



Teaching Notes & Activity Ideas

Ages 2 – 6 (Early Years/ Early KS1)

Areas of Learning:

- *Communication and Language
- *Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- *Literacy
- *Expressive Arts and Design

Don't Be Silly! Is a theatrical story inviting fun participatory reading together. The rhyme is rhythmical and contains a repeating phrase. The book contrasts stiff pomposity of some preoccupied adults with fun playfulness in small children (and others). This gives an opportunity to talk about different facial expressions, and moods, as well as role reversal and stereotyping. There is plenty to look at in the pictures for eagle eyed youngsters to spot, and to encourage back and forth discussion. The book contains numerous framed pictures and portraits (some based on real famous paintings), encouraging discussion about art of the past and of different heritages, and enabling the development of cultural awareness, supporting imagination and creativity.

READING THE BOOK IN GROUP or CLASS

Double Title Page: Pause and ask children to look at the cover page. Sometimes in a book, clues to what the book will be about can be found in the pictures before the actual story has started (a bit like

the titles before a film starts or seeing the set on stage before a play starts). Ask the children to describe what they can see. What is the setting? Draw out from the discussion whether the children spot a) two children (who are the central characters in the book), b) two mice (what are they doing?) c) hats, shoes and an umbrella? D) anything else. (Ask the children to keep an eye out to see if anything that appears on this page appears later in the story).

Ask the children to notice the expressions on the faces of the portraits. Do they notice anything about the portraits ie Do they look happy, sad, cross, joyful, serious, or anything else?

Page 1&2 – Point out the expressions on the childrens faces. What do they communicate, and do they look different from the portraits on the previous page? Also ask what else can be seen in this spread? (hopefully the caravan, and the Judge on the castle will be spotted)

Continue reading through the book, asking at each stage what the children see and what they think is going on.

Then read the book through again with no discussion asking the children to listen to the rhythm of the words (it is helpful if you put some exaggeration, drama and feeling into the reading!).

End with a discussion about the book and what the story is about. What happens in the end? Discuss the final picture too. Do the portraits look the same as at the beginning?

Suggestions for activities:

DRAMATISED READING WITH THE WHOLE GROUP (see printable downloadable text on scallywag website activities section)

This could be as simple as the teacher/s reading the text but everyone chiming in with the phrase “Don’t Be Silly”. This can be done with a pretend megaphone made by cupping the hands round the mouth. Or as a more developed reading and comprehension exercise the text can be divided into different sections read by different people. You might want to encourage dramatic reading, such as a gloomy voice for “their father, MR JUDGE” etc. The idea is that the children practice reading comprehension, whilst really getting into the voice and postures of the different characters (ie what does it feel like to be serious or gloomy? How would one hold one’s body?). It could also be an opportunity to involve quieter members of the class. And of course chiming in with “Don’t be silly!”

This dramatized reading could follow any of the other exercises suggested below for “setting the scene”

It might be something that could be developed to be “performed” at an assembly too.



MAKING A GALLERY OF PAINTINGS and talking about art (see printable downloadable frames, and gallery templates on scallywag site activities section. See also “Portraits from the Book” resource).

Look at the galleries in the book, and look at a series of well known paintings from art of different heritages (or actually arrange a visit to an art gallery). You could bring postcards of portraits, or print them from the internet. Everyone chooses one.



Discuss the paintings and what we think is going on in them. You might particularly discuss the expressions on the faces of the portraits, and what the painter or person in the picture might have been trying to communicate. (as an extra writing exercise you might ask students to create a short story about the character in the picture)

Talk about how times in history and culture might effect how a painting is presented.

Ask students to make a portrait of themselves using a famous portrait as a guide or as an inspiration. They might want to think about what sort of expression the portrait will have, what the setting of the portrait is, and what kinds of clothing they might wear in the picture. And think about the mood of the picture as you make it. Add objects that seem relevant to their life and what interests them, such as a football or a pencil.

Finally, put the “paintings” up with “frames” as a gallery (again see printable resources on scallywag site)

MOUSE TALES - writing exercise 1

Ask students to: Write or tell a story about the mice in the book who live in the castle, or from the point of view of the mice. You might want to develop a bit of a mouse family tree for the story. The story could also be illustrated! You could look at what the mice are getting up to in the book, and use that as an inspiration.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS & EMOTIONS

One area of discussion or lesson period could be around facial expressions, and how they might communicate different emotions.

Get the children to suggest different emotions and then get them to suggest how you might draw them on the board onto a simple face. i.e. would the mouth bow upwards or downwards? How would the eyebrows look? (some children may be “face blind” so be aware of using the group and not singling anyone out, or making anyone feel foolish if they don’t know how to read faces. This could even be made explicit. Some people are better at reading emotion on faces than others and that’s ok. We all have different strengths.)

The session would be an opportunity for children to talk about the different emotions and how they feel in the body.

You might discuss how feelings can be like the weather. Discuss what weather different emotions might feel like. They could be quite mixed sometimes. And they always change like the weather (you could incorporate a drawing exercise of putting down on paper what

weather you feel like when you feel different things/ or what weather you feel like at the moment).

Whatever we feel, it can connect us with other people who feel the same way in the world. We can feel kindness and appreciation towards ourselves and others in this way, whether we are feeling happy or sad or anything else.

As an extra area of discussion, you could discuss how someone might appear to be smiling with their mouth, but still feel sad inside. Talk about how a good friend would respond to someone who is feeling sad and anxious. Could we treat ourselves when we feel like this as if we are a good friend to ourselves?

The Judge in the story seems a bit stern, but maybe he has his own reasons. How do we feel about the different characters? Discuss.

NONSENSE RHYMES or LIMERICKS – writing exercise 2

Although “Don’t Be Silly” is quite different from a poem by Edward Lear or Hillaire Belloc, it shares the same sense of bouncy rhyme and nonsense.



Look at some Edward Lear or other nonsense poems, and get into the mood of the rhythms. Then write your own nonsense rhymes or animal limericks, either on your own or together as a class/group.