

My Father's Dragon

by Ruth Stiles Gannett

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Barbara M. Linde

A Perma-Bound Production

Note to the teacher: This guide is not intended to be followed exactly. Feel free to pick and choose among the suggested activities based on the needs and interests of your students. You are encouraged to make adaptations, or to supplement the guide with activities of your own creation. Page references are followed by a T, M, or B to indicate the top, middle, or bottom of a page.

Objectives

1. The students will demonstrate understanding of the following comprehension skills:
 - identify main ideas
 - recall details
 - predict outcomes
 - discuss character traits
 - place events in sequence
 - identify cause-effect relationships
 - identify story elements
 - determine point of view
2. The students will increase their vocabulary through the use of context clues, discussion, and various word games
3. The students will use creative dramatization to re-enact selected portions of the story
4. The students will use context, word structure, decoding, and dictionary reference to identify new words
5. The students will compare and contrast the elements of reality and fantasy in the story

Introductory Activities

1. Before reading, have the students predict what the book may be about, based on the title and the picture on the cover.
2. Make a pre-reading chart of the things the students want to find out while reading. As the information is found in the story, record it on the chart.
3. Model an overview of the book. Discuss the title and dedication pages. Explain the functions of the copyright and Library of Congress number. Examine the map. Discuss the chapter titles listed on the contents page.

4. Discuss word recognition strategies. Remind the students that they have several options when they encounter an unfamiliar word. Elicit known strategies from them, then present the ones the students did not offer. Cover decoding, word structure, context, and using the dictionary. If desired, also mention quietly asking another student for assistance. Remind the students of these strategies during reading.

Ongoing Activities

1. Make charts for homophones, synonyms, and multiple meaning words. Record examples on the appropriate charts as they are found.
2. Make a collage or paint a mural of a jungle scene.
3. Use a world map to locate islands and jungles (social studies).
4. Have the students do independent research on cats, jungle animals, or dragons. Present short reports to the class.

Biographical Sketch

Ruth Stiles Gannett (August 12, 1923) was born and raised in New York City. She began writing in elementary school, because her teachers encouraged her to do so. She attended Vassar College in Pennsylvania, and graduated in 1944. During World War II, Ruth worked as a radar researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

My Father's Dragon was written a few years later, and printed in 1948. The first draft was written in just two weeks. Ruth had no intention of publishing it, but her family liked it so much they encouraged her to do so. The book was very successful. It was a Newbery Honor Book, and has been in print continuously for the last thirty-five years.

Mrs. Gannett lives in Ithaca, New York. Her husband, Peter Kahn, is an artist. She met him while she was looking for an illustrator for *My Father's Dragon*. They have seven daughters. For a few years, Ruth taught elementary school, as she said "... to make possible for others a joyous experience of education, the sort that encourages children to write their own stories, to make all kinds of things, and to learn in creative ways." She has also served on the local school board.

Critic's Corner

"This is, without question, the funniest book that we have seen for a month of Sundays. It is also an exciting adventure story."
- *Saturday Review*

"Here is a real delight - a nonsense tale in which the ingenuity of the humor and the logic of the nonsense are irresistible."
- *The New Yorker*

Other Books by the Author

Elmer and the Dragon, 1950
The Dragons of Blueand, 1951
Katie and the Sad Noise, 1961

Chapter 1 My Father Meets the Cat

Synopsis: Elmer befriends an alley cat. He tells the cat of his secret wish to fly when he grows up. The cat tells Elmer he knows of a way that Elmer can fly as a child. Elmer's curiosity is piqued.

Word Study: obliged (9M), stray (11T), weep (13B). Activity: Brainstorm other words to use instead of **obliged**. Record them on the synonym chart.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What could happen when a boy meets a cat?
2. What could meeting a cat have to do with a dragon?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Is this story fiction or non-fiction?
(fiction)
2. Who is telling the story?
(p. 9 - Elmer's child)
3. What is the cat's problem?
(p. 9 - She wants food and a warm, dry place to stay.)
4. How does Elmer help?
(p. 9 - He takes her home and feeds her).
5. What is Elmer's problem?
(p. 11 - He wants to fly.)
6. How can the cat help Elmer?
(She apparently knows something about the island that will help Elmer. Accept any reasonable speculations.)
7. How did Elmer feel when his mother whipped him and threw out the cat? What would you have done if you were Elmer?
(Accept any answer the students can support.)
8. Is the cat male or female?
(p. 9 - female [pronoun reference])

Activities:

1. Draw a picture of what the island of Tangerina might look like.
2. Write about a time you found a lost animal, or something else that was lost. Tell how you found it. Tell what you did with it.

Chapter 2 My Father Runs Away

Synopsis: The cat tells Elmer the story of a young dragon who is being held captive on the Wild Island. The cat suggests that Elmer rescue the dragon. He feels certain that the dragon will be grateful and will let Elmer ride him. Elmer agrees to attempt the rescue and stows away on a ship bound for the island of Tangerina.

Word Study: practically (15T), inconvenient (16T), particularly (16T), moody (16T), knapsack (20T), compass (20M), pantry (20M), docks (20B), gangplank (20B). Draw or cut out pictures to illustrate the new words.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. Where is Elmer going?
2. How will he get there?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of the cat's plan?
(Accept any reasonable answers. Encourage the students to defend their answers with facts from the chapter.)
2. What do you think of the way the animals treat the dragon?
(Answers should convey the idea that the animals are cruel to the dragon.)
3. Are there any other ways to get across the river?
(Students may brainstorm a list of ways, including making a bridge, building a boat, walking around to the connected end of the island.)
4. Why didn't any other dragons come to look for the baby?
(Accept any reasonable answers.)
5. Foreshadowing: reread the top of page 16 where the crocodiles are described. Keep in mind the character traits of the crocodiles, as this will be important later on.
6. Why does the plan have to be kept a secret?
(Because Elmer's parents probably would not let him go if they knew about it.)
7. How is Elmer going to keep his presence on the ship a secret?
(Accept any reasonable answers.)

Activity:

Make a chart like the following to list the possible uses of the items in the knapsack. Refer to it during the reading, and record the actual uses of the items mentioned.

HOW WILL ELMER USE THE ITEMS IN THE KNAPSACK?

ITEM	POSSIBLE USE	ACTUAL USE
chewing gum		
lollipops		
rubber band		
black boots		
compass		
toothbrush and toothpaste		
magnifying glasses		
jackknife		
comb and brush		
hair ribbons		
grainbag		
clothes		
food		

2. Draw a large knapsack. On separate pieces of paper, draw the items that are in the knapsack. Tape or clip the items on the sack. Remove them as Elmer uses them.
3. Make a list of all of the things Elmer had to do to get ready to go on the trip. Put them in the correct sequence.

Chapter 3 My Father Finds the Island

Synopsis: By hiding himself inside the empty grain bag, Elmer is able to get to the port of Cranberry. He meets a fisherman who tells him that no one has ever come back alive from Wild Island. This does not deter Elmer. He spends seven hours leaping from rock to rock and finally reaches Wild Island.

Word Study: hold (22T), cargo (22T), port (22M), punctual (24B). Draw a ship and label the parts. Use an encyclopedia as a reference.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Question:

1. How will Elmer get to the island?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. What do you think of Elmer's disguise?
(Accept any reasonable answer.)
3. What kind of person is Elmer? Support your answer with facts from the story.
(He is brave and adventurous. He was not frightened by what the fisherman told him.)
4. Why did it take so long to cross on the rocks?
(It was a long distance, they were slippery, it was too dark to see much, Elmer was being very careful.)

Activities:

1. Dramatize crossing the rocks.
2. Refer to the map in the front of the book for Elmer's location.

Chapter 4 My Father Finds the River

Synopsis: While traveling through the jungle, Elmer encounters some of the wild animals. Although he manages to elude them, he leaves tangerine peels that alert the animals to the possibility of an intruder.

Word Study: ate, eight (31T) - study as homophones, solemn (36T), recent (36T), unreliable (36B), trundle (37M). Discuss the homophones ate/eight and boulder/bolder. Have the students write sentences using both homophones in a single sentence. Encourage creativity. Illustrate the sentences and display on a bulletin board. Start a homophone chart with the words, and add more as they are found in the story.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What could happen on the way to the river?
2. Will it be a safe or a dangerous trip?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. (Math) How many tangerines are left?
(He started with 31, and ate 7 on p. 27, leaving 24. He ate 8 on p. 31, leaving 16. Then he ate 3 more on p. 32, leaving 13.)
3. What else could he have done with the tangerine peels?
(Accept any reasonable answer.)
4. Do the animals know what the invasion is?
(No, possibly because they have never seen a human before.)

Activities:

1. Model the use of dialogue for the students. Then have the students make simple masks of the animals and dramatize the chapter by reading the dialogue.
2. Reread the chapter and find the sequence words. Write the sentences containing sequence words on separate index cards. Work with a partner and put the events in the correct order. Check the book for accuracy.

Chapter 5 My Father Meets Some Tigers

Synopsis: Elmer loses his direction and wanders away from the river. He encounters a group of hungry tigers and diverts them with the chewing gum from his knapsack.

Word Study: dense (39T), oozy (39B), mucky (39B), swampy (39B), wade (40T), contradict (42T), scarce (45T). Find pictures to illustrate the vocabulary words and use them to make a collage.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What can Elmer do when he meets the tigers?
2. Is there anything in his knapsack that can help him?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. How do you think Elmer felt in the jungle?
(Accept any reasonable answers that the students can support.)
3. Was it smart of Elmer to run out into the clearing?
(Probably not, because the tigers saw him that way)
4. What did Elmer's response to the tigers tell you about his character?
(He was clever, quick-thinking, brave.)
5. How would you describe the tigers?
(foolish, gullible, easily distracted, playful)

Activities:

1. Brainstorm uses for bubble gum.
2. Research the history of bubble gum - its invention, composition, and popularity.
3. Write a news article about the events in the story to this point.

Chapter 6 My Father Meets A Rhinoceros

Synopsis: Elmer meets a rhinoceros and uses the toothpaste and toothbrush to distract the animal and escape.

Word Study: mahogany (50T), brook (50M), weeping (50B). Use context clues to learn the meanings of the new words. Check the dictionary for verification.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What do you already know about a rhinoceros?
2. What kind of problem could the rhinoceros have?
3. How can Elmer help?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. What might happen now that the boars are suspicious?
(Accept any reasonable answer.)
3. How did the rhinoceros know about the toothbrush and toothpaste?
(He may have had a previous encounter with a human.)

Activities:

1. Draw before and after pictures of the rhino's horn.
2. Write a commercial and have the rhino selling toothpaste.

Chapter 7 My Father Meets A Lion

Synopsis: Now Elmer encounters a fierce lion who has an unruly mane. Elmer gives him a comb, brush, and hair ribbons to tame his locks, and again escapes death.

Word Study: underbrush (57M), glaring (57B), skidded (57B), mane (59B), forelock (60M). Add mane/main to the homophone chart. Find pictures of animals with manes and forelocks.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What kind of a problem could the lion have? Use the picture on page 58 for a clue.
2. How can Elmer help?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. What will the lion's mother say when she arrives?
(Accept any reasonable answer. The mother will probably be pleasantly surprised, and may want to know where the lion got the ribbons, etc.)
3. What do you know about the lion's personality?
(He is afraid of his mother, likes to scare others, is somewhat vain.)

Activities:

1. Draw before and after pictures of the lion.

2. Make posters using the before and after pictures to advertise a beauty shop. Write an ad or slogan to go with the picture.
3. Dramatize the chapter.

Chapter 8 My Father Meets a Gorilla

Synopsis: Elmer meets a flea-infested gorilla. The magnifying glasses in the knapsack prove to be just what the gorilla needs to find the fleas. While his monkey assistants are busy removing the fleas, the gorilla forgets about Elmer. Elmer continues his search for the dragon.

Word Study: banyan tree (63T), ducked (64T) - multiple meaning word, occupied (66T), dignified (66T), miraculous (72T). Add duck to the chart of multiple meaning words. Pantomime the words *ducked*, *occupied*, and *dignified*.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What problem could the gorilla have?
(Have the students brainstorm all they know about gorillas to arrive at possible problems.)
2. What is left in the sack to help the gorilla?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. What was the gorilla's problem?
(He had fleas that were so small he couldn't find them to get rid of them.)
3. Where is the clue for what the gorilla needed?
(". . . can't even get a good look at them.")
4. How did Elmer help?
(He gave the gorilla the magnifying glasses so that the monkeys could find the fleas.)
5. What parts of this chapter could be true?
(Animals do get fleas. Some animals have other animals pick off parasites. Animals groom each other.)

Activities:

1. Use a magnifying glass to look at different items.
2. Brainstorm other ways the gorilla could get rid of the fleas.
3. Pretend to be a flea. Write about what it feels like to have the monkeys trying to get rid of you.

Chapter 9 My Father Makes A Bridge

Synopsis: Elmer reaches the river bank but is perplexed about finding a way to reach the dragon. When a group of hungry crocodiles approaches, he realizes he can use rubber bands to fasten the lollipops to their tails and have them suck on the pops while making a bridge across the river.

Word Study: summon (73M), craving (75M). List other words that mean the same thing as summon. Make a list of things for which the students get cravings.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What is Elmer's problem?
2. What is left in the knapsack to help him?

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. (Math tie-in) How many lollipops were left over?
(Two dozen = 24. $24 - 17 = 7$. Or, since there are 18 crocodiles in the picture, $24 - 18 = 6$. Accept either answer.)
3. What do you think Elmer did with the leftover lollipops?
(Accept any reasonable answer.)
4. Could any part of this really happen?
(Crocodiles could eat lollipops.)

Activity:

Make up more math problems using the animals. (Ex: How many lollipops would Elmer need if each crocodile ate two?) Trade with a friend and solve the problems.

Chapter 10 My Father Finds the Dragon

Synopsis: Elmer reaches the dragon as the animals begin a pursuit across the crocodile bridge. The lead crocodile, who has finished his lollipop, changes course and heads downriver. The story ends with the animals floating down the river on the crocodiles' backs, as Elmer and the dragon fly happily away.

Word Study: furious (79M), raging (79M), seething (79M), ranting (79M), screeching (79M), irate (79M), saw (81M) - multiple meaning, recovered (86T). Dramatize or illustrate the many angry words used to describe the animals. Add saw to the multiple meanings word chart.

Pre-Reading Purpose Setting Questions:

1. What could happen now?
2. Take a vote to predict whether or not Elmer will rescue the dragon.

Post-Reading Discussion Questions:

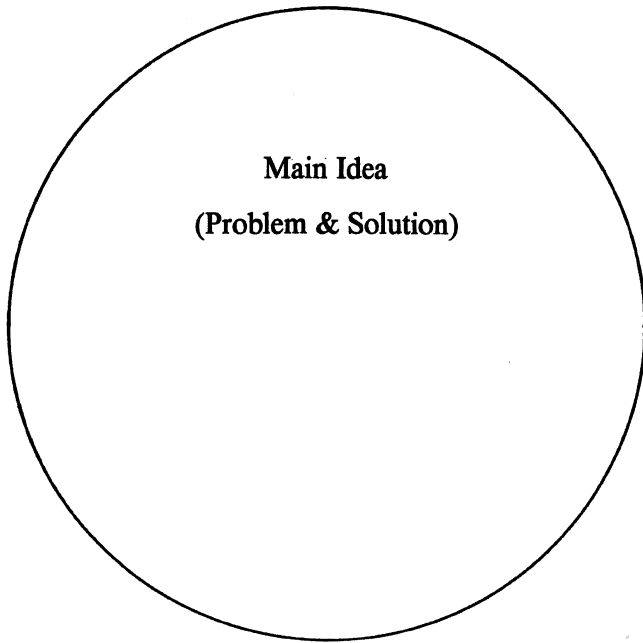
1. Check the pre-reading predictions.
2. How did Elmer feel when he rescued the dragon?
(Accept any reasonable answer - happy, satisfied, joyful, etc.)
3. How did the dragon feel about being rescued?
(Accept any reasonable answer - happy, relieved, elated, etc.)
4. What will happen to the animals floating down the river?
(Accept any reasonable answer, and encourage creativity - they will be eaten by the crocodiles, they will all learn to swim, they will drown in the river.)

Activity:

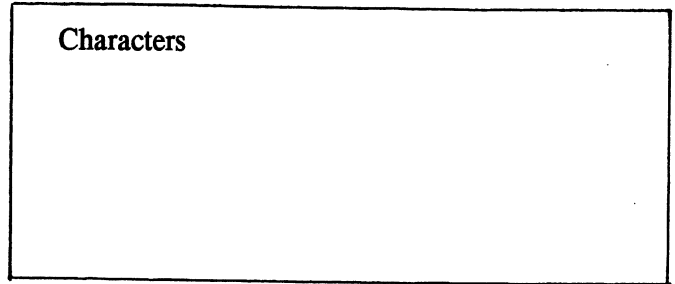
Brainstorm other ways the animals could cross the river now that the dragon is gone. (Encourage creativity. Answers may include the following: Supply lollipops and keep the crocodile bridge, make a bridge of tree limbs, make a rope bridge, have the monkeys carry messages, make a ferry boat.)

STORY MAP

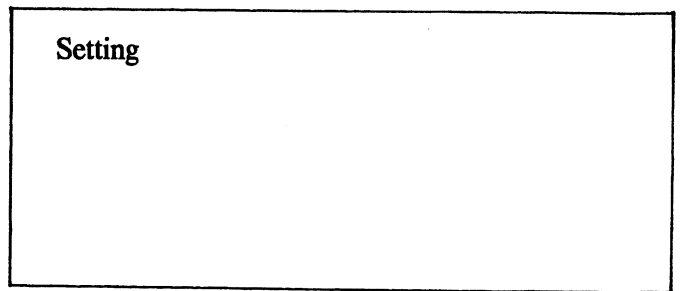
To summarize the story, have the students complete the story map. Cut out the pieces and arrange them on another piece of paper in a way that will help the students remember the events in the story.



Main Idea
(Problem & Solution)

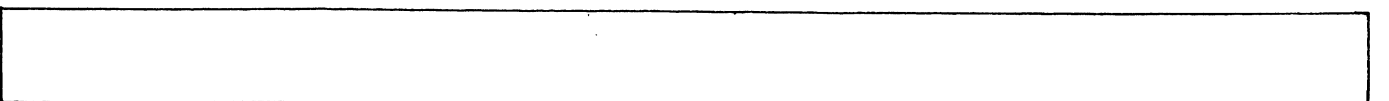
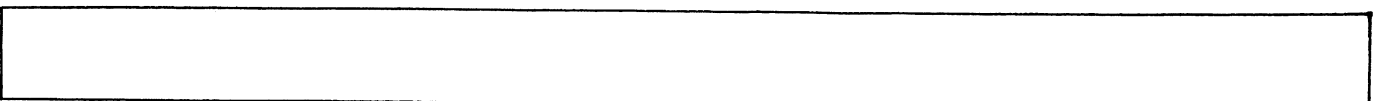
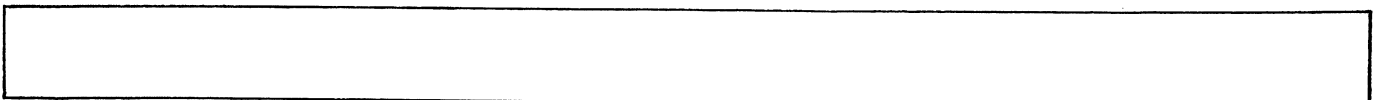
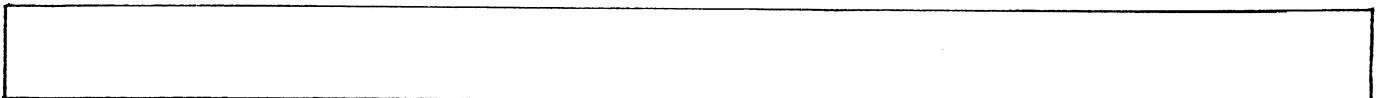
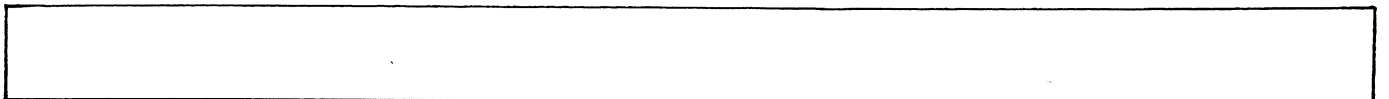
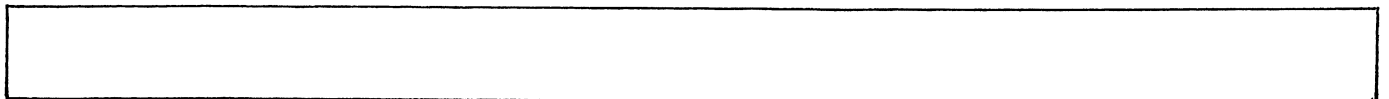
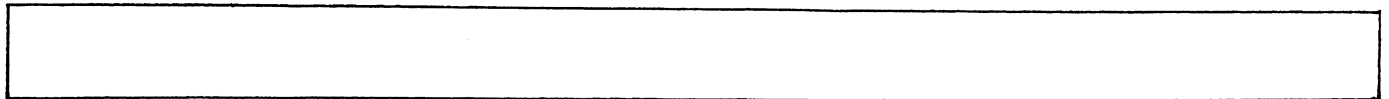


Characters



Setting

Details



CINQUAIN POETRY

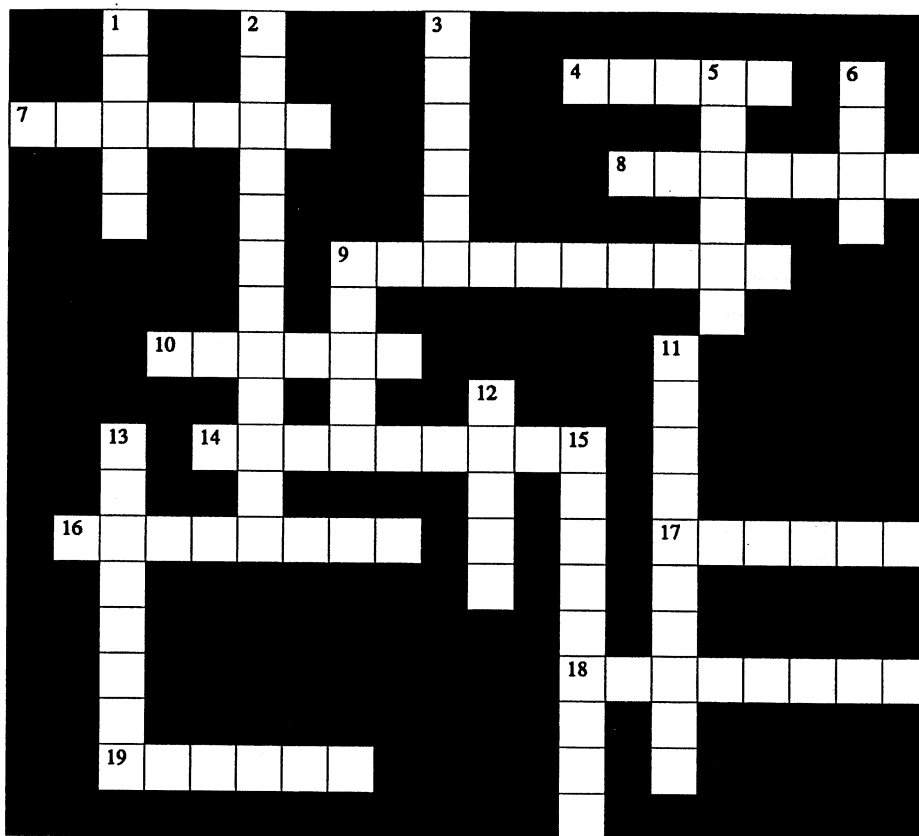
A cinquain is a five-lined poem. The first line has the name of the object or person. The second has two descriptive adjectives. The third has three verbs using *-ing*. The fourth line has two more adjectives. The fifth has a synonym for the first line.

Have the students use the form below to make a cinquain poem about one of the characters from the book.

<hr/>		
(name)		
<hr/>		<hr/>
(adjective)		(adjective)
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
(verb)	(verb)	(verb)
<hr/>		<hr/>
(adjective)		(adjective)
<hr/>		
(synonym)		

VOCABULARY TEST

Use the vocabulary words from the story to complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS:

4. packed closely together
7. an enclosed chamber where fuel is burned to make heat
8. staring angrily
9. to disagree or say the opposite
10. a small room, usually near the kitchen, where food and dishes are kept
14. returned to normal
16. acting or arriving on time
17. of a time just before the present; new
18. the section of hair that grows just above the forehead
19. very serious

DOWN:

1. an animal that has wandered away from a group or proper place
2. annoying or causing difficulty
3. to call or send for
5. hard to get; not often seen or found
6. the long hair on the top of the head and neck of a male lion or a horse
9. goods or freight carried by a ship or an airplane
11. untidy or unruly
12. a small, natural stream of water
13. large, round rocks
15. calm, serious, and stately in manner

COMPREHENSION TEST

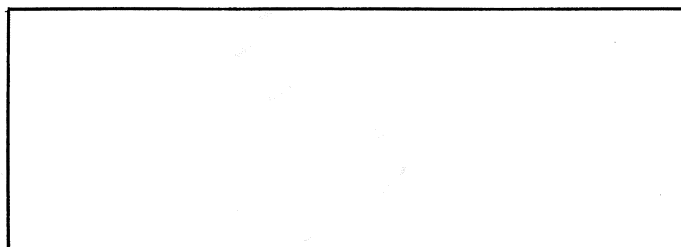
Part I: Character Identification

Read the description of each character. In the box next to the description, draw a picture and write the name of the character.

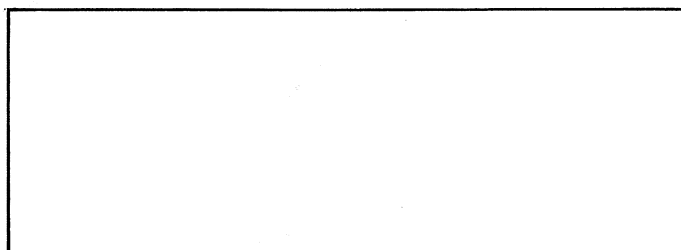
DESCRIPTION

CHARACTER and NAME

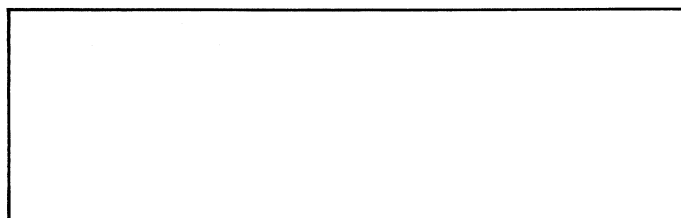
1. These two animals were suspicious from the beginning. They lead the other animals in the search for the intruders.



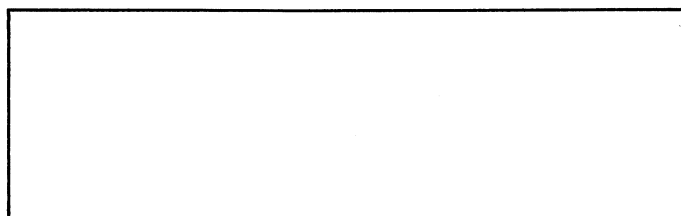
2. This kind stray animal helped Elmer think of a way to make the daring rescue.



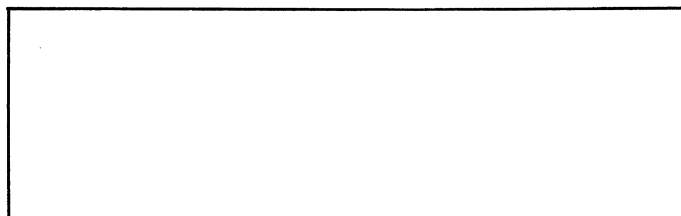
3. These animals had cravings for sweet foods.



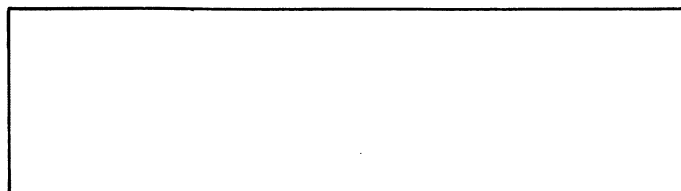
4. This young captive was being forced to carry the other animals across the river.



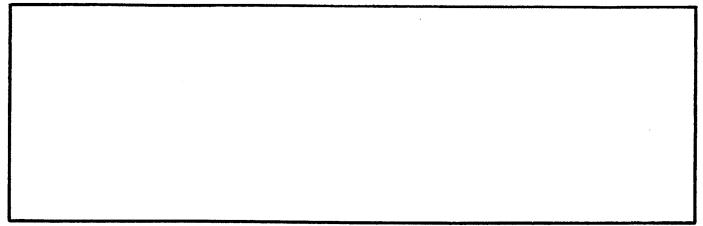
5. This hairy beast was grouchy and itchy before Elmer helped him.



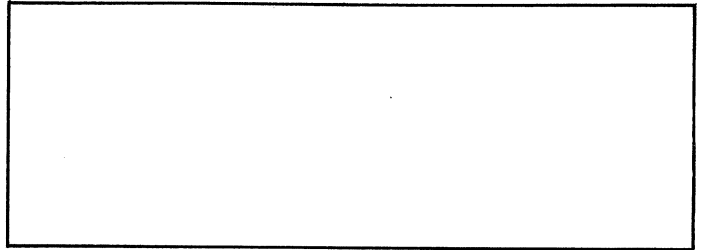
6. This fierce son used Elmer's brush, comb, and hair ribbons to solve his problem.



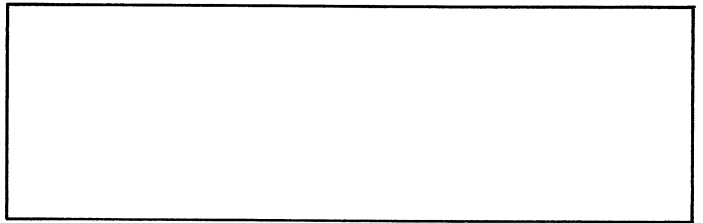
7. This tiny animal mixed up his words while talking excitedly.



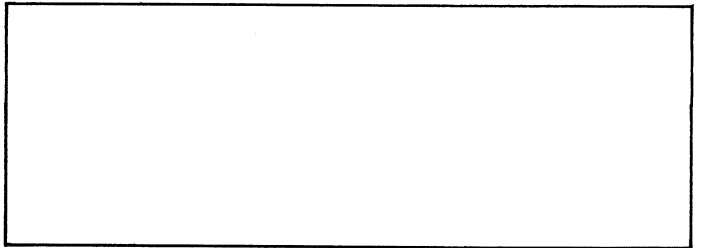
8. This huge creature was sad because the only beautiful part of him had turned ugly.



9. These seven hungry animals ate Elmer's chewing gum instead of eating Elmer.



10. These round creatures mistook Elmer for a monkey.



Part II: Character Quotations

Choose the character from the box who said each of the following. Write the name in front of the quote.

- _____ 1. "I'd be very much obliged if I could sit by a warm furnace, and perhaps have a saucer of milk."
- _____ 2. "Bum cack! We dreed our nagon!"
- _____ 3. "I bet you're taking your sick grandmother to the doctor's."
- _____ 4. "As fond as we are of chewing gum, we're sure we'd like you even better."
- _____ 5. "Everything else about me is ugly, but when I had a beautiful tusk I didn't worry so much about the rest."
- _____ 6. "My mother is coming over this afternoon, and if she sees me this way, I'm afraid she'll stop my allowance."
- _____ 7. "Horsefeathers! I'm going to get to the bottom of this if it's the last thing I do."
- _____ 8. "Blast those fleas!"
- _____ 9. "I have such a craving for something sweet."
- _____ 10. "All aboard! Where shall we go?"
- _____ 11. "Why, they're miraculous! It's easy to see the fleas now."

boar

cat

crocodiles

dragon

gorilla

lion

monkeys

mouse

rhinoceros

tigers

tortoises

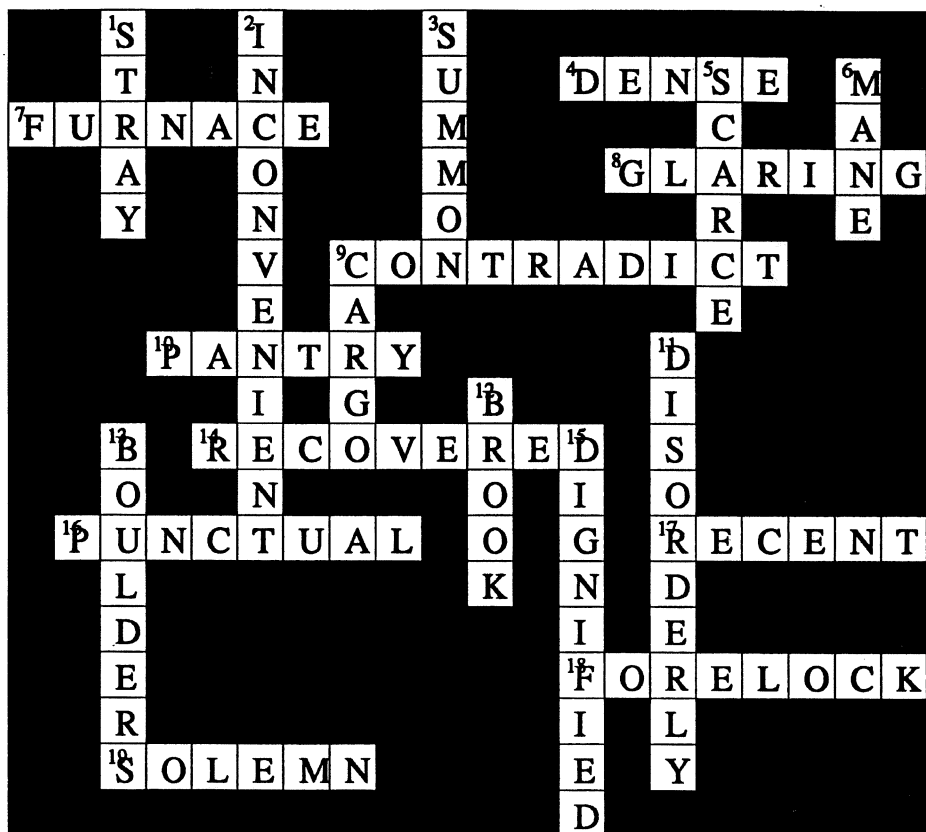
Part III: Multiple Choice

These questions emphasize cause-effect relationships. Before completing the following exercise, discuss the skill with your class. Find examples of cause-effect relationships. Then answer the questions below.

1. Because of the way Elmer's mother felt about cats, she _____.
 - A. gave it milk
 - B. threw it out
 - C. found a new home for it
2. The cat was able to explore Wild Island because _____.
 - A. she had permission from the mayor
 - B. she missed the boat at Cranberry
 - C. she had a map and a knapsack
3. Elmer agreed to rescue the dragon because he _____.
 - A. wanted to fly while he was still young
 - B. liked to have adventures
 - C. wanted to run away from home
4. Since Wild Island was divided by a wide river _____.
 - A. the animals did a lot of swimming
 - B. it was difficult for the animals to cross
 - C. the animals did not know what was on the opposite side
5. The animals beat the dragon and twisted his wings because _____.
 - A. the dragon was wild and needed to be tamed
 - B. they thought it would stop him from complaining about carrying them across the river.
 - C. they didn't know how to be kind to others
6. Since their plans had to be kept secret, Elmer and the cat _____.
 - A. hid the things they were packing for the trip
 - B. talked about the trip in a secret code
 - C. only packed when no one else was around
7. When they got to the dock, the cat made loud queer noises in order to _____.
 - A. call her friends together for a going away party
 - B. wake the sailors so they could help Elmer on board
 - C. distract the night watchman so Elmer could sneak on the ship
8. The sailors thought the bag Elmer was hiding in was dried corn on the cob because _____.
 - A. they could not read the label that said "wheat"
 - B. they didn't know the difference between wheat and corn
 - C. they thought Elmer's elbow felt like an ear of corn
9. When he got to Wild Island, Elmer walked along the beach because he wanted to _____.
 - A. find a good place to go swimming
 - B. find the place where the river flowed into the ocean
 - C. see if there was anything to eat
10. It was dangerous for Elmer to stay near the Ocean Rocks in the daytime because _____.
 - A. they were probably guarded during the day
 - B. the tide came in and they were under water
 - C. they got very hot from the sun and he could get burned if he touched them

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test



ANSWER KEY

Comprehension Test

Part I: Character Identification

1. boars
2. cat
3. crocodiles
4. dragon
5. gorilla
6. lion
7. mouse
8. rhinoceros
9. tigers
10. tortoises

Part II: Character Quotations

1. cat
2. mouse
3. tortoises
4. tigers
5. rhinoceros
6. lion
7. boar
8. gorilla
9. crocodile
10. dragon
11. monkeys

Part III: Multiple Choice

1. B
2. B
3. A
4. B
5. B
6. A
7. C
8. C
9. B
10. A



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