

My Brother Needs a Boa by Anne Weston
Illustrated by Cheryl Nathan

When a rat moves into Benito's rainforest village store and chases away all the customers, he tries to find the perfect boa constrictor to get rid of the rat.

Learning Engagements:

1. Building Background Knowledge
2. Story Mapping
3. Composing Similes
4. Making Predictions
5. Learning Languages
6. Creating Collage Artwork
7. Making Text-to-text Connections

Learning Engagement #1: Building Background Knowledge

Book Prompt: The story is set in the rainforest. Before reading the story, examine the book covers with the children. Determine what the children already know about rainforests by completing the first section of a K-W-L chart.

| What we K NOW | What we W ANT to learn | What we L EARNED |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | |

Ask readers to predict what animals and plants might be part of this story. After reading, check the predictions.

To extend the learning from the story, study Costa Rica, the author's home country. Work with readers to develop questions about the rainforest biome. Record the questions in the center column. After the study, record what readers learned in the right-hand column. One excellent title to further this study is *Forest in the Clouds* by Sneed B. Collard III, illustrated by Michael Rothman (Charlesbridge, 2000).



Learning Engagement #2: Story Mapping

Book Prompt: This story has a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Read the entire book from beginning to end. Reread the story and use a story map to record the setting, characters, problem, beginning, middle, and ending of the story including the solution to the problem. The story map form is at the end of this issue of *Teaching Tools from Star Bright Books*.

Learning Engagement #3: Composing Similes

Book Prompt: A simile is a comparison using "like" or "as." Recognizing and writing similes helps readers make connections between prior knowledge and new information.

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The author uses a simile to describe the boa's movement and shape as it chases the rat out of the grocery store: "Behind it flowed the boa like a thick stream of chocolate syrup."



Write a simile for the snakes that Benito rejects because they are not right for the job.

| Snake's Physical Attribute | Simile |
|--|---|
| "That boa is too small." | It is as small as a pumpkin seed. |
| "That boa is twice as long as I am." | It is as long as a licorice whip. |
| "Then Benito realized the vine was really a thin brown snake." | The snake was as thin as a pancake. |
| "That boa just ate." | It is as fat as a double-decker sandwich. |

Learning Engagement #4: Making Predictions

Book Prompt: The story has some of the characteristics of folktales. Gossip about the rat in Benito's market spreads predictably through the community. Friends and neighbors bring four different snakes to Benito, but he rejects them all. After the first or second rejection, readers will predict that the next snake will also be rejected.



Practice making predictions by creating logical three-panel cartoons with or without words.



Learning Engagement #5: Learning Languages

Book Prompt: The author lives in Costa Rica. She uses the Spanish word for thank you in the text, *gracias*.

Brainstorm a list of countries. Conduct research to learn the official language of that country and find out how to say and pronounce the word(s) for thank you in that language. Complete a category matrix and practice pronouncing these words.

| Country | Language | Thank you |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| Costa Rica | Spanish | Gracias |
| Brazil | Portuguese | Obrigado |
| France | French | Merci |
| Germany | German | Danke |
| Italy | Italian | Grazie |

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Learning Engagement #6: Creating Collage Artwork

Book Prompt: The illustrator Cheryl Nathan uses a collage technique to create the illustrations in this text.

After reading the book, reread it paying especially close attention to the illustrator's collage technique. Look at the work of other children's literature collage artists, such as Eric Carle. Provide children with the opportunity to create collage illustrations. (If you have studied the rainforest biome, ask students to create illustrations of rainforest plants and animals.)



Visit illustrator Cheryl Nathan's Web site for collage artwork directions and a line art template at: <http://cherylnathan.com/boa/BoaProject.html>

Learning Engagement #7: Making Text-to-text Connections

Book Prompt: This story is about a boa constrictor and has features of traditional literature. Read Shel Silverstein's poem titled "Boa Constrictor" from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Harper & Row, 1974). There are many children's books about boas. Conduct a subject search for "boa constrictor juvenile fiction" and "juvenile literature" using the school or public library online catalog. Read other fiction and informational books about boa constrictors.

Also read traditional literature in which events happen predictably in a series of three or four times.

Other Recommended Books about Snakes:

Boa Constrictors by Valerie J. Weber (Gareth Stevens, 2003)

The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash by Trina Hakes Noble, illustrated by Steven Kellogg (Dial, 1980)

Jungle Party by Brian Wildsmith (Star Bright Books, 2007)

Other Recommended Traditional Literature Books:

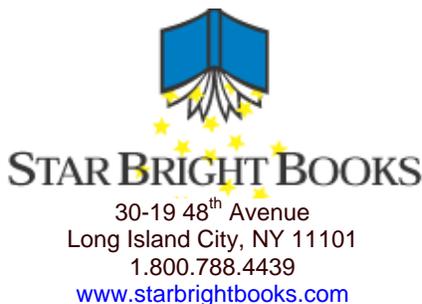
The Fool of the World and His Flying Ship adapted and illustrated by Valeri Gorbachev (Star Bright Books, 1998)

Henny-Penny by Jane Wattenberg (Scholastic, 2000)

The House that Jack Built by Taback Simms (Putnam, 2002)

Too Much Talk by Angela Shelf Medearis, illustrated Stefano Vitale (Candlewick, 1995)

The Turnip: An Old Russian Folktale by Pierr Morgan (Philomel, 1990)



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Story Map

Book Title: _____

Author/Illustrator: _____

Main Character(s):

Setting:

Problem:

Plot

Beginning:

Middle:

End/Solution: