

Marta and the Manger Straw

Book by Virginia Kroll

Literature based unit study by Wende

Note: Teacher may want to address this language arts lesson the first time book is read.

Foreshadowing –

Foreshadowing is a suggestion of what is to come later in a story by giving hints or clues. Sometimes these hints or clues are given in the text, and other times they are given in the pictures. Have your child examine the picture of the fish wagon going by. Can your child tell by the text or pictures what may happen next? Point out the fish flopping out of the wagon if he cannot spot this on his own.

Social Studies

Poland –

Locate Poland on a world map. Poland is a country located on the continent of Europe. The capital is Warsaw. Most of the land is low lying, except for the mountains, which form Poland's border with Czechoslovakia. Poland is mainly an agricultural country, with its main crops being rye, wheat, potatoes, and sugar beets, most of which is grown on state owned farmlands. Poland also has many coal mines and a large shipbuilding industry. People in Poland speak Polish, and the currency is the zloty.

Christmas Traditions in Poland –

Read the Author's Notes in the beginning of the story. For the people of Poland, the Christmas dinner begins when the first star appears in the sky on December 24th, after Fast Day. Straw is placed under the table, dishes, and tablecloth. One chair is left empty for the Holy Child. A Peace Wafer, given to the head of the household by the priest, is then broken and shared with the guests. While the wafer is being eaten, wishes for the coming year are exchanged. During the Christmas season, puppet shows called "schopka" are given depicting the Herod's murder of Innocents. A Polish Christmas centers on the songs, which are a combination of the religious and secular sentiments of people, sung in memory of the Savior's birth.

Stray Animals –

Marta found a stray dog. Stray animals are those that do not have homes. People should be very cautious around stray animals. You can't tell for sure if the animal is just temporarily lost, or if it has always been wild. Stray animals are usually hungry and scared, which can make them dangerous. They may carry diseases. Warn your children not to approach a stray animal. You may want to visit an animal shelter while sharing this book to see how some strays are taken care of and relocated to homes.

World War II –

This story takes place during World War II. While the Christmas season may not be the time to discuss this war, it may be enough to just mention that during this period of history, Poland was under attack and the people were very poor. Older children may want to research Poland's part in the war on their own.

Science

Fire –

Marta gave Mamusia a fat log for her fire, and she used the last of her logs for the fire before going to bed. Fires have been keeping people warm for thousands of years. There are three things that are needed for a fire. First needed is something to burn, called fuel. In *Marta and the Manger Straw* the fuel that was used was wood. What kind of fuel do you burn to keep warm? Do you have a wood or coal stove, or maybe an oil or propane furnace? Discuss with your child what the fuel source you use to heat your house is, and maybe even show him where it is and where the source comes from. The second thing needed to have a fire is heat to start the fuel burning. Thousands of years ago, before matches were invented, people would use friction between two objects to create enough heat to start a fire. Today, we can start a fire with matches, or with an electrical spark. The third thing needed to burn a fire is oxygen. Without oxygen, the fire will smolder out. Do an experiment to demonstrate how a fire needs oxygen. Light a candle. Carefully place a glass jar over it, cutting off its supply of oxygen. What happens? Explain to your children how important it is not to play with fire and to keep it contained. As Marta and her mother found out, one little spark can cause a whole

lot of damage. You may want to use this lesson as an opportunity to discuss fire safety rules in your house. Keep in mind that you need to take away any one thing, fuel, heat, or oxygen, to make a fire go out. Review “stop, drop, and roll” with your children, and review your fire emergency plan.

Straw –

This story is about the Polish Christmas traditions involving straw. Poland is an agricultural country that grows a lot of rye and wheat. Rye and wheat are cereal grasses that are cultivated and used to make flour, and for animal food. First, a reaper cuts down the stalks. A threshing machine is used to remove the grain from the cut grasses, and all the stems and stalks that are left after threshing are called straw. This straw is used in making hats, baskets, placemats, carpets, etc. It is also used for animal bedding. As interest warrants, research Cyrus McCormick and his reaping machine. His inventions during the 1800’s led to the modern day combines that can harvest, thresh and clean a field of wheat or rye in record time.

Language Arts

Capitalization Rules –

As this book contains many proper nouns, it provides a good opportunity to introduce/review some of the rules of capitalization.

Capitalize the first word in every sentence, and the first word in a direct quotation.

Capitalize nouns or pronouns that refer to the Supreme Being. Examples include *God*, and *Jesus*.

Capitalize both the first and last names of people and pets, as well as titles when they are a part of the name. Examples include *Marta*, *Pastor Walter*, *Babcia*, *Mrs. Wolska*, *Mamusia*, etc.

Capitalize all days of the week, months, and holidays. Examples include *Christmas*, *Merry Christmas*,

Capitalize geographical names, such as *Poland* or *Polish*.

Have your child write a good sentence, in his best handwriting, using at least three capitalized proper nouns.

Vocabulary –

Introduce the definitions of unfamiliar words as you come across them in the story, and have child use the word in a sentence to show understanding.

Manger – a trough or box for feeding horses or cattle

Raspy – rough; grating

Shawl – a wrap worn over the upper part of the body

Unruly – resisting rules or discipline

Internal Rhyme –

An internal rhyme occurs when the rhyming words appear in the same sentence or line of poetry. When they found the cow in the story, it was “stuck in the muck”.

Have your child identify the two rhyming words. Older children can make a list of all the words they can think of with an “uck” ending. Younger children may recognize this line from the children’s book *One Duck Stuck*.

Onomatopoeia –

When Marta broke the straw it made a *Snap!* sound. Onomatopoeia is the use of a word whose sound suggests its meaning. Introduce this poetic device to your child and point out its use in future readings.

Creative and Thoughtful Writing –

Marta’s pastor told her to remember that there are all kinds of riches. Let your child brainstorm all the different kinds of riches there are. You may enjoy writing these all on cardstock tags, hole punching them, and tying them with ribbon to a straw wreath for a Christmas decoration.

Math

Fractions –

How many people (or animals) did Marta share her straw with? Marta shared the straw with 3 people and a dog. Explain to your child that the piece of straw Marta received from the pastor was a whole, and she gave a fractional piece to each of the recipients. The whole would look like this: $\frac{4}{4}$. The top number is called the numerator and represents the fractional part. The bottom number is called the denominator and represents the whole. If one person received one of the four parts, what would the fraction look like? ($\frac{1}{4}$) What if people received two of the four parts? ($\frac{2}{4}$) How about three of the four parts? ($\frac{3}{4}$) Demonstrate different fractional parts using straw or sticks as manipulatives.

Arts and Crafts

Color Palette –

As you look through the illustrations, take notice of the colors used. There are many shades of red, orange, yellow, gold, and brown. These are all warm colors. Discuss how the illustrations make you feel. Look at the illustration towards the end of the story, with Marta opening the door to find the dog outside. Compare the warm colors of the room to the cool blues of outside. Warm colors include red, red-orange, orange, yellow-orange, and yellow. Cool colors include green, blue-green, blue, blue-violet, and violet. Using watercolors, like the illustrator Robyn Belton, paint warm pictures and cool pictures.

Straw Crafts -

Make your own straw traditions, referring to the craft activities in the back of the book.

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