

Pets

by Joy Watson
pictures by Gavin Bishop

Overview

This humorous rhyming text describes a series of unusual pets found in a rather unusual neighbourhood and is accompanied by wacky, detailed illustrations. Note that copies of this book and its accompanying audiotape are no longer available.

Suggested Purposes:

The text has a high proportion of challenging words but offers many opportunities for exploring language. Once children are comfortable with the vocabulary, it's a great text for practising oral performance skills. It works particularly well as a shared text and is also useful for monitoring children's decoding strategies.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the use of rhyme
- the catchy rhythm
- the use of commas to support phrasing
- the use of a dash to indicate anticipation on page 10
- the use of upper-case letters at the beginning of each line
- the wacky illustrations
- the open ending
- the humour in the poem
- the inclusion of surnames
- the "O" in "O'Brien" and "O'Toole" and the "Mc" in "McPhee".

Possible challenges

- the characters' names
- the use of the word "opossum" rather than "possum"
- the meaning of the phrase "opossums galore"
- the need to draw heavily on decoding strategies to get through the text.

Introducing the text

Tell the children you have a book called *Pets* for them to read. Open out the front and back cover of the book and identify the various animals. *Where would we normally find these animals? Does this illustration match the title?* Draw out the idea that they might be in for a few surprises!

During the reading

You may prefer to use a shared reading approach for parts of the reading, depending on the children's confidence in managing text challenges and their ability to decode. They will probably need reassurance with the names of the characters because even if they decode them correctly, if the name is unfamiliar, they won't know whether they've got it right.

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Page 2 – Examine the illustration. *What are these people looking at? What do we call people who live near us? What's so funny about the giraffe?*

Encourage the children to try reading pages 3 to 6 by themselves. Observe how they manage the interest vocabulary. Encourage the children to explain the strategies they're using. *How did you work that word out? Why did you think that word was "Adair"?* They might refer to the illustrations, apply their phonics knowledge (such as noticing the "ph" digraph in "McPhee" or the "ame" rime in "tame"), make use of the rhyme pattern, or try reading on to the second line and then returning to the first to check or confirm their initial attempt. If you feel the children are struggling, offer extra support by sharing the text together.

Page 7 – You may need to explain that opossums are found in America and that they're similar to possums. If necessary, explain that "opossums galore" means that there are lots and lots of them.

Read to the end of the book. *So why do they laugh?* Compare the illustration on page 12 with the illustration on page 2 and enjoy sharing the children's ideas.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner. Observe their use of strategies and their ability to read with rhythm and expression. Children who can manage this text easily and confidently are likely to be ready to move on to the Purple level.

Check this by doing a running record on a Turquoise text that has a hundred words or more. *At the End of the Day* or *Dimitri's Lunch* are good texts to use.

Write out the text as a one-page poem on a chart or overhead transparency to read together. Remind the children about the convention of starting each line of a poem with a capital letter.

Read the poem aloud together. Have the children identify the pairs of rhyming (or near-rhyming) words on each page. Draw out the idea that different combinations of letters can have the same sounds, for example, "door", "galore"; "laugh", "giraffe"; "O'Brien", "lion".

Identify the different types of punctuation (semicolon, comma, full stops, dash, question mark) and discuss their purpose. *How do the commas/the dash/the question mark help you read the poem?* Draw out the idea that the punctuation supports the rhythm and the use of expression.

Investigate the surnames "O'Brien", "O'Toole", and "McPhee". Think of other surnames that use abbreviations or apostrophes.

Discuss the wacky illustrations and discuss what makes them funny. *Which is your favourite illustration? Why?*

Practise presentation skills by reading the text aloud together, enjoying the rhyme and rhythm.

Suggestions for further tasks

Make the audiotape available on the listening post.

Read other nonsense poems, for example, “I Had a Little Brother” or “A Crocodile with Toothache” in *Thank You* (Green). Show the children where to find poetry books in the library.

Find other books that have been illustrated by Gavin Bishop.

Make up nonsense sentences together using the poem as a model, for example, “Penelope Potter has an outrageous otter”.

Ask the children to choose one of the animals from the story and to write a short account of how they would look after it, where they would keep it, and what they would feed it! Add a wacky illustration.

Write a newspaper report about the wacky street these animals live in. Include a catchy headline.