City Dog, Country Frog

Words: Mo Willems
Pictures: Jon J Muth

A Literature Guide for 1st grade

By: Mark Gedmin, Fall 2012
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**Rationale:**

In *City Dog, Country Frog*, Caldwell-Award winning author Mo Willems' simple and moving text and Jon J. Muth’s lively watercolors create a meaningful story about the nature of friendship through the seasons. While it can be appreciated on many levels by readers of all ages, 1st grade students will find the themes of seasons, animals and friendship especially engaging. Using the lessons outlined in this literature guide, students will have the opportunity to capitalize on their creative energies as they paint and act out their favorite scene from the story. They will also be encouraged to think critically about what makes a friend, and will be challenged to think with empathy as they infer how the characters feel in the story. Six-year-olds, according to Chip Wood's book *Yardsticks*, are in a major transition in their emotional growth. As they begin to develop an adult view of reality, they are also learning to approach the world more logically. This emerging worldview will allow them to build on their schema of the seasons and of friends, and to explore topics such as the life cycle.

Story development at the first grade level is strongly influenced by drawings, and illustrator Jon J. Muth has done a beautiful job of painting simple images that work to enhance the story and highlight the changing seasons. Six-year-olds are eager and imaginative, especially when it comes to artistic expression, and will have the opportunity to write their own chapter based on their own illustration-inspired drawings – exercising this creativity. This guide gives them multiple ways to engage creatively with the text while making text-to-self and text-to-world connections.

*City Dog, Country Frog* is a predictable picture book that takes the reader through the four seasons. The text is simple, but could challenge some 1st grade readers with new vocabulary; however, the activities outlined use the text mainly as a read-aloud. The book offers students the chance to call upon their prior knowledge, look for textual clues, dig deeper into the story, think critically, and practice making inferences in order to draw out and build upon connections to the important themes and ideas presented within the story.
Summary:

The story begins in the spring, when City Dog goes on a trip to the country where he meets Country Frog. He first finds Country Frog sitting on a rock, where he says he is waiting for a friend, but after a moment's thought, says, “But you’ll do!” Since City Dog had never been to the country, Country Frog shows him some country games like jumping and splashing. In the summer, City Dog returns to the country where he shows his friend Country Frog city games like sniffing and fetching. In the fall, they meet up again, and this time Country Frog is tired and suggests playing “remembering games.” They remember all the good times they shared while relaxing by the pond with the autumn trees bursting with color around them. In the winter, City Dog returns to the country again, and is excited to find Country Frog – but he isn't there! The ending brings the story full circle, and follows City Dog on a return trip the following spring. City Dog is again looking for his friend Country Frog, but finds Country Chipmunk instead. Country Chipmunk asks City Dog what he's doing, to which City Dog replies sadly, “Waiting for a friend.” Then, City Dog smiles a frog-like smile and adds, “But you’ll do.”

Initiating Activities:

Introduce the book during a read-aloud, where students can have a shared experience of reading and looking at pictures. Ask students to predict what they think the story will be about by looking at the cover, and encourage them to make connections between their own experiences and the themes within the story. Some useful questions for a pre-reading discussion include:

Who do we think are going to be the characters of this book? (Based on cover illustration)
What are some of your ideas on what this story might be about?
Does anyone have a pet dog at home?
What do we know about dogs?
Would dogs be friends with frogs?
**Mini-lesson #1**

**Text-to-Self Connections**

*City Dog, Country Frog* is a perfect book for practicing making text-to-self connections. Whether the connection is playing games with friends, thinking about pets, or sharing with others, the goal is that students will find some way to connect to the story. To assess their connections in this lesson, students will be asked to draw a picture of a connection they made to share with the group. Drawings will show whether they are illustrating real connections, or if they are drawing things that are inspired by the book. This activity also presents an opportunity to discuss what it is to make a connection.

*Connection:* When I read this book, I think of my own dog running around in the country without a leash, but I make also make more connections about making friends and learning new things from them.

*Teach:* I want to show you what connections I make as we read *City Dog, Country Frog*. As I read, I may stop at certain spots to make a connection, and I’ll ask you to think about connections you have with the story, and maybe share with a partner a connection you are making.

*Active Engagement:* I’d like everyone to draw a picture of a connection they made with *City Dog, Country Frog* and then we can come back and share. I will hang them up and we can see if there are any similarities in our connections.

*Link:* Does the story become more meaningful when we make text-to-self connections? Does it become more meaningful when we share our connections with others, and we see that some of us have unique connections and some of us have connections that are similar to one another? Have we learned anything new about our classmates from their drawings?
Mini-Lesson #2:  
Story-Mapping, Recalling Details, & Summarizing

In this activity, students will practice re-telling the story, and will be asked to pay close attention to detail. In doing so, they will be encouraged to think about the role that details play in the story, and they will gain practice summarizing – crafting a short, accurate explanation of what they know.

Connection: We get to live in a place where we can play in the snow all winter, and in the summer we can go swim in the lakes and rivers – there are fun things to do, no matter the time of year. Do you have a favorite season? What makes it special for you?

Teach: Just like in City Dog, Country Frog, we live in a place where there are four seasons. In the story, each season is special and unique for both City Dog and Country Frog. Let’s see if we can recall some of the major events that take place during each season. We'll add them to our chart so that we can keep track of what we've remembered.

Active Engagement: When I think about the book and the four seasons, something important happens in each season. Who can tell me what happens in the spring? Who can draw a picture of that? What about the summer? Fall? And what happens in the winter? What happens when it is spring again? (Be sure to give lots of positive reinforcement and feedback during the discussion!)

Link: When we’re reading, characters often times go through changes. That is what makes stories so interesting and meaningful. It would be a pretty boring book if nothing happened right? Next time we read together, we'll practice thinking about how the characters change throughout the story.

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Critical Thinking:
Discussion Questions to Further Thinking

1. What clues tell us that City Dog and Country Frog are friends?
- Re-examine the book to look for clues. Discuss what makes a good friend, and identify things that the characters do for each other that show these things.

2. What are some ways that City Dog and Country Frog’s friendship is like a friendship that you have?
- Ask students to share examples of a special friendship that they have with someone. Encourage them to compare their experience with that of City Dog and Country Frog, making connections between their own experiences and those of the characters.

3. What are some ways that City Dog and Country Frog's friendship is like the seasons?
- The seasons are a powerful theme in this book. Think about how the characters changed and how the seasons changed.

4. Why do you think Country Frog was not in the country in the winter?
- This could be a delicate topic, depending on how students interpret it. Students with lots of knowledge about hibernation and amphibians may know that frogs hibernate, but other students may think that the frog died. If they are sad that the character has died, it's possible to have a discussion about losing friends. Otherwise, teach students about how frogs hibernate! This could lead to further frog studies – maybe even some classroom frog eggs in the spring.

5. Why do you think City Dog smiled a froggy smile? Where did City Dog get that smile from? Did he steal it? Did he borrow it? Was it a present? Did he learn it?
- Have students think about how we learn things from other people. Sometimes, learning is structured and formal, like during a lesson. Other times, we learn things just by
watching, and perhaps without realizing we're learning. Ask students to share examples of things they have learned from friends – whether they are skills, games, words, etc.

6. Why do you think City Dog waits on the rock in the winter?
- Students should begin to think about what it's like when you want to see someone, but they are nowhere to be found. Talk about how City Dog might feel – how he misses Country Frog, how he might be worried, etc. Then, talk about how this shows how much City Dog cares and how important their friendship is to him.

**Related Activities:**

*Paint a Scene:*
At six, children experience an artistic explosion and story development is still strongly influenced by drawings (Wood). Have the students recall a scene that resonated with them, as children are generally better able to respond to specific parts of a story, rather than the whole (Kasten). Have students use watercolors, just like the illustrator did, to depict their favorite scene. Display the student’s paintings so that they can visualize the cyclical nature of the seasons together. Use the display to discuss what students like about each of the seasons, and what makes each one unique.

*Act out a scene: “Remembering Games”*
In the fall, City Dog and Country Frog play remembering games. Discuss with students what it means to remember, and how a game that requires you to remember might be different from an active, exciting game like tag. Then, choose scenes from the book and have students act them out in pairs – using their memories to turn the activity into a remembering game. After a scene is performed, have the audience guess what scene they were acting out. Ask them what key details they noticed that helped them to make their decision – things like dialogue, movements, body language, etc. can all be useful clues. Discuss these with students before they plan their scene.

*Write the next chapter: “Summer (again)”*
This activity allows students to think about what might happen next in the story. Does City Dog make friends with Country Chipmunk? Do they learn anything from each other? Or does City Dog stop visiting the country? Does Country Frog come back? If the next part of the story involves Country Chipmunk, have students come up with games City Dog and Country Chipmunk might play together. Spend some time thinking about what students already know about chipmunks – where they like to live, what they eat, what they look like, etc. Have students design their own chapter entitled: “Summer.” They can create a series of drawings and short written descriptions of all that happens during the next summer.

**Common Core State Standards for 1st Grade**

*Reading:*
1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.
7. Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
9. Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

*Writing:*
3. Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.
8. With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

*Speaking and Listening:*
1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
4. Describe people, places, things and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.
6. Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation

Language Arts:
1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.
3. With guidance and support from adults demonstrate understanding of word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Bibliography

