the stomach.

Poems called "The Centipede" and "The Soggy Frog," although written in a humorous manner, will tie in nicely with science themes. (Prelutsky, *The Sheriff of Rottenshot* , pages, 10-11) The New Haven science curriculum mandates a study of insects for first grade students in the classroom. The topic of the centipede will help to spark an interest in insects. What constitutes an insect? Is a centipede an insect? Where is their habitat? The children will write an expository essay about real insects and a make-believe story using Prelutsky's poem as a model for obtaining ideas. Likewise, the poem called "The Soggy Frog" will be used in a science lesson to discuss the difference between a toad and a frog. Prelutsky's poem gives us clues. He writes about a frog that resides in a bog and is soggy while a toad stays by the road and is dry. The children will center their discussion on questions such as: What is the difference between a frog and a toad? What is the difference between the habitats of the frog and toad? For additional information the children will look up web sites on the Internet, reporting facts to their classmates. The information gathered will be placed on a chart for our science wall in the classroom.

Prelutsky's book, *Rhymes Around the Year: Dog Days* , will be used in our math meeting. In first grade, we work with the calendar on a daily basis. Prelutsky's book introduces a new poem for each month that pertains to something special for each season of that month. For example, January's theme is snow, April's theme is pink blossoms on a tree, July is fireworks in the evening sky, and November is turkey on Thanksgiving Day. These poems will be used as introductions to each new month on our calendar.

Prelutsky writes about penguins looking for snow one morning in Fort Myers, on the Gulf of Mexico. (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , pages 50-51) They waddle along the beach looking high and looking low. Why won't the penguins find snow on the Gulf of Mexico in Fort Myers? Why are penguins looking for snow? How do you think they got to the Gulf of Mexico in Fort Myers? Willie Sunday will assist the class in reading a big book entitled *Penguins* by Marilyn Wooley and Keith Pigdon. A team of children will look up additional information on the Internet about penguins and report back to class factual information that they have

gleaned from their study. In addition, the children will assemble penguin puppets at the art center in the classroom and write stories to present in class.

A silly poem in *A Nonny Mouse Writes Again!* (11) describes an elephant that flies like a bird, builds a nest in a rhubarb tree, and then whistles like a pig. First graders love to write about animals and give them make-believe characteristics. The children will think about an animal with striking characteristics. For example, they may decide to choose a female kangaroo who has a pouch for her young joey where he stays secure and safe till he is six or eight months old. Their make-believe kangaroo may fill her pocket with all kinds of candy, soda pop, and toys as she and her joey travel to Disney World to find Mickey Mouse for a tea party in a tree.

Gaining literacy will play an important role in every facet of my unit. In addition to hearing and reading Prelutsky's poetry in class, the children will be paired with a fourth grader from our Beecher team. The first graders along with their fourth grade buddies will compose poetry and share an illustration in class.

Willie Sunday will encourage the children while reading Prelutsky's poetry to see themselves, their surroundings, community, and family in his writings. It is my intent for the children to capture these same feelings in their own writings. For example, when

Prelutsky writes in his poem, "I'm Thankful," about the fact that he is thankful for his baseball bat that he cracked or his basketball that sprung a leak, the children can identify with the objects and circumstances that he describes and write about their own feelings. (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block*, page 28)

My content section, where I give specific narrative for teaching my unit, will name topics along with suggested poetry and written activities to be used in the classroom. I anticipate using five poems under each topic - one poem for each day of the week. The entire unit will last for approximately four weeks.

## Poetry by Jack Prelutsky

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Jack Prelutsky's poetry can be divided into many varied topics or categories. I have decided to group some of his poetry into categories under specific themes or topics. The categories that I will be using for the following examples of poetry and strategies are: People, Family (includes feelings and emotions), Animals and Places. A fourth week will include a miscellaneous section where I will include a poem about a frog and a few poems about insects.

### **People**

#### *Week One - First Day*

As an introduction to our unit, Willie will tell the children that we will be exploring poetry written by Jack Prelutsky. During our exploration of Prelutsky's poetry, the children will be introduced to characters like Eddie the spaghetti nut, a ridiculous dog, Kermit Keene, a boneless chicken, a pet alligator, the Diatonic Dittymunch, and many more. Willie will be sure to bring many chuckles when he tells the children that they may find amidst the poetry an invitation to a dragon's birthday party. Of course, he will tell the children that he may invite his puppet friends, Tuesday's Cup of Sugar, Wednesday Delight and Alphabet Thursday. Well, if they are invited perhaps the children could invite a friend too.

"Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face," (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , page 64) will be a great poem to use as we begin our journey with Prelutsky's poetry. Prelutsky admonishes the children to be glad that their nose is on their face for if it were within their ear what a terrible rattle their brain would receive when one would sneeze. Or can you imagine your nose attached to the top of your head - how terribly uncomfortable if tickled by one's hair. After reading the poem, Willie will ask the children to think of various places that their nose could be attached to on their body. For example, imagine your ear stuck onto your arm, how could one breathe if tucked under a sleeve. Or think of your nose attached to the palm of your hand - what a terrible fix when trying to write. Why even a nose glued onto a knee would succumb to pain when running, falling, or climbing a tree. The children will be asked to write a few stanzas that begin with "I am glad my nose is found on my face. Imagine my nose if it were stuck on my..." In addition to writing about where one's nose could be found other than the face, the children will think creatively and write how their nose would respond if found in that place.

### *Week One - Second Day*

Chili is a fun food to eat. Or is it when it is so hot that our taste buds find it difficult to transmit pleasant flavors to our brain? "When Tillie Ate the Chili," (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , page 88) she ran frantically down the street, setting a new world record by racing around the block. Her mouth was on fire, eyes red with tears, smoke coming from her nostrils, and steam pouring from her ears. However, when she cooled off an hour later, she declared the chili was tasty and asked for another bowl. Willie will ask the children to write a descriptive essay about Tillie. The children will use our essay format (who, where, what, how) for writing the story that will be used throughout the unit when composing written work. Who is Tillie? Although the poem doesn't exactly give us a lot of descriptive language about Tillie's physical characteristics, the children can surmise that Tillie must have been a funny character. They will describe her using creative terms like: There once was a lady named Tillie. She had eyes that bulged liked balloons. Her hair stuck straight up in the air as if glued there by mistake. She was skinny as a rail with legs that looked so frail. They will proceed by telling where Tillie lived. Perhaps Tillie lived in the jungle or the zoo. Could she have lived by a river named "Calamazoo?" Prelutsky's poem gives lots of clues about what Tillie did after eating the chili. The children's writing will most likely describe how Tillie ate chili, coughed, wheezed, sputtered, and ran around the block. How did she feel about the chili? She loved the chili and asked for another bowl.

### *Week One, Day Three*

Granny Gooding (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , page 31) is another adorable character found in Prelutsky's poetry. Granny Gooding lost her footing and fell into a pudding vat. She has pudding everywhere - on her jacket, hat, slippers, and dress. Can you believe ever since Granny Gooding lost her footing she has been a mess? The poem does not give us a specific setting for Granny Gooding. There is, however, a beautiful illustration showing Granny Gooding in a circus setting. She clings to an umbrella in one hand and in the other embraces a cute dog dressed in frilly attire. The audience is aghast as strobe lights are centered on her and she is falling from a trapeze towards a large pudding bowl topped with a ripe red strawberry. Willie will initiate our same essay arrangement with the children for writing a paragraph using the who, where, what, and how format. He will encourage the children to think creatively as they think about Granny Gooding. The children will think about their setting for Granny Gooding before they conjure up thoughts about who she really is in their minds. Do you want Granny Gooding in a circus setting? Perhaps she could be on a farm, in a school, or out to sea. Would the setting change the appearance of Granny Gooding and what she does? Do you think the setting would change Granny Gooding's feelings? When the children have pondered these questions, and have brainstormed with Willie about their ideas then they are ready to write their own creative story.



### *Week One, Day Four*

When asked to apologize, young children have one word in mind, "sorry." Usually their apology doesn't contain themselves, just "sorry." Prelutsky's poem "I'm Sorry!" (Prelutsky, *Something Big Has Been Here* , page 93) will certainly help our young children to identify with the sentiment of the poem. The child in the poem is sorry for bringing home ants, putting a frog in his room, writing on the walls with sardines, tying a can to the cat...he is even sorry for something that he did not do - allowing the dog to eat the broom. The children will most certainly giggle upon hearing Willie read the last line - "I'm sorry for being a brat!" Willie will tell the children that they are going to write a "sorry" poem. They will be encouraged to use rhyming words; however, this will not be a requirement for their writing. The children will also be encouraged to think creatively and come up with their own ending line. A few examples: I'm sorry for being so stupid! I'm sorry for being so nasty! I'm sorry for being a clown!

Prelutsky's poem "The New Kid on the Block," (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , page 7) describes a kid who acts like a bully. The kid plays rough, likes to fight, stomp on toes, disrespect peer's property - in fact, the kid is big and strong with muscles that are showing everywhere. Willie will ask the children if they were surprised that the author intended the bully to be a girl? Can a girl be a bully as the author mentioned in his poem? Why or why not? What constitutes a bully? The poem will be used as a follow up poem later in the day for writing our own class poem. Rather than writing a poem using attributes of a bully, the class will make a list of words that describe respect towards another person. From this list of words we will compose a class poem. The ending line could read like this: My friend is the kindest one of all.

Another poem "My First Best Friend" (Prelutsky, *It's Raining Pigs and Noodles* , page 14) will be used as a follow up poem continuing with the theme of bullying. The poem names friends who are not very kind. For example, a friend swipes the child's pie, another friend tramples on toes, while another friend kicks in the knee. A discussion will center on traits that are pleasing in a friend. How does one earn respect? What are some of the characteristics of being a good friend? Is it important for your friends to show respect? Why?

### *Week One, Day Five*

Young children love to talk about their dreams - especially the kind of make-believe stories where reality knows no boundaries. Prelutsky's poem "Last Night I Dreamed of Chickens" (Prelutsky, *Something Big Has Been Here* , page 44-45) doesn't even come close to reality. The gentleman dreams of chickens that are nesting in his hair, hopping on his head, running about his bed, standing on his stomach - in fact there are chickens everywhere. Prelutsky usually puts a surprise twist or ending to his poems and this one is no exception - "when I woke today, I noticed there were eggs on top of me." Willie will challenge the children to come up with a make believe dream and write a poem about it. The character in the poem had his dream at night. The children may have their dream at any time of the day. For example, they may begin: Yesterday afternoon I dreamed of... Or, this morning while in school I dreamed of... They will think of another animal character rather than chickens. Yesterday I dreamed of elephants, there were elephants everywhere, they were stomping on my bed, they squashed my head, there were elephants, elephants, elephants as far as I could possibly see...when I woke from my nap, I saw peanuts all over me.

## **Family**

### *Week Two, Day One*

In the book *A Nonny Mouse Writes Again* , (9) Prelutsky includes a clever poem about a child whose grandma



is always getting on his case, especially for behavior that is not kind or respectful. At any rate, the poem admonishes the child to be good when Grandma comes to visit - Don't spray her face with milk; Don't put pins into her head; Don't call her nasty names in Greek; Don't staple her foot to the floor; Don't put waffles in her ears, or beetles in her tea... Although everything is exaggerated and sounds downright cruel, the poet drives a point home to the child - be kind and respectful to your grandma and she will be more tolerant of you. Our classroom's golden rule "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" certainly applies to the theme of this poem. The poem will be used as a springboard for talking about relationships. Willie will lead the class in a discussion about relationships with our family, and our relationships with classmates in school. Are good, healthy relationships important between family members? Why? How do they affect our lives? Why do you think relationships at home affect the way we respect others in school? How can one show respect and establish a good relationship with others? The children's responses will be charted and used on a daily basis for showing respect in class. Willie will review the poem with the children and ask them to write their own version. They will think of a particular setting and then choose someone that will come to visit. For example: When the principal comes to visit, be sure to close your mouth and sit. Don't throw paper in the air, or pull Jennifer's curly hair, Be sure to invite him to lunch, but don't invite him home for brunch; Remember, whatever you do - you want him to think the best of you. Young children may not be able to use rhyming words. The children will begin with a line telling who is coming to visit followed by lines stating what may impress their visitor.

Grandparents are special people in the lives of children. Although the poem about a grandmother is humorous, it does put a rather negative twist upon the relationship between the child and grandparent. The children will receive a homework assignment for the weekend that emphasizes a positive aspect. Each child will be asked to visit a grandparent and commit to doing a kind deed. If they are unable to visit a grandparent then they may choose a family member within their own household. Monday's assignment will be a written one - the children will write about their weekend experience using our writing format for completing a paragraph.

### *Week Two, Day Two*

Young children enjoy talking and writing about food. Wouldn't they absolutely love to share about food that would cause anyone to become sick to the stomach? In his book *The Sheriff of Rottenshot*, Pelutsky has written a poem called "Sadie Snatt." (22) Now Sadie is not your ordinary lady. Her obesity is quite hilarious to say the least; however, her diet is enough to cause you to wonder what Prelutsky was thinking when he wrote this humorous poem for children. Well, children must have been on his mind because I can already hear the squeals of delight and laughter coming from them. Can you imagine that amongst all of her finest delicacies she includes turtle tails and salmon scales? Or how about chicken cheeks and buzzard beaks. If you frown upon them why not try earthworm omelets or frozen fish-eye custard. Prelutsky writes another amusing poem called "My Mother Says I'm Sickening (Prelutsky, *For Laughing Out Loud: Poems to Tickle Your Funny Bone*, page 52). The child is told by his mother not to drop the mashed potatoes on the gerbil or the cat; not to stuff the yogurt in his sister's shoes nor put peas in his pocket or place noodles on his head. The two poems would mesh nicely and certainly allow the creative juices to flow within the children. Willie's assignment for today will be to ask the children to write a humorous poem about food. Perhaps they could begin by saying something eloquent about their mother along with a special guest who will be coming for dinner. An example might be: My mother is a fine lady who loves to show off her social graces especially when our minister comes to dinner. She tells me things I may not do - do not make mountains and rivers with your mashed potatoes; do not stuff the celery in your ears; do not mash the peas in your milk, nor pour the gravy on your sister's dress.

### *Week Two, Day Three*

Willie has a new plan for today. Hidden away deep in his suitcase house is a cardboard box with a line on each side from the poem "Baby in a High Chair," (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , page 46). The poem has two stanzas with four lines each. It is a simple poem that can easily be read by first graders and memorized as well. The simple theme tells us that the baby likes to smile, giggle, and is happy. Willie, with the teacher's assistance, will roll the box onto the floor. The children will take turns picking up the box and reading the line that is facing them. After they have read the line they will find the matching line in the poem that is attached to the board. The children are getting oral reading experience along with sequencing skills. As a follow up activity for day four, the children will write a short essay about a baby that they know using our written story format for writing a paragraph.

### *Week Two, Day Four*

Who doesn't know a father who has tried to fix a few things and now they are no longer in working condition? I am sure most fathers would fit under this category. In this poem, "I Wish My Father Wouldn't Try to Fix Things Anymore," (Prelutsky, *Something Big Has Been Here* , page 102), the father tries to fix things around the house: a toaster that now will not stop popping up; a blender that after being fixed will not start; a clock that is now running backwards, and a dozen that are sure to tickle the funny bone. After reading the poem, Willie will ask the children to write an essay about their fathers, using creative language to describe their father, and tell something that their father tried to fix but is no longer working. Many of our children may have male figures in their lives but not necessarily a father. In that particular case, the children write about their uncle, grandfather, or even an older brother.

### *Week Two, Day Five*

In the poem "I'm Thankful" (Prelutsky, *New Kid on the Block*, page 28) the child is thankful from everything from a checker set to roller skates. However, with each item that he is thankful for a line follows about something that happened to the object. For example, he is thankful for his bathing suit that he lost in the river. The children will write their own "Thankful" poem. Willie will give an example such as: I'm thankful for the rain, that made my shoes all wet. I'm thankful for my dog, who bit me at the vet.

## ***Animals and Places***

### *Week Three, Day One*

Many of Prelutsky's poems that pertain to specific places contain cartoon-like animal characters. Therefore, some of the poetry that I have selected may come under headings for both animals and places. The poem "In the Heart of South Dakota" (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , page 10) tells us about Jenny Jay who gets off a train and hops upon a bison, riding him across a windy plain. She ends up sitting on a fence gazing at the presidents carved on Mount Rushmore. There is so much material in this one short, humorous poem. Of course, as always when we are reading about a specific place, Willie will begin by showing the children on the globe where South Dakota is located in relation to where they live in Connecticut. He will show the illustration in Prelutsky's book of Mount Rushmore with the four presidents and name them - George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. The children will give information that they know about bison, along with questions that will guide them in gathering information that they do not know. The Internet will be our source for gleaning information for the class. Willie will ask the children to write an essay on information that they remember from our discussion. Their physical description should include the fact that

the American Bison is the largest mammal in the continent of North America. They have dark brown woolly hair, curved horns upon their head, and a bigger front with a tapered hind part. They like to travel in herds, and feed on grasses. Their last line may include something funny - "If I ever meet a bison, I'd..."

### *Week Three, Days Two and Three*

Prelutsky has written many humorous poems about elephants. One in particular is called "In Indianapolis" (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , page 24). The illustrations are just as funny, and will be a favorite with the children. Willie will be sure to ask the children where he can find Indianapolis. In the poem Prelutsky tells us that in Indianapolis we see an elephant sitting in a sycamore tree, sipping warm milk through an oversized straw. He also tells us what we will do - dance with a blue kangaroo, and when the elephant sneezes, we will run and hide. This is a great poem to teach children about elephants and kangaroos and their environments. In my mind I can hear Willie having fun with this poem. He'll probably tell the children that Indianapolis has to be in Africa or some Asian country because he is certain that is where one would look for elephants. Indianapolis will not be a familiar city for our younger children who live in New Haven. They become confused enough thinking that New Haven is their state or that they live in the city of Connecticut. We will look on the globe to find Indianapolis. Willie will ask the children if they think that elephants could be found in Indianapolis. He will tell them that we will look on the Internet to help us find information about elephants.

The World Book on line is a great source for information. We will discover that elephants are the biggest animal in the world except for a few whales that are larger. Also, they are the only animal that has a trunk for a nose. Elephants are extremely strong - that is why in some countries they are used for logging or for carrying heavy loads. They are also very intelligent and can be taught to perform tricks such as dancing, rolling over, standing on their heads, etc. Elephants enjoy eating grass, roots, water plants, bark, and leaves. They are excellent swimmers and hold their trunks above the water while swimming.

The children will write an essay about elephants using our written format for writing a paragraph. Their stories will be illustrated with as many details as they can remember from our factual information.

On day five we will talk about kangaroos. It will be particularly interesting for the children to discover that the joey is only one inch long and very undeveloped when he is born. He lives on his mother's milk while being carried in her pouch. Kangaroos are found in Australia, New Guinea, or nearby islands. A team of students will gather more information about kangaroos from the Internet and report their findings back to the class. Willie will share with the class that elephants and kangaroos are not found in the same environments. He will ask the children why they think Prelutsky included an elephant and a kangaroo in the poem "In Indianapolis." Could it be another tactic by Prelutsky to bring humor to his poetry?

He will read "A Certain Lady Kangaroo" (Prelutsky, *The Sheriff of Rottenshot* , page 20) where we find a silly kangaroo who tried to keep everything from a makeup kit to credit cards in her pouch but they kept falling out. She tried snaps, strings, staples and glue, but nothing would keep her pouch shut. Finally she went to a tailor who fitted her with a zipper. Willie will read a little rhyme that he wrote and then tell the children that they will write an ending to his poem. There once was a blue kangaroo, that lived in the California zoo, the things that she carried in her pouch, made her a mean old grouch. One day everything came tumbling out, then she began to complain and pout. Oh dear, she began to sigh, I do believe I will have to cry. I cannot tell what all I have within my pouch. Please help me before I scream, "Ouch!" Together as a class we will brainstorm about what the blue kangaroo may have had in her pouch. It will be fun to make up a story about a blue kangaroo. Who is she? Use descriptive words to tell how she looks. Where does she live? What does she

have in her pouch? What is she planning to do with the things in her pouch? Where is she planning to go?

#### *Week Three, Day Four*

In his book, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders*, Prelutsky includes a funny poem called "Every Morning in Fort Myers." (50) The penguins are looking high and looking low for a sign of snow. The children will find the poem just as absurd when they discover that Fort Myers is in the state of Florida. The illustrations are just as comical. One penguin is wearing binoculars around his neck, while another sports an umbrella hat. One poor fellow has fainted while others stand around and try to assist. There are even a few penguins that are trying to communicate to the puzzled lifeguard - I suppose they are asking where they can find snow in Fort Myers, on the Gulf of Mexico. Willie will read a poem that he wrote to be used as a model for the children's writing. Every evening in New Haven, on the Long Island Sound, there's a herd of hungry elephants, looking all around. All along the shore they stomp, looking for a pail full of peanuts, but they won't find them in New Haven, on the Long Island Sound. The children will adjust their writings according to the animals or birds that they choose. Willie will encourage the children to think of animal or bird characters that are not indigenous to our area.

A follow-up poem that we will use called "Penguins" (Prelutsky, *A Pizza the Size of the Sun*, page 42), although humorous, gives us information about where we can expect to find penguins. The poem tells us that penguins can be found on our planet's underside, and that they have to be careful not to cough or they might fall off.

#### *Week Three, Day Five*

We will conclude this week's poetry with the poem, "One Old Owl" (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders*, page 36). The poem portrays an old owl sitting in a tree in a forest watching silently while the night is still. The old owl looked around while the moon was bright, then flapped his wings and flew into the night. The children will use prior knowledge from a study about owls that we do in the beginning of the school term. At that time we read books about owls, chart our information, and complete a special art project where we make owls and fly them from the ceiling in our room. Willie will read a model poem that he has written to the children. Two brown furry owls made a beautiful sight, while sitting on a fence watching for mice in the night. The children will adjust their number of owls, description of the owls, where the owls are sitting, and what they are looking for in the night.

### **Miscellaneous**

#### *Week Four, Day One*

A simple poem "The Soggy Frog" (Prelutsky, *The Sheriff of Rottenshot*, page 11) depicts a frog and toad. The toad's abode is by the road while the frog's abode is in the boggy. Prelutsky concludes that is why the toad seems dry and the frog is soggy. The children will be given a written assignment where they describe a toad and compare him to a frog. Prior knowledge will have been gleaned from the Internet where we look up information and compare the two creatures.

#### *Week Four, Day Two*

Since we all know that the frog's main diet consists of insects, we will read an untitled poem (Prelutsky, *Beneath a Blue Umbrella*, page 48) about a red bug, yellow bug, and a little blue snake. As they were swimming and playing in the Great Salt Lake, they spied a mean and sly green bullfrog watching them. When they heard him say, "Croak," they all yelled, "Whoops," and swam away. We will review prior knowledge about

insects and then continue to read a very funny poem called "The Centipede." In Prelutsky's poem we find that the centipede has many feet as she rides her odd velocipede. She has won many awards for working all of her centipedals. Is the centipede an insect? If not, what disqualifies her from being classified as an insect?

*Week Four, Days Three, Four, and Five*

We will conclude our unit by reading various poems from Prelutsky's book *Ride a Purple Pelican*. These poems will take us on many journeys to far away places like Kalamazoo, Nova Scotia, California, and Arkansas.

## Standards

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This unit will address the following *Language Arts Standards* for grade one as are approved by the New Haven Board of Education.

### *Content Standard 1.0: Reading*

Demonstrate strategic reading skills.

- Students will discuss what they already know about the topic.
- Students will use phonics, word meaning and grammar clues to help in reading.
- Students will distinguish real events from make-believe.
- Students will show understanding by responding orally, in writing, through technology, and/or through the arts.

### *Content Standard 2.0: Writing*

Demonstrate successful writing behaviors.

- Students will establish a purpose by writing and make a plan.
- Students will use complete sentences, margins, headings, and correct spacing.
- Students will check for correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
- Students will exhibit, share, and/or publish their writing.
- Students will keep a folder that demonstrates progress in writing.

### Content Standard 3.0: Speaking

Demonstrate strategic speaking skills.

- Students will speak courteously and respectfully to all persons.
- Students will share information and participate in discussion groups.

## Assessments

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The completed written works by the children serves as an assessment for the unit. In addition to the written stories, the teacher uses the rubric found at the end of the unit to evaluate oral and written responses. Students use the rubric for self-evaluation.

## Lesson Plans

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### **Lesson One**

Poem: "When Tillie Ate the Chili" (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , page 88)

Objectives: Students will...

- listen to a poem read to them by Willie (a classroom puppet).
- produce a creative written response.
- Share their written response with a classmate.

Procedures:

1. Willie will read the poem, "When Tillie Ate the Chili."
2. The children will write a descriptive narrative about Tillie. Who is Tillie? Describe in written prose what Tillie looks like in your mind. Where does Tillie live? Describe her surroundings. What does Tillie do? In the poem Tillie ate chili then ran around the block coughing, wheezing, and sputtering. Is that what your Tillie will do? Be creative. How does Tillie feel in your story? In the poem, Tillie loved the chili and asked for another bowl.
3. The children will make Tillie puppet characters in the art center.



4. The children will share their Tillie story in class.
5. The class will share in a chili party. Our Tillie puppets will be there too.

## Lesson Two

Poem: "The New Kid on the Block" (Prelutsky, *The New Kid on the Block* , page 7)

Objectives: Students will...

- participate in a shared reading of a poem with Willie (a classroom puppet).
- interact in a group discussion.
- help to produce a class poem.

Procedures:

1. The children will read along with Willie as he reads the poem, "The New Kid on the Block."
2. The children will enter into a discussion about bullies. In the poem, Prelutsky gives us a surprise ending - the bully is a girl. Are you surprised that the bully who stomps on toes, plays rough, likes to fight, and disrespect property is a girl? Can a girl be a bully? What is a bully? How do you treat bullies? Can bullies be friends? Why or why not?
3. The class will brainstorm and make a list of words that show respect towards another person.
4. We will use the list of words and compose a class poem.
5. We will ask our music teacher for help and add a tune to our poem so that we can sing it in class.

## Lesson Three

Poem: "Every Morning in Fort Myers" (Prelutsky, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* , page 50)

Objectives: Students will...

- participate in a shared reading of a poem by Willie (a classroom puppet).
- create a written response.
- create a penguin puppet.

Procedures:

1. The children will participate in a shared reading of the book, *Penguins* .
2. The information will be charted and hung on our science wall.
3. Willie will read the poem, "Every Morning in Fort Myers."
4. The children will write their own version using a written format modeled by Willie. They will choose an animal or bird character that is not indigenous to New Haven. The writings will reflect the animal or bird characters that are chosen. For example, Every evening in New Haven, on the Long Island Sound, there's a herd of hungry elephants, looking for a pail full of peanuts, but they won't find them in New Haven, on the Long Island Sound.
5. The children will create a penguin puppet at the art center.
6. The children will recite their poem in class with their puppet.

## Appendix

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One of my little girls was having a difficult day. She stayed in my room for a chat when her classmates went to lunch. I read the poem, "Alligators Are Unfriendly" (Prelutsky, *New Kid on the Block*, page 14) to her. Together we decided to write a funny story about an alligator. From this version I wrote a play that the children will dramatize for a school assembly.

"An Alligator in My Kitchen"

### Scene 1

Narrator: Beckie and her mom came home from school one day and to their dismay they found an alligator sitting on a chair in their kitchen. The alligator was eating Mom's favorite crackers.

(Beckie and Mom walk across the stage on their way home from school.)

Mom: Beckie, I want you to start your homework.

Becky: Oh Mom, do I have to do my homework?

Mom: Yes you do! And remember do not eat my favorite crackers.

Becky: I won't... Look Mom, there's an alligator in the kitchen!

Mom: There you go again Becky. I told you to stop dreaming up make believe stories.

Becky: I'm not joking Mom. Look he's eating your favorite crackers. The ones that you told me not to touch.

Mom: Oh dear! There really is an alligator sitting on our kitchen chair. He really is eating my favorite crackers.

Becky: What are you going to do?

Mom: Alligator go and stand in the corner. I have to have time to think about what we are going to do with you. (Mom exits off the stage.)

### Scene 2

Narrator: Mr. Alligator stands in the corner. But he is feeling very sad. Becky sees how disappointed Mr. Alligator is and tries to comfort him.

Becky: Please do not cry Mr. Alligator. I will get some help for you. Please sit on your chair again until I call my friends. (Becky calls her friend Johnny and Susie to come over and help her with Mr. Alligator.)

Johnny: You really were not joking, Becky. You really have an alligator in your kitchen.

Susie: Becky, why do you continue to make up stories that are not... Becky, you have an alligator in your kitchen.

Becky: I told you so!

Susie: I'm going to call the kids on the block.

### Scene 3

Narrator: Susie calls Freddie, Mary, Lillie, Jill, Judy, and Andy. She tells them that Becky has an alligator in her house. The kids do not believe Susie but they all rush to Becky's house.

(The Kids on the Block are all talking at the same time. They cannot believe Susie's story.)

Kids on the Block enter: Becky, you have an alligator in your kitchen.

Freddie: You can't keep him.

Mary: Alligators can be mean.

Lillie: Alligators are boring.

Jill: Alligators can't catch a ball,

Andy: Alligators can't bring you a greeting.

Judy: Alligators may eat you in the hall.

Freddie: You can't have him for a pet.

Becky: Now just one moment. Let me have a word or two. I am going to have a talk with my friend, Mr. Alligator.

Kids on the Block repeat together: Your friend?

Becky: I bet I can have him for a pet. Mr. Alligator can you cook some hamburgers and serve them on bread? Can you make my bed? Can you do my homework each night? Can you make the garbage go out of sight?

(Mr. Alligator shakes his head "yes" to each question. The Kids on the Block stare with their mouths wide open.)

Becky: See I will have him for a pet. (Becky runs off stage and calls to her mother.) Mom, Mom I have an alligator for a pet.

Mom: So you have an imaginary friend, Becky. What else is new? Or is he my imaginary friend too? I am confused.

(Everyone puts hands up in disbelief. Beckie stands in the middle of the group grinning from ear to ear with her arm around the alligator.)

Kids on the Block repeat together: Is he our imaginary friend too?

Narrator: You will have to decide - Is he your imaginary friend too?

## Teacher's Bibliography

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Amazon.com. "Jack Prelutsky's "How to Write a Funny Poem,"

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ts/feature/6293/t/104-0968890-9384728>, Jack Prelutsk writes and gives tips to children for writing a funny poem. He explains how to exaggerate, make the ordinary special, draw a absurd conclusion, and explains how the poem should have a sense of rhythm.

Auray, Dea Paoletta, and Mariconda, Barbara. *Getting Ready to Write* . Easton: Empowering Writers, Ll., 1997. The activities in this book were written to lay the groundwork for narrative writing. The overall thrust is designed to bring out the author in all students. Good examples and templates for enabling the teacher to bring success to students in the classroom.

Embracing the Child.com. "Jack Prelutsky's Children's Poet," <http://www.embracingthechild.com/bookspecialprelutsky.htm>. This site offers a short description of a few of Prelutsky's poetry books along with a few poems from each book. Poetry books include, *Scranimals*, *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders*, *Awful Ogre's Awful Day*, *It's Raining Pigs and Noodles*, *The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom* , and *The Gargoyle on the Roof* .

Kapell, Dave. *The Magnetic Poetry Book* . New York: Workman Publishing, 1998. A book to teach children who want to become prolific in writing poetry. Includes a magnetic board with tabs for creating poetry. Great ideas for teachers to use in the classroom.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970. Kenneth Koch describes his methods for teaching Manhattan elementary school children to write poetry. He gives examples of students' work that are appropriate for various age levels.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, Where did You get That Red?* New York: Random House, Inc., 1973. Kenneth Koch gives examples of poetry by authors such as Blake, Donne, Stevens and others. Koch gives these examples as models and explains to teachers how to help children write their own poetry.

Scholastic.com. "Writing with Writers," [http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry\\_tguide.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry_tguide.htm), This site features three authors, Jack Prelutsky, Jean Marzollo, and Karla Kuskin who give suggestions to students for writing poetry using description, rhythm, and rhyming words. The sit includes lesson plans for teachers, assessments and rubrics, and national standards for reading/language arts.

## Children's Bibliography

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Pigdon, Keith and Woolley, Marilyn. *Penguins*, New York: Mondo Publishing, 1997. A beautifully illustrated book giving lots of information about the life cycle of penguins and their habitats.

Prelutsky, Jack. *A Nonny Mouse Writes Again!* New York: Random House, Inc., 1993. A collection of 50 funny poems pertaining mostly to animals and what they do to humans. Colorful illustrations help to understand the meaning in the poems.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Awful Ogre's Awful Day* . New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001. Funny poems that center on a character named Awful Ogre. Children will love to spend a day with Awful Ogre as encounters all kinds of funny experiences including an elephant in a bathtub. Colorful illustrations help tobring the poetry to life.

Prelutsky, Jack. *A Pizza the Size of the Sun*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1994. The collection of poems is rich with descriptions and funny lines that will capture the attention of the reader. It includes a backwards poem, a poem that never ends, and scores of others that will be certain to make you smile. Excellent models to spark themes for writing - narratives and poetry.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Beneath a Blue Umbrella*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990. Prelutsky's poems from various places around the country are surely to spark a social studies or science theme. For example, Ricketty Pickety who rides a polar bear, combs his hair with an icicle, and finally carries his bear will certainly spark interest in a theme about bears.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Rhymes Around the Year: Dog Days*. New York: Dragonfly Books, 2001. A wonderful way for children to learn about the months of the year with a funny poems for each month along with colorful illustrations.

Prelutsky, Jack. *For Laughing Out Loud: Poems to Tickle Your Funny Bone*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, 1991. A collection of 132 funny poems that children will love. They will especially love the poem about homework and wonder who the men in white are that carry them away.

Prelutsky, Jack. *It's Raining Pigs and Noodles*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, 1997 Over one hundred funny poems about people and animals and some things that will never happen. The children will love the wordplay and the shape play that is found throughout the book.

Prelutsky, Jack. *It's Snowing! It's Snowing!* New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984. A delightful poetry book about snowmen, ice skating, snowballs, etc. A beautiful poem about a snowman that will spark an interest for the young reader for writing their own snowman story or poem.

Prelutsky, Jack. *It's Valentine's Day*. New York: A Mulberry Paperback Book, 1983. Valentine's Day is a delightful day for young children. The funny poems of Prelutsky bring out a lot of feelings that the children experience on this special day.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Ride a Purple Pelican*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1986.

As we climb aboard a purple pelican, we are taken to faraway places like Kalamazoo, Saskatoon, Honolulu, Nova Scotia, and the giant red woods of California. A great book with themes for social studies.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Something Big is Right Here!* New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990.

Funny Poems about animals and people. Children will be sure to enjoy meeting such characters as a rat of culture, Super Simpson, Captain Conniption, five flying hot dogs, and many more.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The Dragons are Singing Tonight*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1993. Children will meet dragons of all sorts - dragons in castles, dragons in bathtubs, dragons in computers, dragons in armor, etc. They will love to write about their own dragon.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2002. A collection of 28 short poems that center around a geography theme covering 15 states and Canada.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The New Kid on the Block*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984. Funny poems that children will be sure to love. One will meet jellyfish stew, a bouncing mouse, a ridiculous dog, and a boneless chicken. You'll also be glad that your nose is on your face and why you should never dine on dinosaurs.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The Sheriff of Rottenshot*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1982. A collection of funny poems by Jack Prelutsky where animals take on human traits and people do funny things that are not natural. Children will love Cecil Snedde who sneezes so many times that his head finally flies off.



Prelutsky, Jack. *The Snopp on the Sidewalk*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1976. Funny poems by Prelutsky about imaginary creatures such as Jabberwock, the Quangle Wangle, and the Wild Things. A collection that will be sure to spark a lot of fun themes for writing.

## Assessment Key

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\*The following assessment key will be used to evaluate the following rubric.

Social Skills

- 1 - Seldom
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Frequently
- 4 - Always

Academic Skills

- 1 - Student demonstrates substantial inconsistencies that suggest the need for new learning.
- 2 - Student demonstrates a partial understanding of the story. Inconsistencies detract from the meaning of the story.
- 3 - Student demonstrates a sufficient understanding of the story. Errors do not detract from the meaning of the story.
- 4 - Student demonstrates a clear and advanced understanding of the story and its meaning.

## ASSESSMENTS

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Smiley Face Rubric - Circle a face that shows how you did.

(image available in print form)

### *Teacher Evaluation - Oral and Written*

#### Social Skills:

Listened to classmates 1 2 3 4

Complimented classmates' work 1 2 3 4

Shared and took turns 1 2 3 4

#### Academic Skills:

Shared ideas 1 2 3 4

Written response 1 2 3 4

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