

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

Author: William Steig

Summary: In a moment of fright, Sylvester the donkey asks his magic pebble to turn him into a rock but then can not hold the pebble to wish himself back to normal again.

Unit Study and Printables by Wende

BIBLE/CHARACTER

Talking Donkeys –

This story is a fantasy. Everyone knows that donkeys can't talk. But can they? Read the story of Balaam with your child, in Numbers chapter 22. Balaam's donkey saw what Balaam didn't – the angel of the Lord standing in Balaam's way with His sword drawn. The Lord wasn't happy with some decisions that Balaam was making, and was going to stop him. The donkey refused to go where Balaam told him, trying to save him from the angel of the Lord. And each time, Balaam beat the donkey.

Finally, the Lord performed a miracle, making the donkey speak with a human voice, saying "What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

And Balaam said unto the donkey, "Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee."

And the donkey said unto Balaam, "Am not I thine donkey, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?"

And he said, "Nay."

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

And the angel of the LORD said unto him, "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine donkey these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the donkey saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive."

God has many ways to open our eyes, humble our hearts, and turn us from sin. A talking donkey is just one of these ways.

Being a Good Neighbor -

What does the Bible say about being a good neighbor? Read Luke 10:2-37 to your child, Jesus' parable about the traveler. He tells us that a neighbor is a person of compassion, helpfulness, and thoughtful care, not just someone you live close to. Ask your child to brainstorm how he might be a good neighbor.

Some other verses about neighbors:

Leviticus 19:18 – thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself

Proverbs 3:29 – Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Neighborhoods and Community Helpers –

Sylvester and his family live in a neighborhood on Acorn Road in the town of Oatsdale. A neighborhood is a group of people living within a certain range. Familiarize your children with your neighborhood. Do they know their street and town names? Take a walk or a drive around your neighborhood, with children noting street signs, pointing out familiar sights, and soaking in the surroundings. Show them where the police station and firehouse are, explaining to them how they are community helpers. Maybe they would like to try their hand at making a map of the neighborhood.

Sometimes your neighbors can be community helpers too. Does your child remember who tried to help Sylvester's parents find Sylvester? All of the neighborhood dogs went looking for him. Reminisce about a time that you or your child may have been community helpers. Maybe you helped to find a runaway dog, or picked up trash along the street. Maybe you helped the people of your neighborhood in a time of natural disaster. Share these adventures with your children.

Feelings –

Sometimes we act out in anger or frustration because we don't know how to express our feelings. This is especially true with children. The Donkey, and other characters, went through many, many different feelings throughout this story. Have your child act out these various feelings:

excited surprised startled frightened confused perplexed puzzled
bewildered scared worried helpless hopeless miserable unhappy

Discuss with children how a problem can be helped more quickly if they are able to express their feelings.

SCIENCE

Animal Babies –

Sylvester's parents asked all the animal children if they knew where his son was. Does your student know the adult and baby names of the various animals? The story mentions puppies, kittens, colts, and piglets. Have student name the parent animal (dog, cat, horse, pig). Does he

know any more? You could mention cow/calf, bear/cub, sheep/lamb, lion/cub, kangaroo/joey, etc.

Animals in Winter –

As the weather was growing colder Sylvester went into a deep sleep. This deep sleep during the wintertime is called hibernation. While donkeys (or rocks!) don't usually hibernate, there are many animals that do. Can your child think of any animals that hibernate? Bears, groundhogs, and bats are among those animals that will sleep all winter. Other animals, such as birds and butterflies, will migrate to warmer areas during winter, where food and shelter is more plentiful. And others will store up food and stay inside their cozy homes when the weather turns cold. [Animals in Winter](#) by Henrietta Bancroft and Richard G. Van Gelder is part of the "Let's-Read-And-Find-Out Science Book" series and is educational and enjoyable. Another good go-along book could be [The Big Snow](#) by Berta and Elmer Hader, winner of the 1949 Caldecott award.

Weather and Seasons –

This picture book gives very good examples of the changing of seasons. Discuss with your child the different seasons, and the months they fall under. Does your child know what causes the seasons? The earth takes 24 hours to spin on its axis, to create day and night. And it takes 365 days for the earth to rotate around the sun, to create a year. The seasons tell us how far the earth has traveled around the sun since the year began. What happens to the plants and animals in spring? How about fall and winter? What is your child's favorite season? Why? Go outside and observe your surroundings, noting the changes specific to the seasons.

Rocks –

Sylvester liked to collect pebbles. Pebbles are small rocks that have been smoothed by water. Rocks are masses of minerals that occur in nature. There are three basic types of rocks: igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic. Discuss each of these rock types with your child.

Igneous – a rock that is formed when other rocks melt, cool, and then harden. Igneous rocks are the hardest rocks. Examples include obsidian, pumice, granite, and pegmatite.

Metamorphic – rocks that have changed by being heated and squeezed. They are the second hardest rocks. Examples include slate, marble, and quartzite.

Sedimentary – rocks that formed from bits of other rocks or plants. They are the softest of the three kinds of rocks. Examples include sandstone, limestone, and conglomerate.

Your child may enjoy starting his own rock collection. There are certain characteristics to examine to identify the rocks collected. They include the color of the rock itself, the color streak a rock makes when rubbed on paper, the luster or shine, the hardness (1 being softest, 10 being hardest), and the way it breaks. Look for some good resource books at the library to help your child identify the rocks he finds.

[Complete My Rock Collection Notebook Page](#)

[Complete Types of Rocks Notebook Page](#)

Donkeys -

Donkeys are domesticated animals that belong to the equine family, along with horses, zebras and mules. Donkeys have been used for thousands of years as working animals. They can pull carts, plow fields, and be used as pack animals. They also can be used to protect sheep and goats from predators, as they have a very hard kick. They can live up to 40 years.

The male donkey is called a Jack, and the female donkey is called a Jennet or Jenny. A young donkey is called a foal.

In their native habitats, donkeys spend about half their day foraging on grasses, shrubs, and other plant material. Domestic donkeys eat straw (especially barley straw), hay, and grains.

Donkeys range from gray to brown, with some being dappled or spotted. Donkeys are known for their long ears. The donkey's hooves are smaller and rounder than in horses. The donkey's mane and tail are coarse, and the tail looks more like a cow's than a horse's. Legs are long and rather thin.

Donkeys are considered stubborn animals. They hold their ground more than other animals when approached by predators, and will use their brassy bray to sound off in various situations.

[Complete Donkey Notebook Page](#)

LANGUAGE ARTS

Vocabulary –

Discuss unfamiliar words with your child.

Extraordinary –	amazing; astonishing
Ceased –	stopped; ended
Gratified –	thankful; appreciative
Fetlock –	a tuft of hair growing on the back of a leg just above the hoof
Nook –	corner; cranny
Gully -	ditch; channel; ravine

Abbreviations –

An abbreviation is the shortened form of a word or phrase. Abbreviations are sometimes used for common words, and most are followed by a period. In this story, Sylvester's mother is called Mrs. Duncan, and his father is called Mr. Duncan. If student is not familiar with these abbreviations have him locate them throughout the story and practice writing them. Can your student think of any others? Some more familiar ones would be Dr. for Doctor, Rd. for Road, or Ave. for Avenue.

Personification –

It is a literary device in which the author gives an animal, object, or idea the characteristics of a human. In Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, William Steig has humorously dressed the animals and given them names and even occupations! Can your child think of any other stories with

personification? Katy and the Big Snow by Virginia Lee Burton is another story with a winter theme featuring good examples of personification.

Creative Writing –

Have your student write or narrate a story beginning, “If I found a magic pebble I would...” After writing the story, you may want to have the older student revise it for content and style by reading it out loud, listening for the overall sense and sound, and then proofread it for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors.

Reading Comprehension –

Play the [Game](#) found at the end of this unit to test comprehension and review the story.

MATH

Billion –

Sylvester thought that the chance of someone wishing that a rock were a donkey was one in a billion at best. How much is a billion? It is a one, followed by nine zeros, reading like this: 1,000,000,000. Have child write out the number and identify the place value of each digit. Ask him if he thinks that 1 in 1,000,000,000 is a good chance or bad?

Counting –

Look with your child at the picture of the dogs searching for Sylvester. Have child count all the dogs. How many brown? How many gray? How many spotted? How many different kinds can your child find?

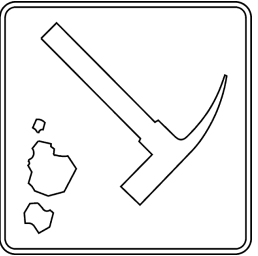
Graphing –

Using the pebbles and stones your child collected in the science lesson, have child make a bar graph of rocks by color, texture (smooth, rough), size, etc. Have him group the rocks in different ways, and look for his input as to how he would graph each one.

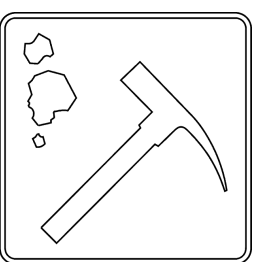
ART

Caldecott Award-

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig is the winner of the 1970 Caldecott Award. Have child find the medal on cover of story. In 1937 the secretary of the American Booksellers Association, Fredric Melcher, proposed that a special award should be given to the artist of “the most distinguished American picture book for children published in the United States during the preceding year”. The award was named in honor of Randolph Caldecott, a 19th century picture book illustrator. The winner is selected and announced in midwinter by the American Library Association. As you examine the pictures of the story with your child, discuss reasons it may have been selected as a “distinguished American picture book”. Have child design his own medal, using foil, to award to his favorite picture book.



My Rock Collection



Name	Color	Streak	Luster	Hardness	Other Properties



Types of Rocks

Igneous -

Metamorphic -

Sedimentary -

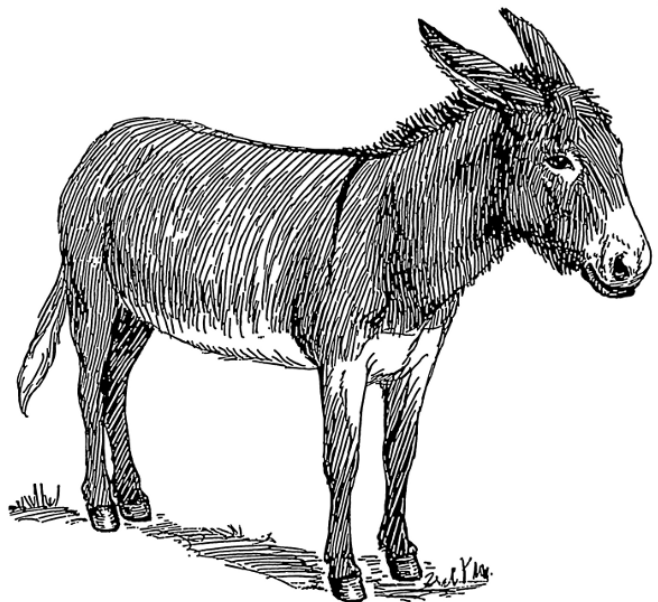
Donkeys

Anatomy

Diet

Interesting Facts

Uses

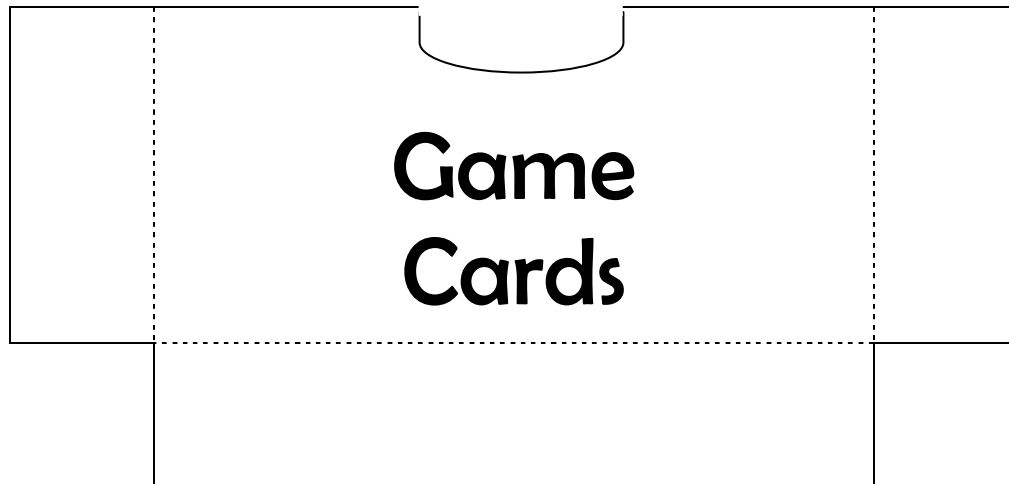


Sylvester and the Magic Pebble File Folder Game

Print game cards and board onto cardstock. Make pocket to store cards. Inside of a file folder, glue the board to one side, and the pocket and game instructions to the other.

<p>What kind of animal is Sylvester?</p>	<p>What road does Sylvester live on?</p>
<p>The name of Sylvester's town is _____.</p>	<p>What did Sylvester like to collect?</p>
<p>What color pebble does Sylvester find?</p>	<p>What sits on Sylvester and howls?</p>
<p>How long does Sylvester stay under the magic spell?</p>	<p>What kind of animal does Sylvester meet on Strawberry Hill?</p>
<p>Why did Sylvester wish he were a rock?</p>	<p>Where did Sylvester's father put the pebble at the end of the story?</p>

<p>Besides becoming a rock, what else did Sylvester wish for?</p>	<p>What kind of award did the book <u>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</u> win?</p>
<p>Game Instructions: Use coins or buttons as pawns. Each player draws a card. If he answers correctly, he rolls the dice and moves that many spaces. If he gets the answer wrong, it is the next player's turn. Play until someone reaches the end and wins the game!</p>	



START



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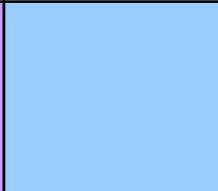
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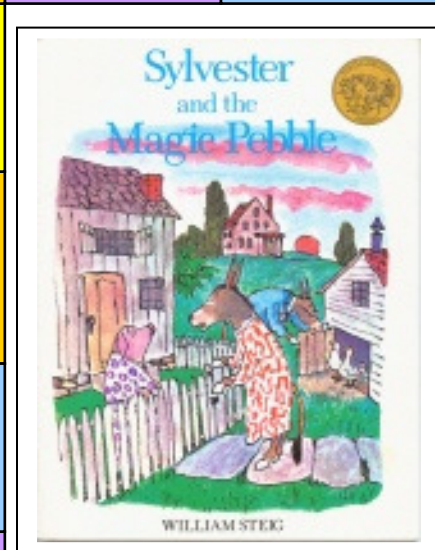
Take an extra turn



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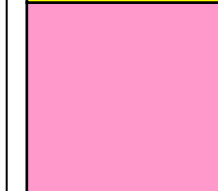
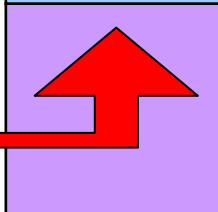
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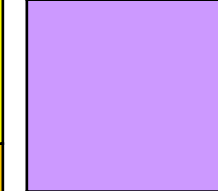
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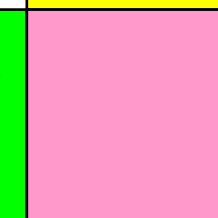
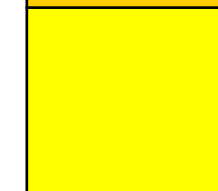


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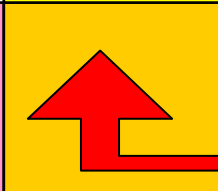


Take the Shortcut Pass

Take an extra turn



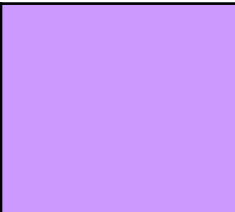
END



Go back 2 spaces

Place Cards Here

Go ahead 2 spaces



Take an extra turn