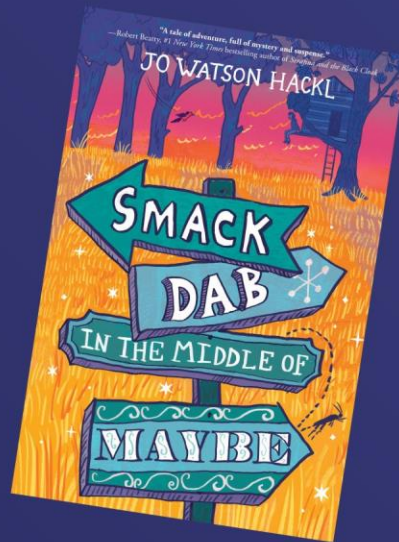


Smack Dab

in the Middle of
Experiencing
Your World:

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE
ART, STEM, EXPLORING, AND LITERATURE
ACTIVITIES FOR

SMACK DAB
IN THE MIDDLE
OF MAYBE
BY JO WATSON HACKL



RANDOM HOUSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS

About the Book

Eleven days, thirteen clues and one kid who won't give up

Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe takes readers on an adventure with 12-year-old Cricket and her companion, a field cricket named Charlene, through an overgrown ghost town in Electric City, Mississippi, to solve a thirty-year-old clue trail in search of a secret room that may or may not exist, all to try to win back Cricket's run-away mother. Cricket must use her wits and just a smidgen of luck to live off the land in a Mississippi winter, survive sleet storm and snake-bite, and work to solve an increasingly baffling clue trail left by an eccentric artist with a logic all his own. Along the way, Cricket meets the reclusive last resident of the ghost town, enlists the help of a poetry-loving dog, and takes up a touch of grave-robbing. These experiences awaken Cricket to the possibility of finding strength in the most unlikely of places—within herself.

About the Author

Jo was born near Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where her favorite artist, Walter Anderson, painted a secret room. Jo later moved to a ghost town, Electric Mills, Mississippi. Anderson's secret room and the ghost town inspired Jo's novel, *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. Today Jo lives in Greenville, South Carolina with her husband, children, and her dog Pupper, who just happens to closely resemble the character of Percy in the book. Jo founded www.outdoorosity.org, a free resource for educators and families celebrating the treasures and curiosities of nature with stories, know-how and inspiration to get readers outside. You can find Jo online at JoHackl.com.
Facebook: Jo Watson Hackl Author
Twitter: @JoHackl
Instagram: @JoHackl



Praise for *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*

- “Told in the easy, laconic tone of good, Southern storytelling, Hackl’s debut rolls off the tongue and into the heart easy as warm butter on a biscuit..... Lyrical and endearing, this debut is a genuine adventure tale, poignant and as fresh as a spring garden.”—Kirkus Reviews, starred review
- “Cricket is an intriguing and complex protagonist, and the plot, full of adventure, treasure hunts, and mystery, will keep young readers hooked.”—School Library Journal
- “A masterful debut. Cricket is my new hero, brave and funny and full of heart. Jo Watson Hackl’s new middle-grade novel has art, poetry, and adventure—and I couldn’t put it down.”—Augusta Scattergood, award-winning author of *Glory Be*
- “*Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* is part treasure hunt, part wilderness adventure, and all heart.” Alan Gratz, New York Times bestselling author of *Refugee*
- Winner of the Southern Book Prize
- An Indie Next pick and Okra pick

Introduction

This activity booklet contains a multitude of activities to supplement *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* by Jo Hackl. This activity book is appropriate for use in classrooms, homeschool programs, museum programs, and at home for anyone who loves to read. Activities can be done individually or in groups. Students in 4th–8th grade are the target reading level for the story, but younger students through adults can enjoy both the book and the included activities.

Each activity is broken into subject themes. Some activities can be extended by visiting the website, www.johackl.com. Extensions are included for anyone who wants to further their learning and engagement within a topic.

Astronomy - Ecology - Economics - Geography
Graphic Design - History - Literacy - Math
Mental Wellness - Outdoor Survival Skills
Poetry - Science - Visual Art - Writing

Text excerpts © Jo Watson Hackl
Educational activity content © Jessica Hayes
Cover art and cricket © Gilbert Ford
Interior art © Catherine Hackl and Emily Sobeski

Activity: Making Paper

Collards always reminded me of Mama. She used to make me drawing paper out of collards, sumac seeds, dryer lint, and newspaper Daddy chopped up in his wood chipper. She plunked things in her paper the way other people stuck things in scrapbooks. Thread from the hem of her wedding dress, a four-leaf clover, Daddy's first grey hair. Mama's paper held so much life, it made my drawings pop right off the page.

Chapter 1, Pages 1-2

Subject: Environmental Science, Visual Art

Objective: You will begin to learn about the history of paper, the importance of recycling paper, and how paper is made.



Book Activity:

Did you know paper has a long history? Do you know the impact that making paper has on the environment?

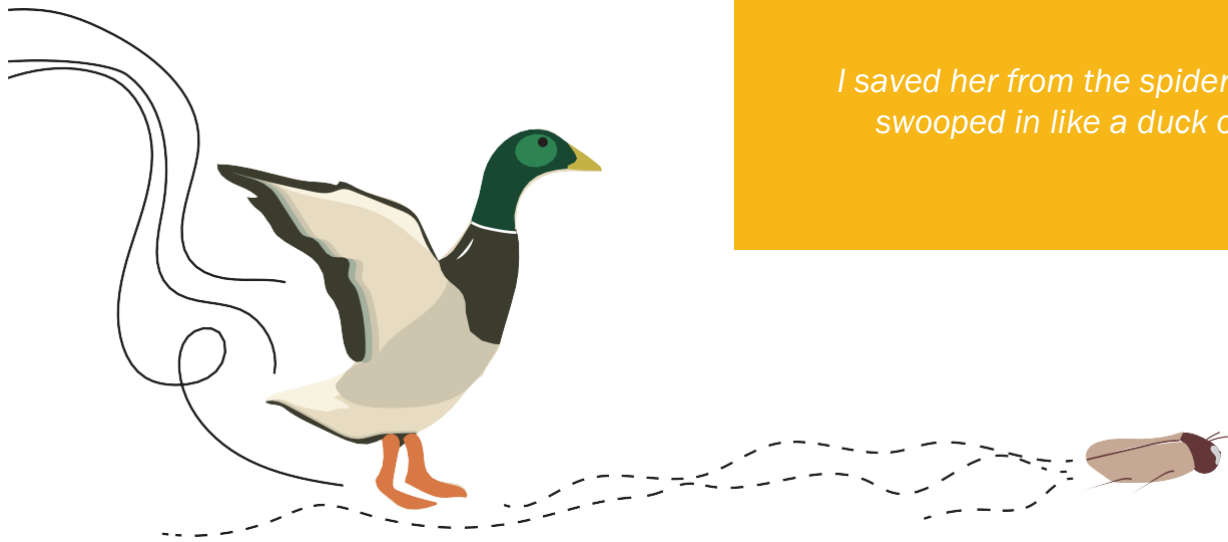
Modern paper is usually made from wood fibers in trees. Before paper, people used other surfaces for writing surfaces. Clay, wood, stone, and even animal skins have been used for writing. About 2000 years ago, the Chinese invented paper by mixing a pulp together, pressing out the liquid, and letting it dry in the sun.

In the story, Cricket talks about the way Mama made paper. She says it made her drawings pop right off the page. Recycled paper is special, but another environmentally friendly action you can take is reusing paper. Instead of using a new, white sheet of paper, reuse a piece of paper or cardboard to draw a picture. You can use an old newspaper, the back of a cereal box, the back of a piece of paper you previously used, or even the back of junk mail paper. Look around your house; what can you use that would otherwise be thrown away? After you draw your picture, make a list of things special to you that you'd like to include in home-made paper. It can be anything small enough to be made into paper - petals from your favorite flower, leaves from your favorite plant, even a piece of hair from your pet." What would you name your paper concoction?

Website Activity:

Making your own paper is a lot easier than it sounds! You can visit johackl.com for instructions on making your own paper. You can also find tips for recycling paper.

Activity: Similies



I saved her from the spider, but Little Quinn swooped in like a duck on a June Bug.

Chapter 1, Page 4

Subject: Literacy, Writing

Objective: You will learn how figurative language adds color, or interest, to stories and poems.

Book Activity:

In the story, the author uses figurative language to describe what Cricket thinks, feels, sees, hears, and discovers. Instead of directly making a statement, figurative language is creatively used to get a point across. In the quote above, instead of saying that Little Quinn ran quickly towards the cricket, the author says Little Quinn “swooped in like a duck on a June Bug!” This is called a simile.

Throughout the story, you’ll find examples of similes and metaphors. Similes compare two things using the words “like” or “as.” A metaphor compares two different things without using words “like” or “as.” Track them on the table on the next page and make notes about the simile. What did the author mean? Can you think of another simile or metaphor to use in place of the existing statement?

LIKE
OR
AS

Simile or Metaphor	Notes	Write your own Simile or Metaphor

Can you create your own similes and metaphors using statements from the story?

Website Activity: What is meant by “Hope is the thing with feathers?” Read the entire poem at johackl.com to better understand the metaphor.

Activity: Charlene's Chirps

Charlene chirped three quick times, her notes high and fine and clear.



Chapter 2, Page 11

Subject: Literacy, Animal Science

Objective:

- 1) You will learn to spot examples of personification in stories.
- 2) You will learn about the natural habitat of crickets.

Book Activity:

Have you ever heard a cricket at night? Male crickets have a sharp ridge called a scraper on a wing that they rub against wrinkles, called files, on their other wing. Male crickets chirp for several reasons including to communicate with female crickets, to define their territory, or when they feel threatened.

In the story, Cricket comments on Charlene's chirping. We also see examples of personification as Cricket applies human characteristics to Charlene. Can you find examples of this personification in the story?

Example:

Example:

Example:

Example:

Example:

Extension Activity:

Cricket creates a home for Charlene in a box with dirt and leaves. Research the natural habitat of crickets and create your own home for Charlene. Or you can use art materials and the box below to design “Charlene’s home.” You can use a shoebox and natural materials from outside to create Charlene’s home, or you can use art materials to create the home. Remember, there are many types of crickets. What type of cricket do you think Charlene is? Why?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin red border, intended for students to draw or write their answers to the extension activity.

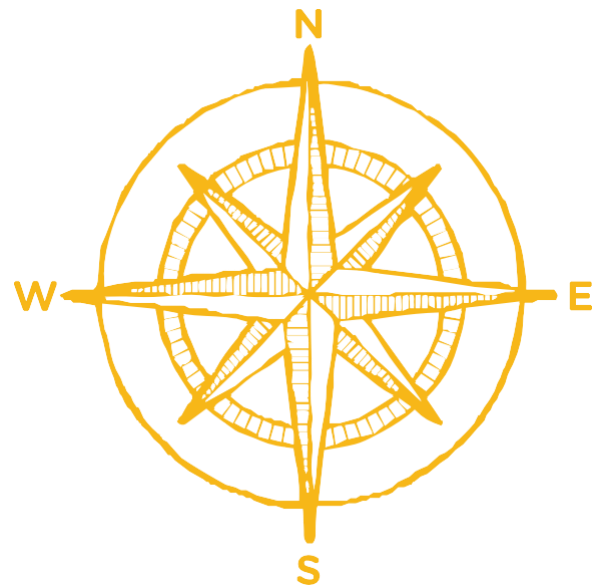
Activity: Going South

*I tried to keep what I could see
of the sun on my right side.
“The sun sets in the west,” I
whispered to Charlene. “This
way, we know we’re heading
south.” With each step, though,
it seemed like the sun was
slanting at us lower.*

Chapter 3, Page 17

Subject: Literacy, Geography

Objective: You will begin to learn about cardinal directions and how to make a compass.



Book Activity:

Carrying a compass with you in your backpack when exploring the woods or hiking is always a good idea. The location of the sun in the sky can also help you find your way – remember, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. You can remember the order of cardinal directions with a memory trick –

Never Eat Soggy Waffles (North, East, South, and West!). Mnemonic devices can help you remember all sorts of information! Can you think of your own mnemonic device to remember cardinal directions? Write it here:

Can you think of your own mnemonic device to remember that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west? Write it here:

Activity: The Woods Turned Wild

The rows stopped by the barbed wire fence. Behind us, row after row of same-size timber company pine trees stretched as far as I could see. In front, the woods turned wild. Hardwoods, pines, briars, and bushes, they all crowded out the light.

Chapter 3, Page 17

Subject: Ecology, Science, Visual Art

Objective: You will begin to learn about observing and documenting the natural woods.



Book Activity:

Cricket is familiar with the different types of plants she sees in the woods. She can identify the names and types of plants throughout the story, even when the woods turn wild. Look up photos of hardwoods, pines, briars, and bushes and draw a picture of what you think Cricket saw in the woods:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin teal border, intended for a drawing or illustration related to the book activity.

Next time you are near the woods, see if you can identify the different types of plants you see. These can be woods in your neighborhood, at a nearby park, or anywhere that you can safely explore. Part of learning about the woods is observing and documenting what you see. In the story, Cricket's Daddy's book even documented plants that were safe and harmful to eat. You can take pictures of plants if you have a camera, and you can draw pictures of the plants and make notes about what they look like below. See if you can find out the names of the plants you have documented.

Plant 1	Plant 2
Plant 3	Plant 4

Extension Activity

Start a nature journal! All you need is a blank journal, a pencil, and crayons. You can document anything you find in nature, such as animals, plants and insects. Each time you find something you want to document in your journal, include the date, time, and location.

Draw a picture of what you found and describe what it looks like. You can describe the colors, the textures (if it is safe to touch), and the size. Include any other observations.

Use a credible source to see if you can find out more about what you found in nature, including the scientific name of any plants or the life cycle of any creature.

Activity: Ghost Towns

Back before the logging road got grown over, the state had put up a plaque. Now the sign was faded and off kilter, but I could still read the words.



Chapter 4, Page 20

Subject: History, Writing

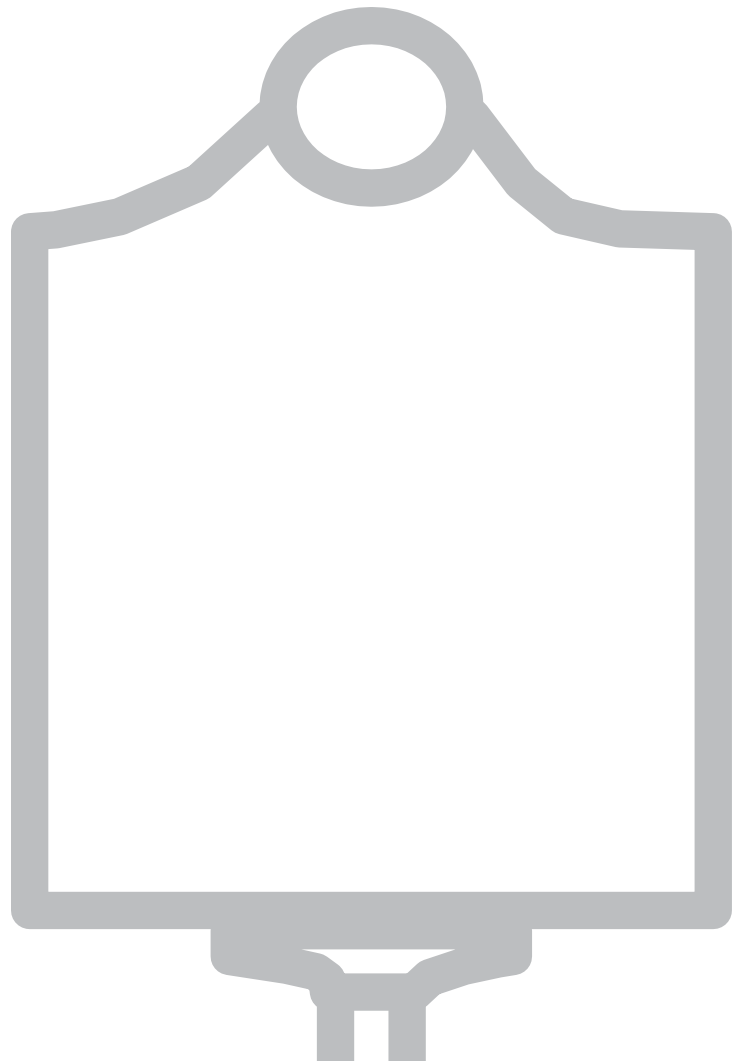
Objective: You will learn about the history and significance of ghost towns throughout the world.

Book Activity:

Electric City, Mississippi is an overgrown ghost town Cricket travels to in search of the “Bird Room.” The author, Jo Hackl, drew from her own experiences for this part of the story. When Jo was Cricket’s age, she lived in the real ghost town of Electric Mills. Electric Mills, established in 1913, was the site of one of the first electric lumber mills in the United States. Once all the lumber had been harvested, most of the homes, buildings and town were removed.

Ghost towns often come into existence because people are forced to move away or because they cannot survive. Once the lumber was harvested in Electric City, Mississippi, there was no longer work to be done. A natural disaster, such as a tsunami, landslide, or volcano can also force people to move away due to damage or threats. Sometimes, there is not enough food for people to survive.

Create an imaginary ghost town in your state or country. Write about the location of your ghost town, when the original city was established, and when and how it became abandoned in this historical marker sign.



Extension Activity:

Research real ghost towns that exist in your region and around the world. How did they become ghost towns?

Activity: New Book Cover

Always seek the beauty.

Chapter 5, Page 23

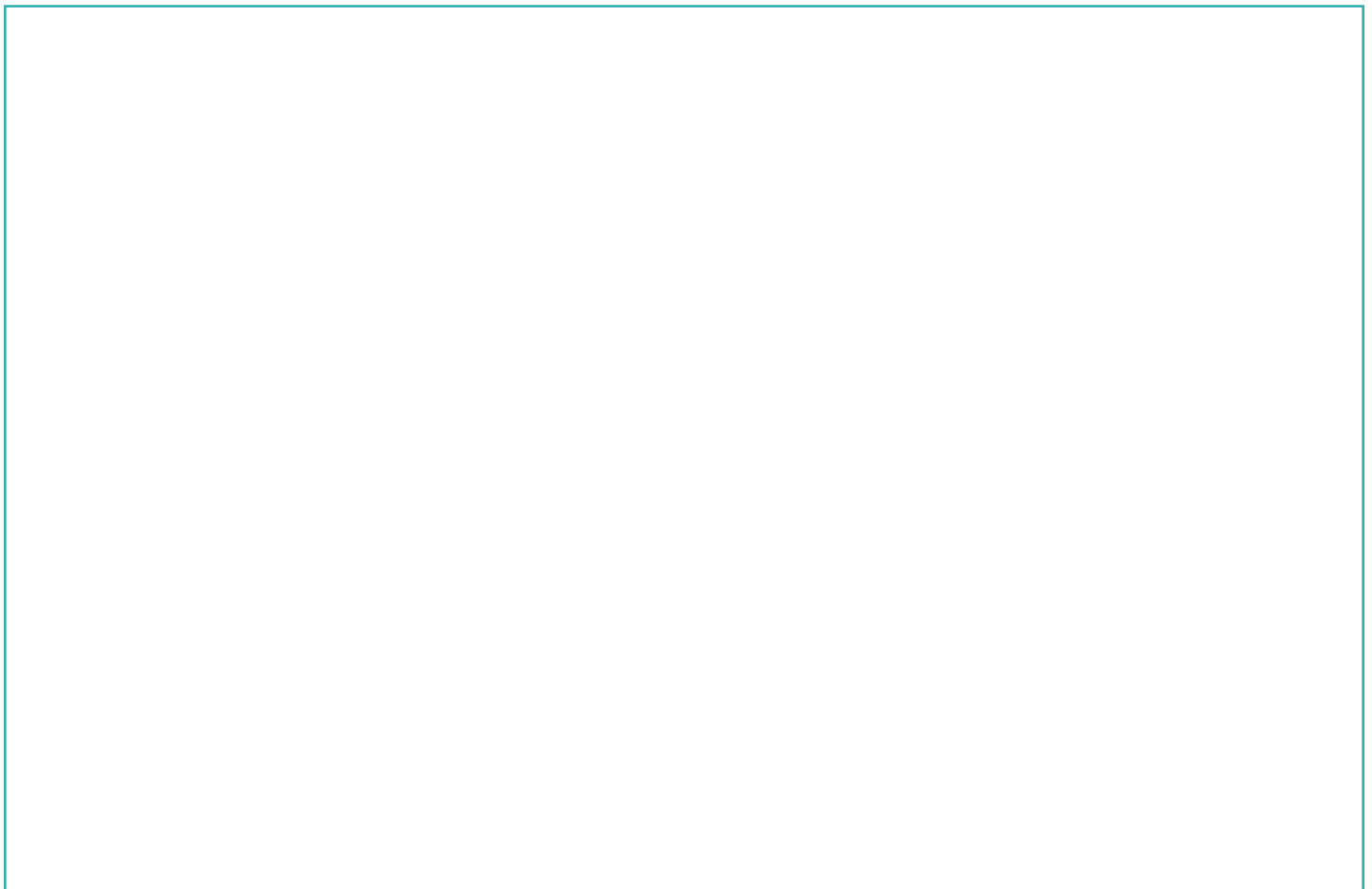
Subject: Art, Literacy, Graphic Design

Objective: You will learn to use the main ideas and themes from a story to create a new book cover.

Book Activity

Using the main idea or an important scene from the story, create a new book cover for *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. First, look at the existing book cover for the story. What important elements are included on the cover? What characters do you notice? What is the setting? What objects do you see? What colors are used? Why do you think these elements are included in the cover?

Next, think about the main idea, themes, and symbols from the story. What do you think should be included in the cover of the book. Would you give the book a new title? Create your design below. You can also make the design on a computer if you have access to graphic design software.



Activity: The Tree House

Our tree house stood seven feet off the ground, tucked so tight between the branches that you'd walk right past it if you didn't know what you were looking for.

Chapter 5, Page 23

Subject: Math

Objective: You will find out more about Cricket's tree house using math skills.

Book Activity

Cricket's tree house sat on the trunk of a ginkgo tree in the middle of large branches. In the picture below, you can see the base on the floor of the woods, the tree trunk, the ladder, the floor of the tree house, the four walls, and the roof. See if you can answer the following questions based on the dimensions you are given.



1) The tree house base floor has a width of 6 feet. The area is 36 square feet. Can you find the length of the tree house base?

2) There are four walls in the tree house. Two of the walls are seven feet by six feet. Can you find the combined total area of those two walls?

3) The other two walls are the front and back walls of the tree house. The bottom portions of these walls are squares measuring seven feet by six feet. The tops of these walls are triangles. The height of triangle is two feet and the base of the triangle is three feet. Can you find the area of these triangles to find the total combined area for both walls?

Tips:

Area of a Triangle: $A = \text{base} \times \text{height} / 2$

Area of a Square or Rectangle: $A = \text{width} \times \text{height}$

Extended Activity:

Using card stock, foam paper, or even cutup cardboard from a shoebox or cereal box, can you build a model of the tree house? Design your tree house below before you create your model.

Activity: The Ginkgo Tree

*We walked half the morning
until I spotted that ginkgo tree.
Its limbs spread out, inviting
me to climb up on in. In the
specked sunlight, its
fan-shaped leaves quivered in
sixteen shades of green.
"This is it," I said.*

Chapter 5, Page 24

Subject: Ecology, Visual Art, Literacy

Objective:

- 1) You will learn details about the ginkgo tree.
- 2) You will learn to write an acrostic poem.

Book Activity

Have you ever seen a ginkgo tree? Research photos of a ginkgo tree and make observations. What colors do you see? Are the leaves fan-shaped like Cricket said? Do you see many shades of green? How far out do the limbs spread?

An acrostic poem uses the letters in a word to begin each line of a poem. Use each letter of the word "ginkgo" to describe the ginkgo tree. You might need to find out more information about the characteristics of this tree.

G

I

N

K

G

O

Extension Activity

Use different shades of green to create your own ginkgo tree. You can use watercolors, paints, crayons, markers, or any combination you like to create your piece of art.



Activity: The Tanager

Mama snuggled me closer. "That room had every kind of bird you can think of – cardinals, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, doves, even crows. But the one I liked best was a watermelon-red bird with black wings. It fluttered its wings at me."

Chapter 6, Page 30-31

Subject: Art History, Visual Art, Ecology

Objective: You will learn about birds that live in your area.

Book Activity

The secret room, or the "Bird Room," is inspired by the author's favorite artist – Walter Inglis Anderson. A room called the Little Room was discovered in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where Anderson did most of this work. He oriented the paintings to interact with the light outside the windows. Mama loved the birds she saw in the fictional room in the story, especially the tanager.

Go outside to see if you can spot any of the birds Mama mentioned in the story. If so, use the next page to draw a picture of the bird you found. Birds often gather where they have access to food, water and shelter, so you might have luck finding birds near a water source and trees.

First, find out which birds can be found in your area. Many of these birds are found all around the world, but not all of them. If you have binoculars, you might be able to spot birds more easily. It might take time to locate a certain type of bird depending on the season and where you live. If you see a different type of bird, document what it looks like or take a picture of it and see if you can find out what type of bird it is.



Pictures of Cardinals	Pictures of Woodpeckers	Pictures of Hummingbirds
Pictures of Doves	Pictures of Crows	Pictures of Tanagers

Extended Activity:

Poll your class or family members! Create a graph of everyone's favorite bird.

Website Activity:

Visit <https://www.walterandersonmuseum.org/> to see pictures of more work by Walter Inglis Anderson.

Activity: Doogaloo

I was holding a doogaloo, the coin they taught us about in school.

Chapter 7, Page 35

Subject: Visual Art, History, Economics

Objective: You will learn about the history of money and design your own money using symbols.

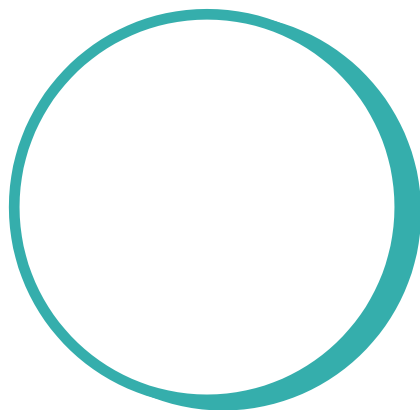
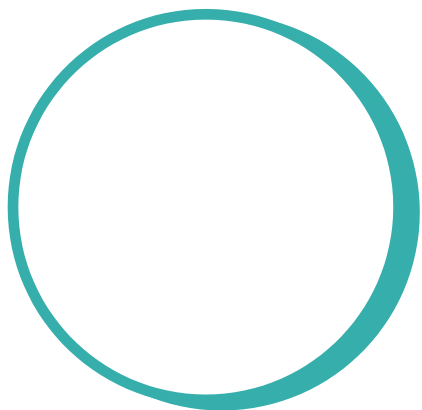
Book Activity

Electric City, Mississippi, had its own type of money. This means that, instead of using pennies or dollar bills, they used a different type of coin. In the book, this coin was called a doogaloo. People have used different types of money and currency throughout history. People used to trade the things they had for things they needed, like trading livestock for cloth or tools. This system is called bartering. Eventually, people found they needed something that was easier to manage and exchange. Before using paper money in China, people treated cowrie snail shells as money. In the United States, people used many different types of currency from different banks before the first official U.S. One Dollar bill was issued in 1862.

Coins and currency often have symbols that represent something important. For example, President Abraham Lincoln is pictured on one side of a penny. Presidents are often found on coins and paper money. Symbols also often exist on money. On the \$1 bill, a pyramid represents strength while the eye above the pyramid represents divinity. The Roman numerals on the bottom of the pyramid – MDCCLXXVI – are the Roman numbers for 1776, the year America declared independence.

What symbols and images are important to you? Is it a favorite animal, place, or person?

What symbols would you put on your own doogaloo?



Activity: Woods Time

I pulled out Daddy's book to read up on things I could eat. But something else caught my attention – notes in Daddy's handwriting next to certain sections. When Cricket's 12. Sure enough, we'd already covered how to build a fire. When Cricket's 10. Check. The different types of trees. Then I came to the part about living off the land. When Cricket's 12 – Woods Time together.

Chapter 8, Pages 39-40

Subject: Outdoor Survival Skills, Writing

Objective: You will learn to make choices to help meet your basic needs.

Book Activity

Cricket survives outside using skills she learned from her Daddy and skills she learned on her own. Cricket makes blankets using pine branches and duct tape. She starts a fire using branches and dead leaves, and says her and Daddy sometimes used candle wax, dryer lint, or lip balm to start their fires. Cricket pays attention to the things she can eat, like chickweed, greenbrier, and bamboo shoots. Using vines, sticks and wire, Cricket makes a fish trap to gather more food.

When Cricket left for the woods, she took a few things from Thelma's store to help her survive. If you were going on an adventure in the woods, what are ten things you would bring with you? Did any of your ideas come from Cricket's experiences in the story? Why did you choose those ten things?

Items	Why

Website Activity: Check out the Outdoor Survival Skill Bucket List on johackl.com.

Activity: To Cricket, From Mama

I pictured Mama standing on this very spot, her face breaking out in that birthday smile of hers, soon as she caught sight of me.

Chapter 10, Page 50

Subject: Writing, Mental Wellness

Objective: You will use your writing skills to write a letter to Cricket from Mama.

Book Activity

Throughout the story, we hear Cricket's experiences and point of view. Cricket tells us about her experiences and interactions with Mama, but we do not hear Mama's story directly. Imagine you are Mama. What do you think Mama would want to tell Cricket? Would she want to tell her why she left? Would she want to tell her how she feels? How would you write a letter to a family member about something you are sorry about? Remember to include a greeting, the body of your message, a closing, and your signature. Use the lines below to write your letter.



Extended Activity:

Have you ever had trouble talking about your thoughts and feelings out loud? Sometimes writing a letter can help express how you feel, even if you don't give the letter to anyone. Some people keep diaries or journals to express how they feel. Write a diary or journal entry about any topic you want to write about. Remember to start your entry as a letter – “Dear Journal” or “Dear Diary.”

Activity: Squirrel Nests

*The few trees with high branches still on
them had squirrel nests in those branches.
I craned my neck.
The same old tight lump of squirrel-nest
leaves still hung ten feet above us.
The squirrels bet on my and Charlene's tree.
The squirrels bet on us.*

Chapter 19, Page 90

Subject: Animal Science

Objective: You will learn about squirrel nests.

Book Activity:

In the story, we learn that some squirrels built their nests in trees in the woods. Squirrels build their nests at least twenty feet high in trees – right above Cricket's tree house!

Research is an important skill in order to find out more information on a topic. Books and magazines, websites, documentaries and videos, and experts and professionals can all be credible sources for finding out more information on a topic. Use one or two of these sources to find the answers to some of these questions about squirrel's nests.

Where can squirrel nests be found (in which geographic areas)? During what time of year can squirrel's nests be found?

Which kinds of trees do squirrels generally use to build their nests?

What materials do squirrels use to make their nests?

How do squirrels put their nests together?

What other interesting facts did you find out about squirrel nests?

Next time you go on a nature walk, see if you can spot a squirrel nest to add to your Nature Journal.

Activity: The Scarlet Tanager Migration

Every wall but the summer one had tanagers – flying in the garden or perched in trees. They were bright red on the spring wall and just starting to turn green on the fall wall. On the winter wall, a huge green tanager caught my eye.

Just a minute. Something isn't right. The tanager doesn't belong on the winter wall. Tanagers have already migrated by winter. No tanager would be in Miss V's woods then.

Chapter 29, Pages 132-133

Subject: Ecology, Geography

Objective: You will learn about the migration of the Scarlet Tanager.

Book Activity:

In the map of North and South America to the right, you can fill in the migration pattern of the Scarlet Tanager. You may need to use a labeled map or globe to help you complete this activity. Choose one color for the location of the Scarlet Tanager during breeding season, another color for the location of the Scarlet Tanager during migration, and one last color for the location of the Scarlet Tanager during winter. The Scarlet Tanager is a long-distance migrator, as you will find out in the mapping activity below.

BREEDING: In the summer, the Scarlet Tanager is found in Southern Canada and Eastern United States.

States include: Northwestern Arkansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Northern Alabama, Northern Georgia, Western South Carolina, Western North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

MIGRATION: In time periods around April and October, the Scarlet Tanager is migrating through Central America.

States include: Southern Arkansas, Louisiana, Eastern Texas, Mississippi, Southern Alabama, Southern Georgia, Eastern South Carolina, Eastern North Carolina, Florida.

Areas also include: Gulf of Mexico, Eastern Coastline of Mexico, Jamaica, Cuba, and Bahamas

WINTER LOCATION: In the winter, the Scarlet Tanager is found in North Western South America. *Includes: Columbia, Ecuador, Peru*



Website Activity: Find out more! You can look at an online map of the migration of the Scarlet Tanager and even listen to the birdcall. Visit johackl.com to find resources.

Activity: Sundial

Outside, the sun sank lower in the sky. It took five minutes for the spotlight to ease off the garden rows. My watch told us when it was five-thirty.

Chapter 38, Page 168

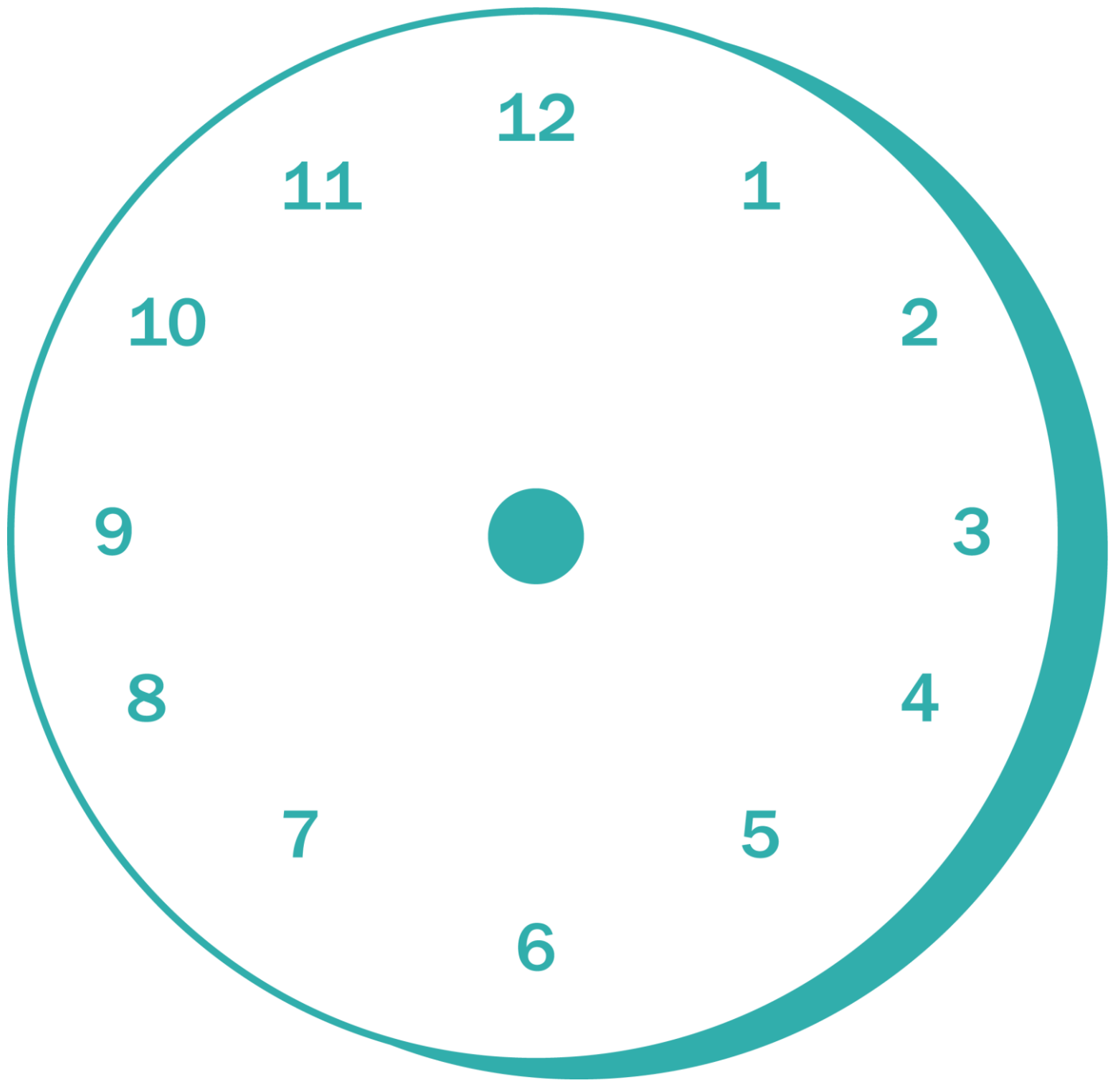
Subject: Astronomy, Math

Objective: You will learn how you can tell time based on the position of the sun in the sky.

Book Activity

Did you know you can use the sun to tell time? A sundial clock is a clock that can tell you the time of day based on the shadow of a rod or stick. When the sun moves across the sky, the shadow location changes, just like the hands of a real clock.

You can easily create a sundial! Cut out the outline of the clock on the next page and poke a hole through the center. Place a straw or pencil through the center hole. Use a compass to make sure the “12:00” hour on your clock is pointing north. If you do not have a compass, there are applications available on phones or tablets. Is the time your sundial shows correct?



Activity: Sunsets

Of course the dark was still coming so early. It was February.

With spring on the way, the sun set a little later every day.

Chapter 39, Page 170

Subject: Science, Math

Objective: You will learn about the changes in sunset times due to the rotation and orbit of the Earth.

Book Activity

Summer solstice is the longest day of the year for people living in the Northern Hemisphere. This is the day that the Earth's North Pole is tilted closest to the sun, creating more daylight hours. As the Earth moves in orbit around the sun, the tilt of the North Pole changes. When the North Pole is tilted furthest away from the sun, it is the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. This is called the winter solstice.

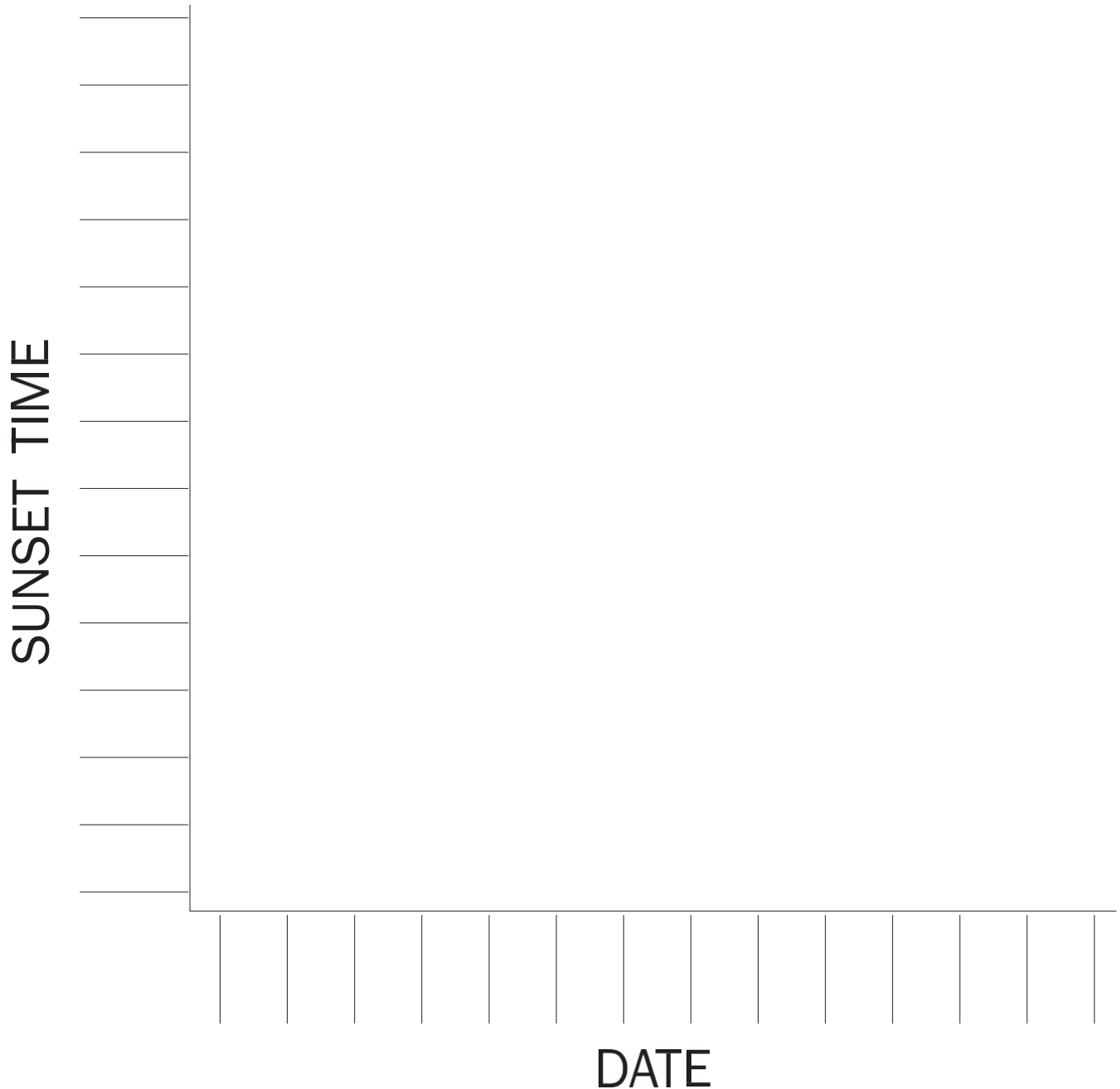
In the book, Cricket discovers that the time of the year that she is in the Bird Room is different from the time of year that Bob was in the Bird Room. This means that the sunset was at a different time by five minutes.

For two weeks, use the table to the right to document the date and time of each sunset. You can use an online almanac, a newspaper, or even a weather outlet to look up the times of the sunset. Go outside and watch the sunset each day when possible.

Date	Time

Extended Activity 1:

Can you create a line graph of the sunset times?



Extended Activity 2:

Continue to graph the sunset times over the course of several months. What time was the sunset when you started? What time was the sunset towards the end? You can create a graph of both sunrise and sunset times to note changes in daylight hours. Do you notice any changes in daylight hours based on the season? You can also look at the average temperature for each day. Do you notice any changes in temperature based on daylight hours?

Activity: Constellations

A constellation. *All I knew about constellations was from science class – “a configuration of stars.”
I ran my hand back over the star on the wall.*

Chapter 40, Page 174

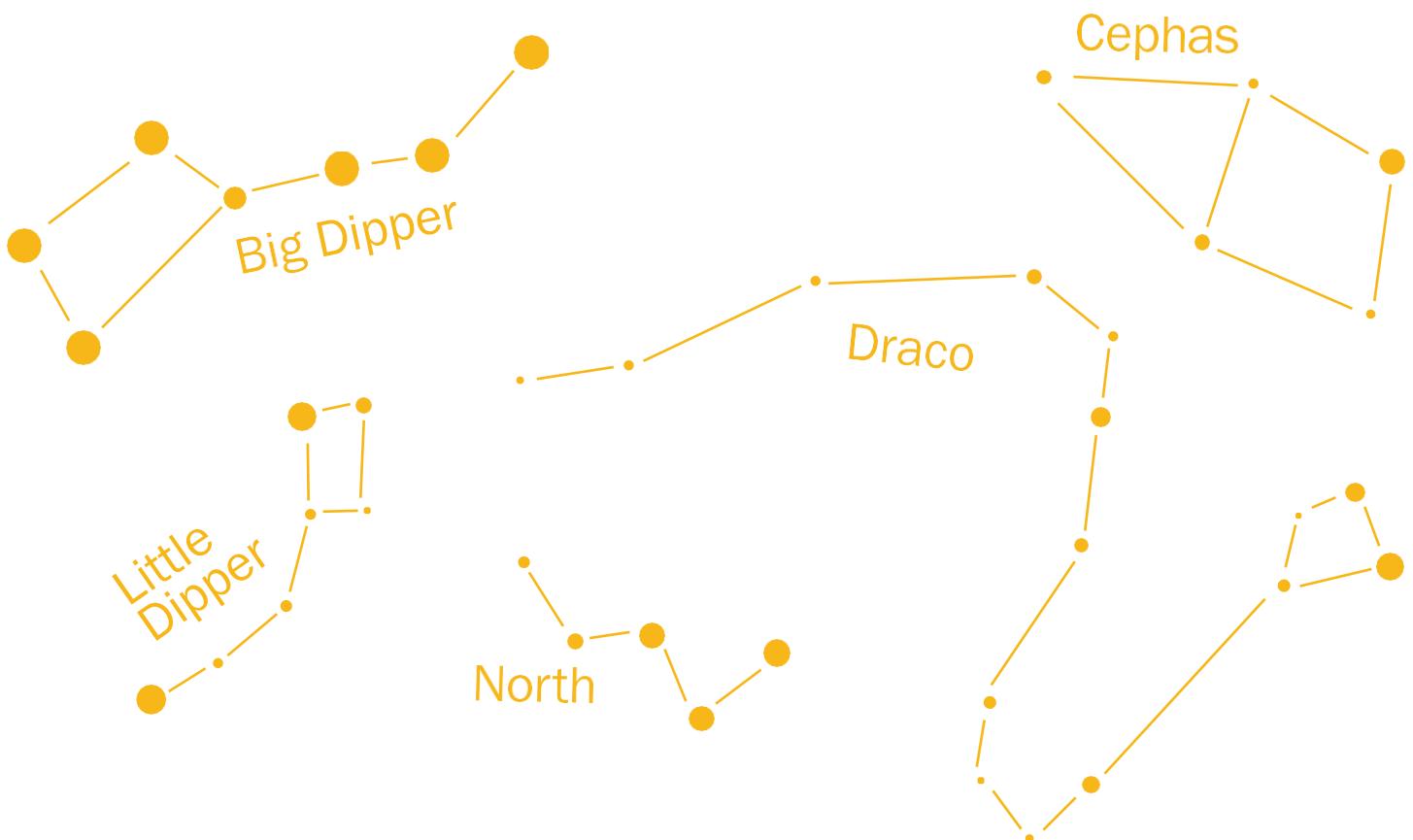
Subject: Astronomy

Objective: You will learn the definition and meaning of a constellation.

Book Activity

Constellations are patterns made from a grouping of stars. Constellations often resemble objects or characters or even mythical creatures. Often times, mythical stories accompany constellations.

In the Northern Hemisphere, you may have seen the Big Dipper, or Ursa Major. If you live at latitudes 41 degrees North or farther north, the Big Dipper is always visible in the evening. In the southern half of the United States, depending on the time of year, the Big Dipper can be spotted hours before dawn. Research the location of constellations in your area. Go outside and see if you can spot the Big Dipper or one of the other constellations you have researched.



Extension OR Website Activity:

Visit johackl.com to learn about constellations that might be visible in Electric Mills, Mississippi and to learn about their stories. Design your own constellation of something from the story and write a mythical story about the constellation below. Your constellation could be a ginkgo tree, the doogaloo, or even a cricket! Can you think of a symbol, object, animal, or plant from the story to use for your constellation?

Activity: Multitudes

Inside, there was a piece of paper with a drawing of a tanager. The tanager reminded me of the tanager that used to be on my doogaloo. Just below the tanager, slanty words:

SOME WALLS AREN'T FOR EVERYONE

– Chapter 18, Page 83

Sometimes different makes people uncomfortable

– CHAPTER 43, Page 186

Remember the line from that Walt Whitman poem, 'I am large, I contain multitudes'? Your mama's more than what those neighbors think, and you know it. She's a person like anyone else. She has her struggles and her strengths.

– CHAPTER 43, Pages 189-190

Subject: Mental Wellness, Writing

Objective: You will explore one of the main ideas of the story by describing what it means to have multitudes.

Book Activity:

Read the lines above. Throughout the story, we learn that Bob's art was unappreciated during his time, similar to how Mama's strengths go unnoticed by some. Consider everything we learn about Mama throughout this story. Does one quality or action define Mama? What strengths does she have? What makes Cricket adore her Mama? Use the next page to write all of Mama's multitudes, or qualities.



What multitudes do you have? Are you defined by only one quality or action?

What multitudes do you want others to see in you?



Activity: Walls

But his art was different, and a lot of people didn't understand it.

CHAPTER 43, PAGE 186

People said things about your friend Emily Dickinson, too... They said she was different, that she kept to herself... But things people said can't make her poems any less beautiful. You know her poems... And you look at these paintings. You tell me who's crazy and who's not.

CHAPTER 43, PAGE 189

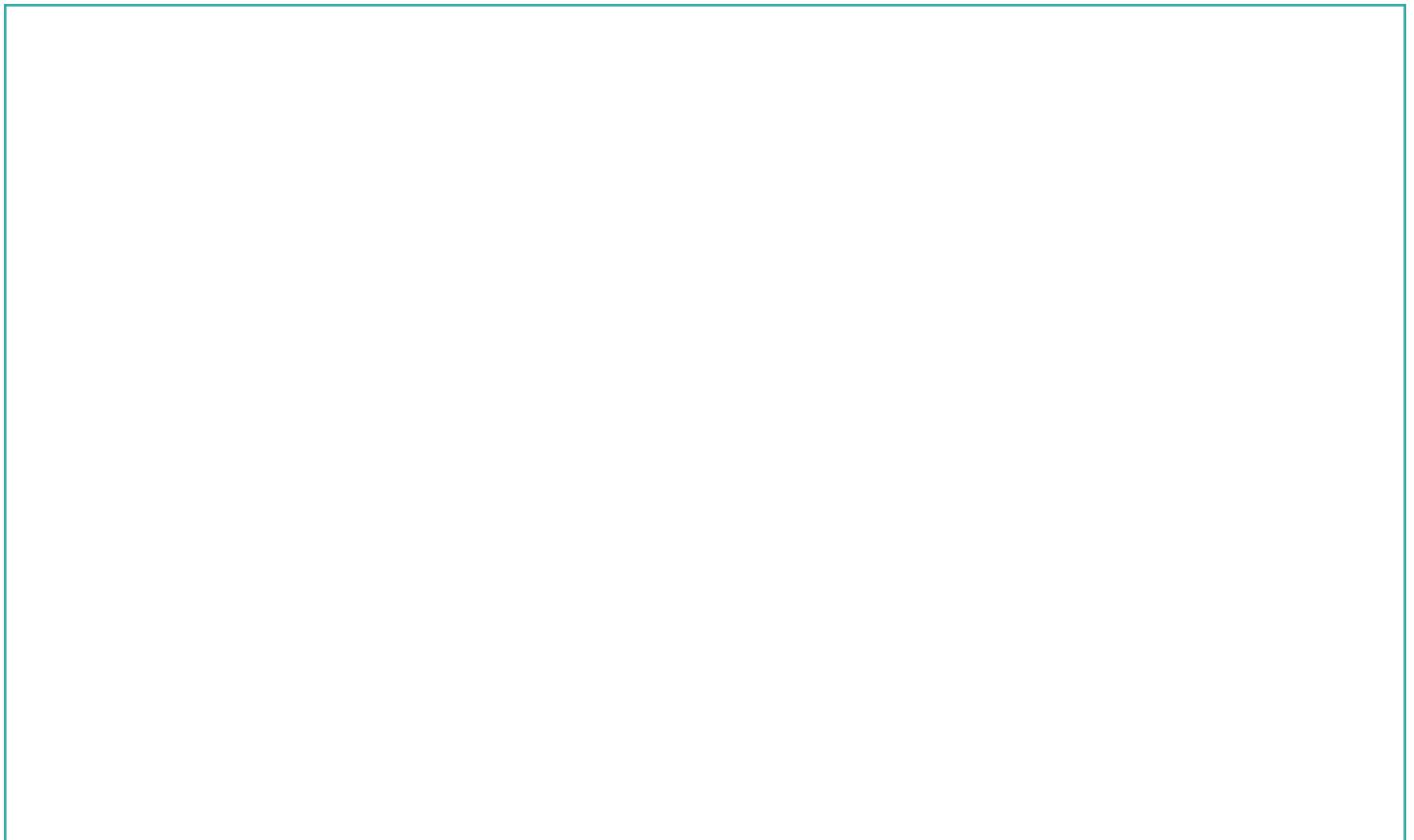
Subject: Mental Wellness, Writing

Objective: You will explore how you can draw on past experiences to identify with the text.

Book Activity:

Like Mama, everyone didn't understand Bob and his art. Bob was asked to change his designs in a mural he created, and took the criticism hard. Even so, he never stopped drawing and painting.

Discuss a time you felt like giving up. Why did you feel that way? What helped you to keep going, or what would have helped you to keep going? What advice would you give to yourself now about the situation?



Book Activity Continued:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin teal border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for students to write or draw their responses to the book activity.

Activity: Realizations

Then it struck me. Maybe Mama hadn't abandoned the adventure ring. Maybe she'd left it for me to find, to bring me luck. I tried to get used to that idea. I let it wallow around in the love and the mad inside me. It started to settle, and I knew. I didn't have to choose between loving Mama and being mad at her for leaving. I was big enough to do both. Maybe I contained multitudes, too.

Chapter 48, Page 220

Subject: Literacy, Coming of Age, Writing, Mental Wellness

Objective: You will explore the transformation Cricket goes through to make this a Coming of Age story.

Book Activity:

Cricket is not the same person at the end of the book as she was in the beginning. Cricket learns that wanting Mama to stay won't make her stay; Mama has to figure some things out on her own. Cricket also learns that she can be mad at Mama but still love her just the same. What do you think is symbolized by Cricket letting Charlene go at the end of the book?

Use one color to decide where Cricket falls on the continuum at the beginning of the story. Use another color to decide where Cricket falls at the end of the story. You can use a third color to denote where Cricket fell in the middle of the story.

Peaceful	.....	Wild
Content	.....	Discouraged
Childish	.....	Mature
Happy	.....	Sad
Accepting	.....	Wishing for Change

Have you ever gone through a change like Cricket? Write about it here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a student to write their response to the question above.

References

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