

Literature Guide

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Max's Words

Written by Kate Banks and Illustrated by Boris Kulikov

Max's Words is a rich and wonderful story of a little boy who collects and organizes words. As emergent and early readers begin to collect their own bank of words, this book can be used to inspire young writers to creatively explore the power and enjoyment of words.

By Jeane Green

Literature Guide for Max's Words
By Kate Banks, Pictures by Boris Kulikov

Suggested grade level: Kindergarten, First Grade

Introduction

Once there was a little boy who wanted to collect something. His name was Max. His older brothers were collectors; Karl collected coins and Benjamin collected stamps. When Max asked if he could have one stamp or one coin they refused to share. The family and numerous friends are depicted in the illustrious pictures wide eyed and smiling as they admire his older brothers' collections. After some thought, Max decided to start his own collection of words (much to his brothers skeptical amusement). From newspapers and magazines he cut out words both big and small, words he loves, and words others have said to him. As words fall onto the table from their source they take on a form that makes their meaning more visual digestible; *hungry* is tongue-red with a bite taken out of it, *hissed* is written in chartreuse with two snakes for the double "s". As Max's collection grows he separates it into neat plies and begins to arrange the words in different orders. Depending on how the words were arranged, Max could make numerous ideas form from the same set of words. He knew then that his collection was special. Not only was his collection inexhaustible but he could create stories with his collection and a good story is like gold. Still, his brothers refused for the second time to trade one coin or one stamp for some of Max's words.

Unaffected, he ingenuously begins to compose a story with his words. The story begins simply but when his brothers become interested it becomes a race to assemble the words in time to save Max's protagonist, a little brown worm who wished to be a green snake. Max wins and saves the worm with agility through his familiarity with his collection. Benjamin and Karl are so impressed they ask Max for a few words to make their own stories, which he gives willingly in exchange for one coin and one stamp.

Max's Words is a children's book that can be enjoyed at any age. For children who are just beginning to experience the joys of writing, this book offers an inspiring introduction to the power and play of words. The story itself appeals to children for it deals with issues of fairness, self-confidence, creativity and autonomy. The novel idea of collecting things, particularly free and accessible things, also appeals to the young reader. Max's words are easily decodable for children who are just learning how to read and invigorating to children who are becoming young writers. The illustrations reflect how important drawings that accompany text are for children at this age. The visual context of each word within the collection enables children to pick up on what the word means while also emphasizing artistic value in words an author chooses. Not only does the text of each word appeal to our creative image-making minds but Max's play with word order beautifully highlights just how important syntax is and how altering it can drastically change the meaning. Max's manipulative exploration of his collection to create meaning and enjoyment is developmentally appropriate for children at this age. They are industrious risk takers, learning best through hands-on activities with a love for movement focusing more on the process than the product (Wood, 75). Max mirrors the early readers need for fun and active learning experiences to fuel growth. The process he goes through to create a collection, entertain himself, and create a story all his own draws the early reader in and encourages playfulness as a tool to use in their own writing process.

Initiating Activities

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One way to spark interest in the book would be to visit a museum that houses a collection of something or bring in a collector who can share their collection with students. The teacher can also introduce the book through a conversation and exploration of a personal collection. From there, expand the topic to include any insight or thoughts the kids might have about collections. The students can start various classroom collections especially a collection like Max's – a word collection.

Max's Words can be read early in the year as a part of their introduction to writer's workshop. The activities that follow will help children feel more comfortable with the writing process by scaffolding the approach to writing through enjoyable and interactive activities. The process Max uses for gathering groups of words to create a story can be imitated by the class as they begin their own journey as writers. Max's process is tangible, making the word order and word choice an important task in the writing process. The book is introduced to the whole class as a read aloud. Throughout the read aloud the teacher asks numerous questions to help children make connections to the story. Possible topics to make the reading more meaningful to the children might be through discussions regarding fairness, sharing and sibling relationships.

This book exemplifies how exciting a story can be through the arrangement of a few words. As emerging writers emphasize Max's journey as a writer and his choice of words throughout the book; while reading, generate lists of words with the students that correspond to Max's words. Using words from the generated lists, emphasize the importance of word order by rearranging their order.

Highlight the parts of speech in the book. During one read through of the book have the children listen for all the describing words in the story, then all the doing words, etc.

Draw their attention to the illustrations: Ask questions regarding the characters facial expressions. Ask them to describe the difference in appearance between Max and his older brothers. Emphasize how the visual context of a word and the type that is used can evoke more from a word than just plain text.

Common Core Reading Standards for Reading Literature, Language, Speaking and Listening

- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson
- Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Direct Instruction Plans:

There are numerous mini-lessons possibilities by using Max's Words. Here are two possible mini-lessons that can help strengthen children's reading comprehension strategies:

MINI-LESSON 1

USING SCHEMA: MAKING TEXT-TO-SELF CONNECTIONS

Grade Level: Emergent and Early First Grade Readers

Materials: Max’s Words by Kate Banks illustrated by Boris Kulikov, chart paper and markers, writing journals or copies of Schema handout for each student (see below)

- Begin in the meeting area. Have chart paper prepared with this heading:

*Connections from Max’s Words to our own experience
that help us better understand the reading:*

Introduction: “We have been learning and practicing ways to read words we don’t know. Sometimes covering up parts of words work well or finding little words in big words can be helpful. Today we are going to practice something good readers do to get more meaning from what they read and to have more fun with reading. Good readers use what they already know to make connections to the things they read. Using what we already know to make a book more enjoyable and have more meaning is called using our schema. I’m going to show you how I use my schema to make Max’s Words a more meaningful book for me. I’m going to think aloud while I’m reading so that all of you can hear my thoughts.”

Group Activity: (Opening to the title page) After reading the text gesture that you are thinking aloud “I have a desk where I get most of my word work done. So, I’m going to write that on this chart (read the heading and then add the first text-to-self bullet.)

- I have a desk where I do a lot of work with words

Turn the page. Read the dedications. Thinking aloud “I had a cat named Max.” Add this to the chart.

- I had a cat named Max.

Continue for a few more pages adding your schema to the text and continue to read and have the students help by sharing their text-to-self connections. (Have them put their thumb up over their lips if they want to share their connection after reading each page. This way there are no hands waving in their partner’s face and it is a quiet gesture.)

Reviewing Our Schema:

Review the class’ list and decide which connections helped everyone learn more about the story (this can be done the next day depending on time limitations). Highlight the connections that were helpful.

Send them off:

Now while you read for the next half hour, I want you to make some connections like we made together for Max’s Words but to the book you are reading. In your reading journal I want you to write, or draw one or more connections you make to your just right book. We will get together at the end of reading class to share some of the connections you made you your books.

Common Core Reading Standards for Reading Literature, Language, Speaking and Listening

- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather information or clarify something that is not understood.
- Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
- Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print
- Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds

MINI LESSON 2

CREATING MENTAL IMAGES: THINKING ABOUT THE WAY OUR WORDS LOOK

Grade Level: Emergent and Early First Grade Readers

Materials: Max's Words by Kate Banks illustrated by Boris Kulikov, chart paper and markers, Words about my Word handout (see below), art supplies: scissors, paper, scraps, markers, string, paint, glue, etc.

Introduction: Begin in the meeting area. "We have been learning and practicing ways to use our schema to make what we read more meaningful. We have made text-to-text connections and text-to-self connections. Today we are going to do a fun activity that will help us think more about the words writers use and how we, as readers and writers, visualize- or make pictures of the words we read in our heads.

Group Activity: Remember in Max's Words how the illustrator made the words look like pictures. Do you remember how he drew the word *park*?" Write *Park* on the chart paper. "Who can tell me what color he use to write the word park? What other things did you notice about the word park?" Add all of their responses to the chart making a visual web with *park* at the center. "Now close your eyes. Think of the word *park*. Keeping your eyes closed for a minute and your hands down just think about what other images come to mind for you when you think of the word *park*."

"Now open your eyes. You just made lots of mental images that relate to that one word *park*. Think about all of the thousands of images your mind is making while you read a whole book! So, today we are each going to draw one word like it looks in our mind when we think about it just like Boris – the illustrator did in Max's Words." (Optional: Look through the book at some of the illustrious words in Max's Words to refresh the children's memory.)

Individual/Partner Activity: Have everyone pick one word they would like to illustrate. If children cannot think of a word have a list of words they can choose from or provide a mystery word bag that they can pull a word out of that would be suitable for this exercise. When everyone has a word, explain the handout: Words about my Chosen Word. Explain that they are to brainstorm words (or images) about their chosen word before they make their word into an art piece just like the group together with *park*. When they are finished with the handout they can get the art materials they need to make their word come alive.

Send them off:

As students brainstorm words about their special word circulate and talk to each student about their ideas. Have students work in pairs if they are struggling with mental images of their word. If students finish early they can make another word visual or they can make a sentence with another student who has finished.

Common Core Reading Standards for Reading Literature, Language, Speaking and Listening

- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text
- Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
- Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- With support, demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
- Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

Focusing Questions:

What would you want to collect?

Why would someone want to collect coins/stamps?

What can we learn from looking at a stamp or a coin?

Why don't Max's brothers give him one item from their collection?

What are some words that you think are small/big?

What words make you feel good? What words come to mind of things you like to eat?

What would the word _____ look like if we were to give the word a life all its' own? What are some describing words for _____?

What do you think Max is going to do with all of his cut-out words?

Do you think Max's collection will intrigue his brothers?

Do Max's brothers learn anything from Max? Why is Max's collection so powerful?

Related Activities

Building Schema; Text-to-Text Connections - Read Oliver Button is a Sissy and make a Venn diagram comparing Max and Oliver. By comparing two characters in a Venn diagram, Students' can make connections and see patterns of the protagonist's of a story.

Math sort – Sort words based on how many letters they have. Create a graph based on the words that were sorted. Students will begin seeing patterns in the length of words. They will feel challenged to find longer words and to use those words in their own writing.

Maps and Languages – From your word lists, find the same word in different languages and place the word on a map of where that language is predominately spoken. This can tie in nicely to learning more about the first or second languages spoken by students in the classroom.

Collaborative story making - Let kids explore collecting and cutting words from old newspapers and magazines. Working with partners, students can make their own creative sentences and stories.

References

Miller, D. (2002). Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades (1st ed.). Stenhouse Publishers.

Wood, C. (2007). Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14 (Third.). Northeast Foundation for Children.

Name _____

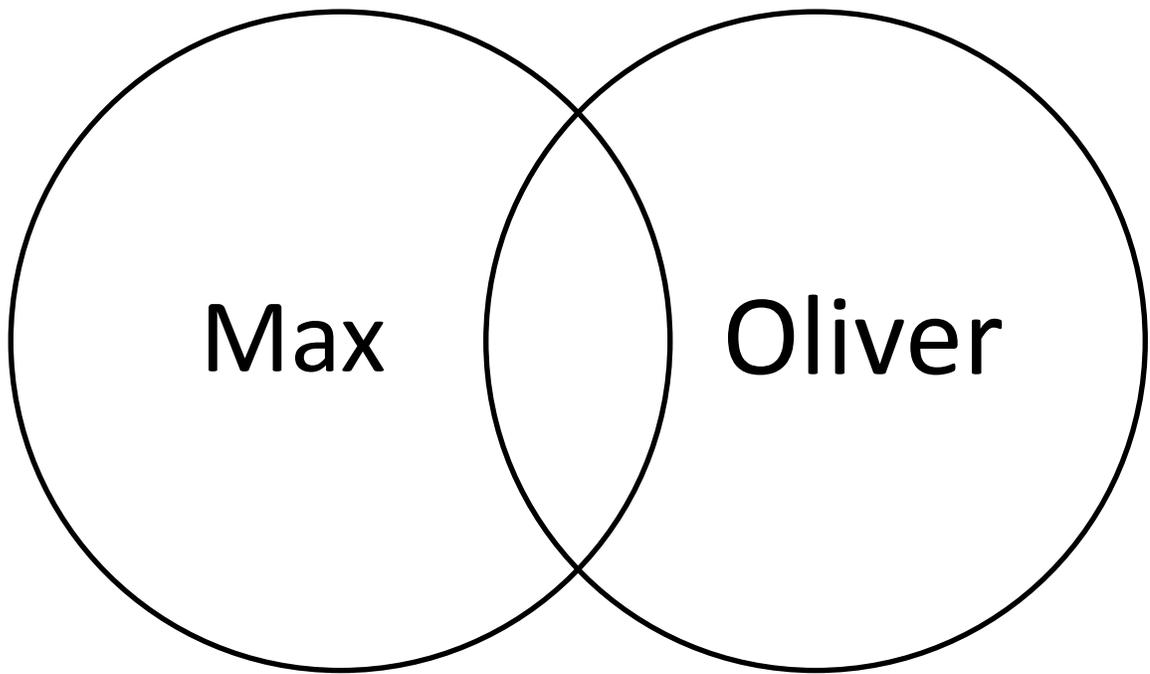
Date _____

Book Title

Using My Schema

When I read the part about	It reminded me of

Making Text-to-Text Connections



Name _____

Date _____

Words about My Chosen Word

