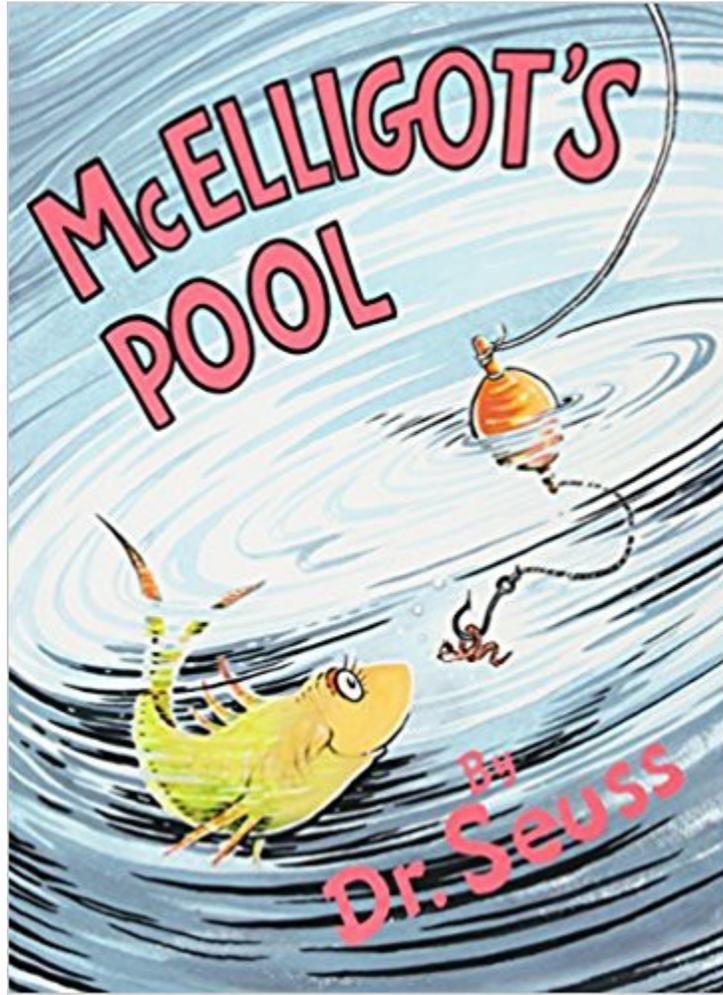**Literary Guide for Dr. Seuss'**

McElligot's Pool

by Robin M. Huntley

Summary

McElligot's Pool is not one of Dr. Seuss' best-known books, but it is one of his best! Blending true Seuss-ian creativity with environmentalist undertones, the story follows a young fisherman through the many different imaginary marine scenarios that could be playing out in the dark water below his fishing pole. McElligot's Pool is a farm pond scarcely larger than a puddle and filled with human detritus (an alarm clock, a boot, a tea kettle, a tin can, and so on), and while it seems likely that the small, dirty pond holds no fish at all, the narrator's youthful imagination is not bound by the constraints of environmental reality (nor any other type of reality) and takes readers on a fantastic underwater trip around the world.

Accompanying the fanciful and creative story are illustrations that beautifully bring each imagined fish species to life. Dogfish with collars chase catfish with realistic cat-like noses, a two-headed eel meets itself, a sawfish with a long and serrated nose is helped by a smaller fish who carries his snout, an Australian fish with a kangaroo-like pouch carries around its young, and so on. The imaginary fish are each more outlandish than the last, and they parade through a series of habitats that is every bit as unlikely as the species themselves. Each illustration is beautifully drawn, and those that are printed in color are especially so.

While at first read the book seems to be just another silly Seuss story, it falls in line with a great many other Dr. Seuss books in that it includes a meaningful message beneath the text. The story taps into the great imaginary play and thought that is unique to childhood, and essential for cognitive development. Despite the farmer's warning, the narrator continues to fish – not yet held back by reality in his imagination.

Critical Thinking Questions

Intended to support readers in engaging with the story and activating necessary schema, the questions below can be used either during or after a close reading of the book. The questions can help

readers notice details in illustrations, recognize patterns in the story structure, relate portions of the story to their own experiences and knowledge, and use the story as a catalyst for their own creativity.

- Why wouldn't McElligot's Pool be a good place for fish to live?

- Why do you think the pool was filled with things that didn't belong there?

- This story was written a long time ago. Do you think that people treated their environment the same way back then that we do today? Explain.

- Why doesn't the young fisherman agree with the farmer? What helps him continue to have hope?

- Have you ever seen water flowing straight from underground? Where do these kinds of springs exist? What are they like?

- Do you know of any rivers that meet the sea? Do you know of any creatures who move from the sea into a river?

- The young fisherman imagines that fish might come from other climates just to enjoy his pool. If his pool was where you live, where do you think fish might come from in order to move in?

- What type of fish do you imagine might exist in such a pool?

- Even if the imaginary fish might not be found in the pool, what kinds of creatures could be found there do you think?

Mini-Lesson

The lesson outlined below utilizes the story as a tool for practicing critical thinking and structures for organizing thoughts. Intended for use with readers ages 7-9, the lesson could easily be adapted for older or younger readers. In the lesson, readers will be asked to compare imaginary fish from the story to the real-life creatures that serve as their inspiration and the animals who are the

namesake for each type of fish. Facilitators will need not only multiple copies of the text (or

photocopies of necessary pages), but images of cats, dogs, catfish, and dogfish, too.

Comparing and Contrasting Reality, Imagination, and Inspiration

1. Re-visit the page in the text where the narrator mentions catfish and dogfish flocking to the

    pool. Ask readers to share what they notice about the dogfish and catfish included in the

    illustration. Discuss the ways in which they resemble actual cats and dogs. Keep track of

    interesting thoughts and observations in a place where all readers can see (chart paper, white

    board, etc.).

2. Explain to readers that unlike many of the other fish mentioned in the story, dogfish and catfish

    are actual types of fish that exist in the world. Share with them at least one image of each

    species. Ask readers to share the similarities that they notice between the dogfish and catfish in

    the text. Then, ask readers to share any similarities that they notice between dogfish and catfish

    and actual cats and dogs. Keep track of interesting thoughts and observations in a place where

    all can see (chart paper, white board, etc.).

3. Explain to readers that they will now work on organizing the observations that they shared into

    a graphic organizer. Facilitators may choose the most appropriate task for readers, as there are

    multiple options. Readers can compare a fish in the book to its real-life equivalent (Dr. Seuss

    catfish to real catfish, for example), compare a real-life fish to its namesake (catfish to cat),

    compare a fish in the book to its namesake (Dr. Seuss catfish to cat), or take on a more complex

    challenge and compare three things at once: a fish in the book, its real-life equivalent, and its

    namesake (Dr. Seuss catfish, real life catfish, and a cat). Readers can recycle their original

    observations from the discussion and use observations made by others while working on their

    graphic organizer. The best organizer to use for such an activity is a simple Venn diagram,

    which can be used to compare and contrast 2 or more things. This activity can be completed

using another kind of graphic organizer, and facilitators may choose what is most appropriate

for readers.

4. As readers work to organize their thoughts, support them in placing information in logical

    places. Encourage readers to be as specific in their observations as possible. For example, if

    readers observe that a cat has fur and a catfish does not, they should then try to identify what the

    catfish has in place of fur.

5. After readers have had sufficient time to organize their thoughts, allow them to share their work

    with each other. They may choose to add to their own graphic organizers as others share their

    thoughts, as the purpose of the lesson is to organize their thinking rather than to make original

    observations.

Extension Activities

Using the story as a catalyst, each of the extension activities below can be used to support

readers in expanding their knowledge in a variety of realms. From conservation and preservation to

rhyming pairs, each activity pulls an idea, image, or topic from the story and connects it to age- and

developmentally-appropriate methods of learning.

Who's In Your Pool?

Do you have a local fishing hole? If you do, do you know what's inside it? If you don't have

one, do you know what you'd find inside if you did have one? Look to local resources to learn about

the species of fish that can be found in local ponds, lakes, rivers, and even the ocean if it's nearby. Use

books, the internet, local experts, and museums to help you learn as much as you can about the types of

fish that you can find in your local landscape. Then, take advantage of warm weather (or wait until you

have some!) and go visit a local body of water to seek out fish (or at least some evidence of them!). Be

sure to learn about migratory fish, since the story mentions fish from very hot and very warm places

flocking to the pool to enjoy the moderate climate there. While this isn't how or why fish migrate, there are lots of good reasons for why they do!

Keeping Fish in the Pool

In the book, McElligot's Pool is filled with junk – human trash that has been tossed into the pool. The farmer feels quite certain that the narrator will never catch a fish due to the unhealthy environment that the pool provides. Since the book was written (1947), rules and regulations have been created to help keep fishing holes and all other bodies of water protected from human contamination. Explore a local body of water to see how, despite changes in the rules for how we treat our environment, humans continue to impact ponds, lakes, rivers, etc. After observing human impact on the space, brainstorm ways to help keep the body of water clean and safe for the species that live within it. Older readers can even do some research to find out exactly what the rules are for protecting bodies of water where they live.

Pairs to Trios

In true Dr. Seuss fashion, <u>McElligot's Pool</u> is full of rhythmic, sing-songy lines. Much of the book rhymes, even! This style of writing is perfect for young readers who are still working on their phonological awareness, as the repeated syllables can help them to decode new words and sounds. Scour the book for rhyming pairs, and work to come up with another word that rhymes with the pair. See how many rhyming pairs you can make into rhyming trios! Older readers can be challenged in this activity by trying to find a third word that rhymes with the pair but does not use the same letters to spell the matching sound.

Imaginary Fish

Though some fish in the book share their name with real-life species, none of the fish in Dr.

Seuss' illustrations are real. They are, however, inspired by real-life objects and elements of the landscape. Use your own imagination to create some fish that could live in nearby bodies of water, using the local landscape and/or things that people do nearby as your inspiration. For example, a fish that lives in a pond in a community where lots of logging happens might be a lumberjack fish, while a fish that lives in a river notorious for its rocky outcroppings might be a stone fish. Encourage readers to incorporate both elements of their inspiration and elements of true fish anatomy in their designs.

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