



Synopsis

Like many children, the little boy in this story thinks that a “nightmare” lives in his closet. His nightmare appears to be a monster. At bedtime, he closes the closet door and hides under the covers. Finally, he decides to face his fear. When the nightmare appears, the little boy shoots him with his toy gun. When the nightmare starts to cry, the little boy tucks him into his own bed. It appears that the nightmare is afraid of the dark and the boy has overcome his fear! This bedtime story can help students address their own fears of the dark.

Timeline

- Before** A little boy used to close his closet door every night before going to sleep, because there was a nightmare in the closet.
- One night** The boy decides to confront the nightmare. He turns on the light quickly, and finds the nightmare sitting on the foot of his bed.
- Then** He shoots the nightmare with his toy gun. The nightmare begins to cry. The boy comforts the nightmare.
- Now** The boy is no longer afraid. He tucks the nightmare in every night at bedtime.

Author Sketch

Mercer Mayer was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1943. He attended the Honolulu Academy of Arts, and moved to New York City in 1964, where he attended the Art Students League and worked as a professional art direc-

tor at an advertising agency before becoming a full-time writer and illustrator of children’s books. He has published more than 300 titles, and is recognized as one of the early creators of wordless picture books. Married three times, Mayer currently lives in Roxbury, Connecticut with his third wife, Gina. He has two children.

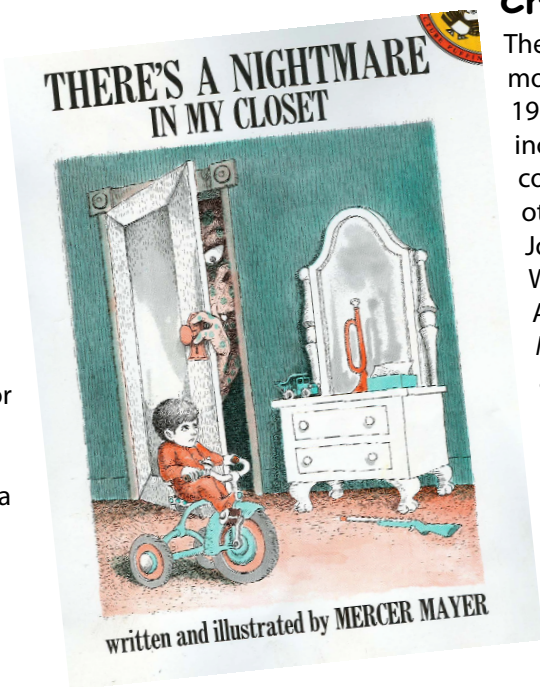
Critic’s Corner

The prolific Mayer has written produced more than 300 children’s titles since the 1960s. Famous for several series, including the Little Critters, he has also collaborated on many projects with other children’s authors, including John Bellairs, Jane Yolen, Jan Wahl, Jay Williams, and John D. Fitzgerald. According to Mayer, *There’s A Nightmare In My Closet* was based on a true story—as a little boy, he was afraid of the dark, and would be sure the closet door was closed before he fell asleep so as not to let the monsters out. (However, he claims not to like monsters, referring to his creatures instead as “critters.”) Mayer has received numerous awards during his career. Although critics compared *There’s A*

Nightmare In My Closet, unfavorably, with Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, the book was nevertheless selected to be a Reading Rainbow book and is in Brodart’s Elementary School Library Collection. It was adapted for film in 1987.

Bibliography

- “Mercer Mayer Biography,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercer_Mayer
- “Bibliography of Mercer Mayer,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliography_of_Mercer_Mayer
- “Mercer Mayer Teacher Resource File,” falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/mayer.htm
- “Mercer Mayer Gallery,” <http://mercermayer.com/>
- “Official Website/Little Critter,” <http://www.littlecritter.com/>



Selected Other Works by Mercer Mayer

Series

Little Critter
Little Monster
A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog
Tink! Tonk!



Individual Titles

Terrible Troll (1968) (re-released as *The Bravest Knight*)
If I Had (1968) (re-released as *If I Had a Gorilla*)
I Am a Hunter (1969)
A Special Trick (1970)
Mine! (with Marianna Mayer)(1970)
Me and My Flying Machine (1971)
The Queen Always Wanted to Dance (1971)
A Silly Story (1972)
Bubble Bubble (1973)
The Wizard Comes to Town (1973)
Two Moral Tales (1974)
Two More Moral Tales (1974)
Walk, Robot, Walk (1974)
You're the Scaredy-Cat (1974)
What Do You Do with a Kangaroo? (1974)
The Great Cat Chase: A Wordless Book (1975)
Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp (1976)
Herbert the Timid Dragon (1980)
Whinnie the Lovesick Dragon (illustrated by Diane Dawson Hearn) (1986)
Mercer Mayer's a Monster Followed Me to School (1991)
Rosie's Mouse (1992)
Shibumi and the Kitemaker (1999)
The Rocking Horse Angel (2000)
The Little Drummer Mouse (2006)

Related Reading

Aliki, *Feelings*
Bonsall, Crosby, *Who's Afraid of the Dark?*
Bourgeois, Paulette, *Franklin in the Dark*
Cole, William and Thaler, Mike, *Monster Knock Knocks*
Crowe, Robert L., *Clyde Monster*
Keats, Ezra Jack, *Dreams*
Kent, Jack, *There's No Such Thing as a Dragon*
Mayer, Mercer, *There's An Alligator Under My Bed*
There's Something in My Attic
Mueller, Virginia, *Monster and the Baby*
Murphy, Joanne B., *Feelings*
Rice, Eve, *Goodnight, Goodnight*
Sendak, Maurice, *Where the Wild Things Are*

Smith, Janice, *Monster in the Third Dresser Drawer*
Viorst, Judith, *My Mother Says There Aren't Any...*
Wildsmith, Brian, *My Dream*
Williams, Linda, *Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything*
Ziefert, Harriet, *Good Night, Lewis!*

Themes and Motifs

- bedtime
- feelings
- fear
- monsters
- safety

Goals and Objectives

- recognizing character development
- identifying inflections (-ed, -ing)
- recognizing story structure

Meaning Study

Building the background

1. Initiate a group discussion about dreams. Discuss the difference between "good and "bad" dreams. As the children share their good and bad dreams, record their responses on a chart.
2. Write "nightmare" on the board or paper. Ask the students to tell what they think of when they think of nightmares. Record their responses. For example:
 - bedtime
 - sleep
 - dark
 - creatures
 - scaryAfter the story, the children may want to add more words to this list.

Introducing the book

1. Present the book to the students. Have them look at the cover and identify the title and author/illustrator.
2. Generate responses concerning the setting and story content based on the title and the illustrated cover.
3. Record these responses so that the students can confirm their predictions after hearing the story.

Prereading: Setting the purpose for reading

Have the children read to confirm their predictions.

Identifying inflections

1. Write the following headings on the board or a chart.

Example:

-ed words

Used

Closed

Decided

-ing words

going

creeping

sitting

Explain that these endings are added to verbs (doing words.) Assist the students as they revisit the book to identify and list all words containing these endings. This lesson can be extended by having students add other words ending in "-ed" and "-ing."

Comprehension Study

Recognizing character development

1. Initiate a discussion about the boy in the story.

Review how he changed from the beginning to the end of the story. Have the students draw a picture of the boy as he reacted to events during the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

Recognizing story structure

Review the story with the students. Create a story map with the following categories:

- title and author
- setting
- characters
- beginning
- events
- middle
- end
- resolution

This may be completed in a group or as an individual exercise.

Confirming, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the reading

1. Encourage the children to share their feelings and thoughts about the story.
2. Initiate a small group or whole class discussion of the story. Some of the following questions may help to start and/or guide this process:
 - How did the little boy feel at the beginning of this story?
 - When did he decide to tackle his fear?
 - How did the little boy plan to get rid of the nightmare

in his closet? How would you do that?

- Could this story really happen? Why?
- When was a time when you were afraid? What did you do?

Across the Curriculum

Writing

1. Discuss interviewing techniques. Have the children select an adult to interview: a parent, teacher, older sibling or friend. The assignment is to conduct an interview to find out the adult's favorite monster or scary creature and why they chose that particular one. After recording the findings, these can be shared with the class.
2. Assist the students in writing a sequel to the book. This can be done as a whole class or small group activity. Have the students select another setting (examples: under the bed, behind the chair), a type of "nightmare" and a new solution. Record the students' responses. This can be published in Big Book format or duplicated for each student.
3. Model letter writing for the students. Have them write a letter to a friend or relative explaining and describing a dream that they have experienced. Emphasize the use of descriptive words and feelings.

Math

1. Create a math activity using small felt monsters as manipulatives. Addition and subtraction combinations can be demonstrated through the use of these figures.
2. Make life-sized monsters by having the students trace their bodies onto large sheets of butcher paper. These outlines may be colored or painted as monsters and cut out. Use these "monsters" to measure and make comparisons involving height and width. The results of these measurements can be graphed for further extension of this activity.

Social Studies

1. Use this book to introduce "feelings." Make a chart with the headings "How We Feel" and "What We Do." Complete this chart by recording the students' responses as they discuss feelings people have and what can be done when we have these feelings. Continue to discuss feelings by examining how we can react to other people's feelings. Introduce the children to Big Foot, the Loch Ness monster and other types of "monsters" people claim to have sighted. Use a map or globe to locate the place of these sightings.

There's a Nightmare in My Closet

Mercer Mayer

Science/Health

1. Demonstrate how shadows occur. Take the students outdoors to observe their shadows. Have the students form small groups of two to four. Then, have the children use chalk to trace each other's shadows on the sidewalk and/or blacktop. Return an hour later to see how the shadows have changed.
2. Darken the classroom or have the children open a door to a closet to observe how forms and shadows appear. Turn on the lights and have the children observe the forms and shadows at that time. List student observations in each setting. Have the students compare and contrast the forms and shadows seen in the dark and in the light.

Art

1. Have the students work in small groups to create a "nightmare." Supply various types of art media for this project: Cardboard boxes and tubes, construction paper, fabric, newspaper, wire, paint and markers. Assist each group in designing a "nightmare" to create. Display these for the class to enjoy.
2. Give the students an opportunity to make a diorama of their bedrooms. These can be created from shoe boxes or other cardboard boxes of their choice, construction paper, fabric, modeling clay and any other appropriate materials. This can be extended into a writing activity by having the children write a description of the room.
3. Discuss and list feelings that the children have experienced. Supply magazines, newspapers, and construction paper. Have the students cut out pictures and glue them on the paper to make collages that illustrate each of the feelings listed (one collage for angry, one for happy, etc.) These collages can be displayed on a bulletin board entitled, "FEELINGS."

Music

1. Play a recording of "Monster Mash." Introduce any other songs related to monsters, dreams and feelings.
2. Assist the children in writing a song. Use a familiar tune, such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and compose a verse about monsters. Example:

*Monsters, monsters everywhere.
What are we to do?
Laugh and smile and have no fear.
There's nothing to scare you.*

Drama

1. Divide the students into pairs. One of the children in each pair can take the role of the nightmare, the other can be the boy. Read the story and have each pair of students dramatize the events.

Evaluating the Experience

1. Keep a teacher's journal of those strategies that best helped the students understand the story.
2. Record the children's behaviors and learning by jotting these on "Post-its." These comments can later be transferred to a journal containing daily comments on the students.
3. Prepare a chart to record the completion of the projects for each of the students.
4. Record the students' responses as they briefly retell the story.
5. Collect a piece of each child's writing to evaluate.

Culminating Activity

1. Host a "Monster Mash." Display all projects that have been completed. Play songs about monsters and ghouls. Give the children an opportunity to move to the music. Serve monster cookies and juice. Read other books and poems about monsters, nightmares and dreams (see related readings). Have the students act out nightmares they have experienced.

Vocabulary Test

Place the correct word listed below within the sentence it belongs.

Creeping peek decided nightmare suppose afraid

1. There used to be a _____ in my closet.
2. I was even _____ to turn around and look
3. When I was safe in bed I'd _____.
4. One night, I _____ to get rid of my nightmare once and for all.
5. As soon as the room was dark, I heard him _____ toward me.
6. I _____ there's another nightmare in my closet, but my bed's not big enough for three.

Comprehension Test

Write the letter of the description next to the matching character or object it describes.

- ___ 1. the nightmare
- ___ 2. one night
- ___ 3. the boy
- ___ 4. in the closet
- ___ 5. tucked him into bed

- a. where the nightmare used to be
- b. the person who was afraid to look in the closet
- c. wouldn't stop crying
- d. when the boy finally decided to get rid of the nightmare
- e. how he helped the nightmare

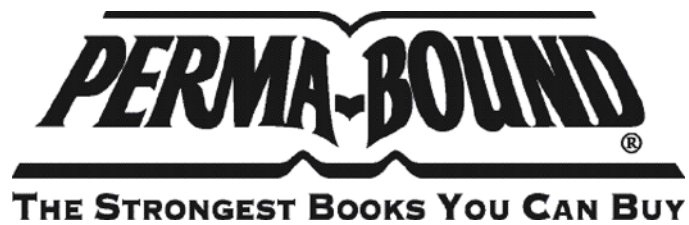
Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

1. nightmare
2. afraid
3. peek
4. decided
5. creeping
6. suppose

Comprehension Test

1. c
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. e



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