

The Big Snow

Book by Berta and Elmer Hader

Unit study by Martha Posten and Celia Hartmann

Social Studies

Rural vs. Urban:

Discuss the difference between rural and urban. What about this book makes us think it is rural? Do you live in a rural or urban area? What would a day of big snow look like in an urban area? A great tale to contrast the two is *The Country Mouse and The City Mouse*.

Holidays: Groundhog Day

The Big Snow refers to Groundhog Day-- "The ground hog didn't wake up until the second day in February. He pushed up through the snow and looked about. The sun was shining brightly and there on the snow the ground hog saw his shadow. 'Oh-oh, I know what that means,' he said. 'There will be six more weeks of winter.' And he hurried back to his den to sleep until spring. "

Groundhog Day is February 2nd. Tradition holds that if the groundhog sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of bad weather, and if he doesn't, that spring will be here soon. Of course, the groundhog doesn't really decide the weather! How did this holiday get started?

In the 1700's German settlers brought the tradition known as Candlemas Day with them. It was the custom on this day for clergy members to bless candles and distribute them (one for each window in every house) among the people for light in the midst of a dark winter. If the sun came out on Candlemas Day (which was also February 2), it meant six more weeks of wintry weather.

According to the Old English saying:

If Candlemas be fair and bright,

Winter has another flight.

If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,

Winter will not come again.

According to the Scottish saying:

*If Candlemas Day is bright and clear,
There'll be two winters in the year.*

According to the German saying:
*For as the sun shines on Candlemas Day
So far will the snow swirl until May.
For as the snow blows on Candlemas Day,
So far will the sun shine before May.*

According to the American saying:
*If the sun shines on Groundhog Day;
Half the fuel and half the hay.*

Culture: Weather Lore

Weather lore is sprinkled throughout this story. If you've already discussed the Groundhog Day lesson with your student, you may wish to build on that by discussing other weather lore.

The book mentions, "A rainbow around the moon meant more snow. MUCH MORE." This is the same concept as Groundhog's Day. Is it true or just for fun?

Here are a few more weather sayings. Discuss the meanings of these sayings with your student and why some of them can be considered accurate (not just based in superstition). Observe some of the sayings over the next several weeks and keep a record of the saying and the weather in the notebook. Which sayings were accurate? Has God given us clues to know what the weather may be like? (of course), but Who ultimately determines the weather and always knows what is going to happen? (only One-- our sovereign God)

*The moon and the weather may change together,
But a change of the moon, will not change the weather.*

A ring around the sun or moon, means rain or snow coming soon.

*When grass is dry at morning light
Look for rain before the night.*

Dew on the grass, rain won't come to pass.

When the night goes to bed with a fever, it will awake with a wet head.

*When stars shine clear and bright,
We will have a very cold night.*

Three days rain will empty any sky.

The sharper the blast, the sooner 'tis past.

*If bees stay at home, rain will soon come,
If they fly away, fine will be the day.*

When clouds look like black smoke a wise man will put on his cloak.

When the chairs squeak, it's of rain they speak.

*Catchy drawer and sticky door,
Coming rain will pour and pour.*

*When the sun shines while raining,
it will rain the same time again tomorrow.*

*When the wind blows from the west, fish bite best.
When it blows from the east, fish bite least.*

When the wind is in the east, 'tis neither good for man nor beast.

Language Arts

Personification:

Personification is the giving of human qualities to things, animals, or other concepts that are not human. In this book, the animals are portrayed as having conversations in a very neighborly way. The next time your student writes a story, you may want to encourage him to personify an animal or object for the main character.

Alphabetical Order/List-Making:

List the animals in alphabetical order. For a smaller list, list only the names of birds in alphabetical order. See Science: Woodland Animals Lesson for complete list.

Onomatopoeia:

Onomatopoeia is using words that creates the sound of the object as you say them. This happens often in this book from the first words of "*Honk-honk-honk.*" Have child point out other examples from the book and give some of their own examples.

Capitalization:

This story provides an opportunity to remind your student that the seasons of the year are NOT capitalized in writing. Months of the year are and so are days of the weeks, but seasons are not.

Art

Comparison and Detail:

Some of the pictures are in watercolor and some are black and white sketches. Notice the color pictures catch the eye more, but the black and white pictures are much more detailed. Compare the pages with the child. Ask them to point out details. The most obvious are the two scenes where it first starts to snow. The first is in black and white with each unique snowflake drawn; the second is in color with white dots. Discuss which one illustrations your child prefers and why.

Have your child draw a picture in pencil, encourage details. Now have your child paint a picture, as close to being the same as the pencil drawing as they can. Make sure to let them know that both pictures are great, but have different qualities that make them beautiful.

Facial Expressions:

Compare the pages where "*there were hill-dwellers who came out to hunt*" to the pages where "*the snow stopped falling on the evening of the second day.*" Look at the expressions on the raccoons, the round circle of a mouth in an expression of awe.

Tell your student to show you his "mad" face, his "happy" face, his "surprised!" face (other ideas include sad, excited, bored, etc.). Have him look in the mirror. What does his mouth look like? His eyes? With your younger student, make paper plate masks with different facial expressions to illustrate different moods. With your older student, let him draw some faces that include different emotions.

Caldecott Medal Winner:

Discuss the artwork with your student. If your student is familiar with other books that have received the Caldecott Award, discuss why he thinks the art work in this book won the award. If your student isn't familiar with the award, explain that it is a prize given to one picture book each year that has exceptional art work, "the most distinguished American picture book for children."

If your student is interested, check out some other Caldecott Medal winning books from the library.

Math

Story Problems: Addition & Subtraction:

Add all the animals, or all the birds, or all the mammals on each page or in the book. Then subtract. Example: All the animals in the book, minus the animals in one scene or minus the number of birds. There are several possible math problems along this pattern. Encourage the child to make their own word problems, if they are of an age to do so.

We liked the idea that it was the same flock of geese viewed in each scene as they passed over different areas. How many birds were in the flock? The first page shows 11, then 9 in the next scene. How many of the flock are missing? (2) Then the third scene shows 14! How many more birds did we find in the flock? (3)

Tally Marks & Counting by Five:

Use tally marks to add up how many black/white pages and how many color pages there are. Then count by five to get the total of each and the total number of pages in the book.

Science

Note: Gather pictures of the animals in this book (either by cut outs of magazines, printed off, or stickers) to make this a hands-on lesson.

Food Chain (herbivores, omnivores, carnivores):

What is the one animal that doesn't enter conversation with another animal? (The

owl.) Ask if the student can guess why that might be. Could it be because owls hunt many of those other animals for food?

Activity 1: Place your animal cutouts from the story onto different colored squares. Start with any animal and then put what animal you think would hunt it in the square next to it or place an animal you think it would hunt in the square before it. Do all animals eat other animals (carnivores)? Do all animals eat plants (herbivores)? Do some animals eat both (omnivores)? Now, try putting the animals into three columns according to what kind of food they eat!

Activity 2: One of Celia's favorite ways to illustrate the food chain is this. Write the word grass on the board. Ask you student who eats grass and write that down. Ask the student who eats that? Continue until the student can't think of any more.

Examples might be: grass <--- mouse <----snake <---owl **or** grass <----cow <---- people

Now take a piece of construction paper and cut it long ways into several strips about 1 - 2" wide. Have your student write each part of the chain, each on a separate strip, using the example(s) written on the board and assemble into interlinking circles. Using my example above, he would write *grass* on the first strip and then glue/staple/tape the ends to make a circle (a link). Write *cow* on the second strip. Then put it through the first link and glue/staple/tape its ends. Then write *people* on the third strip. Then put it through the second link and glue/staple/tape its ends. You now have a **chain** . . . a food chain!



Woodland Animals:

Various Woodland Animals (animals who live in the forest) are characters of this story. If you have classification cards, you may want to add the animals from the story to your cards. If you don't have cards, you may want to start some animal classification cards for the various animals your student encounters through the unit studies at Homeschool Share.

Make envelopes, folders, pockets, a chart with pockets, or index card file for each of the following categories

Vertebrates:

Mammals

Fish

Birds

Reptiles

Amphibians

Invertebrates

Insects

Arachnids

Crustaceans

Other

As you read various stories for your studies, classify the animals you read about within the stories. Print a piece of clip-art, draw a picture, or find a picture in a magazine and make an animal card to put inside the envelope, folder, chart with pockets, etc. Discuss why the animal fits into a certain category. The cards can be played like a game for review anytime.

Here is a list of animals mentioned in this story that can be made into cards for classification: wild goose, rabbit, groundhog, ring-necked pheasant, chipmunk, blue jay, blue bird, cardinal, song sparrow, robin, wood rat, crow, red squirrel, grey squirrel, wood mouse, meadow mouse, deer, skunk, raccoon, screech owl, and chickadee.

Nocturnal Animals:

Nocturnal animals wake up when we go to sleep and they like to eat, play, and

work at night. Make two lists, one of which animals in the book are most active at night and which are active during the day.

Hibernation and Migration:

Why don't all the animals hibernate or migrate until winter passes? How do those animals cope with the cold season? (Some make thicker coats or burrow into dens for warmth.)

Since the animals did different things for the winter season, you may enjoy charting this with your student. Make a chart with four columns-- migrated--went South, hibernated, gathered seeds/nuts, and didn't prepare. List the animals under the appropriate column according to what they did for the winter.

Snow:

You may want to use the page where the snowflakes are falling as a review or introduction lesson on how snowflakes have 6 sides and are unique.

Polar Caps and the Equator:

Explain that the sun is more direct along the equator, making those areas warmer than others. The polar caps are the farthest away from the equator, so they are very cold. Show your student the equator on your globe; point to various places on the globe and ask your student if she thinks that region of the earth gets snow (sometimes, a lot, or always).

"The days grew shorter and shorter" -- the sun's relationship to the equator also explains this. You can use a flashlight (representing the sun) and a globe (the earth) to illustrate. The earth's axis' rotation causes the sun to shine for different amounts of time throughout the course of a year.

Seasons:

Discuss the four seasons. Get four pieces of paper. Write the name of each season at the top of one of the pieces. Sort the season cards into four groups.

For a variation of this idea, have your student go through books on the shelf and put them in piles according to what season appears on the cover illustration.

Observation (and the Scientific Method):

The animals in the story are very observant about the world around them. People

have not always known scientific explanations, but they were observant and told others. Try observing the weather for a week or more, what new things do you notice? Record your findings in a nature journal. What questions does your observation(s) lead you to ask? Observation is the first step in the scientific method. Your older student may wish to learn more about the scientific method and how it works to help people determine whether or not something is fact.

Basics of the scientific method:

1. Observation (and ask questions)
2. Hypotheses (try to answer a question-- what is going on? how? why?)
3. Prediction (the formed hypothesis)
4. Experiment (test the hypothesis to see if it holds true)

Bible/Character

- Read about the creation in Genesis.
- Point to various items in the illustrations from the book and ask what day God made _____.
- God gave people dominion over the land and the animals. Discuss what that means to us today. Notice the people fed the animals. What would happen if they stopped putting out seeds, nuts, corn, hay, and breadcrumbs? Many of the animals may have grown to depend on that food and would go hungry without it.
- Everything He made is for our good. Talk about different ways we benefit from the world around us. (Trees make wood for homes to shelter us, the food we eat, cotton to make clothes...)

Just for Fun

Field Trip Idea--

A great field trip is to a National Weather Center, if you have one. If not, many local news stations give tours and presentations too.

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