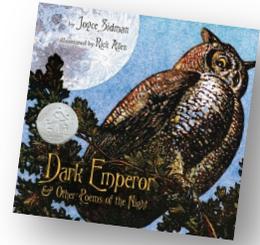


Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night

By Joyce Sidman



Reader's Guide

Predictions

Questions to ask before reading.

1. *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night* is a book about creatures of the night woods. Look at the front and back covers. What clues does the illustrator give you that this is a book about nighttime? Can you guess what other creatures might be in this book?
2. Look at the owl on the cover. What is he looking at? Why do you think the illustrator drew him this way? How does it set the mood for the book?
3. Think of some “night words”—words that you think describe the night. Try to remember them and see if the author uses any of them in the book.
4. Notice the **endpapers** of the book (the inside cover and first page of the book, and the inside back cover and last page of the book). What color are they in front? What color are they in back? Any guesses as to why they change color? Try guessing again after you read the book.

Suggestions for Reading Aloud

1. **Learning about night creatures:** Most of these creatures are familiar to children. Take a moment to ask them what they know about each creature before reading the poem. Then follow the poem with the nonfiction note. Did they learn anything new?
2. Have students help **find the red eft** on (almost) every page. Also, the book progresses from sunset to sunrise. See if they can **find the moon** on each page as it moves across the sky.
2. “Welcome to the Night” is a great **poem for multiple readers**. Choose a different reader for each stanza, or just have everyone chime in on “Welcome to the night.”
3. **Extra Credit:** “Ballad of the Wandering Eft” was written to the tune of Merle Travis’ song “Dark As a Dungeon,” which can be found on YouTube. Offer extra credit for a **musical performance of this poem using this tune!**

Writing Activities

"Advice Poem"

1. Read “Night-Spider’s Advice” with students. Discuss favorite words or phrases, then ask your students to pick out “clues” that this poem was written in the voice of a spider.
2. What kinds of advice does this spider offer? How would this advice apply to their lives as well?
3. As a group, think of something the class knows how to do well, like how to eat lunch in the cafeteria, or how to have fun at recess. Brainstorm “advice” ideas for this subject: things to do, and things NOT to do. Create a group poem using these ideas, e.g., “Fourth Graders’ Advice on How to Make Your Teacher Smile.”

4. Let each student choose their own subject—something he or she knows a lot about: how to make cookies, how to score a soccer goal, how to float on your back. Have them include not only instructions, but also phrases that describe why they love this activity (the “delicious chewy nuggets of dough,” the “whoosh of the soccer ball”), or how this activity relates to life in general (“if you don’t hustle, you’ll never touch the ball”).

5. Make sure to schedule a sharing time!

"Ubi Sunt"

Ubi sunt is a Latin phrase that means “Where are . . .?” It’s also the name of an ancient style of poem (from the Middle Ages) that is meant to lament the loss of beautiful, heroic things (like warriors, kings, homeland, etc.).

1. Share the poem “Moon’s Lament” with the class. Indicate to them that it is almost sunrise in this poem. Ask them: who is speaking? Who is he speaking to? Why? What are some of the different things the speaker mentions? Pick out details. Talk about what the speaker means in the last line.

2. Chose a subject for a group poem, something that the class has experienced together and now misses—like recess, summer vacation, an especially delicious batch of birthday treats, etc. Brainstorm details about this wonderful thing/time—what do they miss the most? Be as specific and descriptive as possible (“the wind in my face as I zip down the slide”)

3. Write a group poem framing all those details as questions: “Where is the soft wind in my face as I zip down the slide?” If you want, add a last line beginning with the word “Alas.” “Alas, here we sit inside until the next recess.”

4. Let each student choose their own subject for an ubi sunt—something they loved that is now in the past. It could be anything from a beloved family member or pet that has died, to an awesome pizza they once had. Have each student follow the pattern modeled in the group poem.

5. Share!

Science Activities

These activities would fit into a unit either on forest animals or the five senses

"Raccoon Hands"

Raccoons use their very sensitive hands to find food, often underwater.

You will need:

- two clean buckets, one filled with water
- two of several matching objects than can get wet: e.g., two stones, two small plastic toys, two shells, two spoons, two pinecones, two golf balls, etc.
- two blindfolds (if needed)
- some towels (for kids to dry hands)

1. Place one set of objects in the dry bucket. In small groups, let blindfolded students try, one by one, to take out and identify each object without looking.

2. Place the other set of objects in the bucket full of water. Again, let blindfolded students take out and try to guess each object.

3. Discussion: How did they identify each object? Texture? Temperature? Then discuss whether it was easier—or harder—to do it in water. Why?

"Mouse Ears"

Mice rely on their excellent hearing to avoid predators like the owl.

1. Have each student sit somewhere in the classroom, with a piece of paper and a pencil.
2. Ask them to shut their eyes and listen carefully. How many different noises can they hear? What do they think each noise is? Have them write down as many noises as they can, trying to describe and identify each one.
3. Discussion: compare noises heard; perhaps write them on the board.
4. Then ask them: if they were mice, lost in the classroom, which would be important noises for them to identify? How could they escape using just their hearing?

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