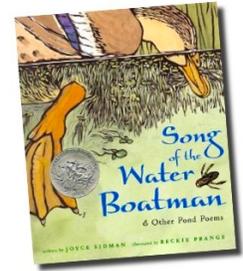


## Song of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems

By Joyce Sidman



### Reader's Guide

*These guidelines are for grades 2-5.*

#### PREDICTIONS

*Questions to ask before reading.*

1. Song of the Water Boatman is a book about pond creatures. Think about ponds for a minute. What creatures (plants and animals) do you think might be in this book?
2. What do you think a "water boatman" might be? With a name like that, what could it be?
3. What is the duck on the cover doing? Look at the shape of its foot and compare it to your own. Why is a duck's foot shaped like that? Why is yours different?

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR READING ALOUD

*Several poems in the book lend themselves to oral reading. Here are just a few suggestions for you and your class.*

##### "Spring Splashdown"

Choose two students to read alternate lines, emphasizing rhythm (Line 1, 3, 5, etc. has a simpler rhythm with simpler words, and would be perfect for a less adept reader). Then have them explain to the class what actually happens in the poem (after looking at sidebar note).

##### "In the Depths of the Summer Pond"

This is a cumulative, "House that Jack Built" kind of poem. There are seven creatures in all. Divide your class into seven groups (or choose seven readers). Have them each learn their creature's part, and recite it when it appears in the poem. Everyone can join in on the chorus: ". . . in the depths of the summer pond!"

##### "Song of the Water Boatman & Backswimmer Refrain"

A back-and-forth poem for two voices. Choose two readers who are interested in pirates ("yo, ho, ho, the pond winds blow"). Have them practice the poem, and also study the sidebar note. After they perform, they can explain to the class the differences between their two insects.

#### SCIENCE ACTIVITIES

*Activities for indoor and outdoor learning.*

##### Bucket Brigade

*Discover, observe, and identify water creatures first-hand.*

1. After reading this book with your class, find a pond nearby to visit with your class.

2. Take several light-colored, shallow basins (so creatures are easily visible), sketch pads, notebooks, and field guides.
3. Divide kids into groups of four, and have each group scoop out some water from the pond into a basin. Two students can sketch plants/animals they find, and two can work on identifying as many objects as possible.
4. Ask afterwards: how many of the creatures from *Song of the Water Boatman* did you find?

### **Seasonal Diary**

*Find out & record how the natural world changes in fall, winter, and spring.*

1. Read "The Season's Campaign" and talk about how the cattails see their world changing from season to season.
2. Plan to take several different nature walks in two or three different seasons.
3. Once outside, encourage children to be as observant as possible. Have them take notepads and list one thing they see, one thing they smell, hear, feel. Have them think about these questions: What are the trees doing in fall/winter/spring? What does the sky look like? What animals do you see? What do you imagine going on behind the scenes? How is life in this season different from another?
4. Back inside, have each child make a diary page, including the date, and record everything they observed. Encourage illustrations. Bind each diary page into a class book for each season.

### **Food Chain**

*Create a wall mural that represents a food chain in your area: an activity that combines science, art & writing.*

1. Read "In the Depths of the Summer Pond." See if students can identify each of the creatures in the illustration. Talk about the concept of a food chain: how each creature is dependent on another to live.
2. Using a current area of study (oceans, rain forest, northern woods, etc.), brainstorm a list of plants/creatures that are "links" in a food chain. Choose six to eight "links" that would be fun to illustrate, and arrange them in their order in the food chain.
3. Have students volunteer to either write or illustrate.  
--Illustrators will create a colorful version of each "link" to paste on the mural.  
--Writers will each choose a "link" and create a descriptive line that goes with it ("Here soars the eagle with a snow-white head").
4. Writers will arrange their lines into a poem, and paste it onto the mural.
5. Illustrators will paste their creatures near the appropriate line on the mural.
6. Viola! A food chain mural!

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

### **Riddle Poem**

*I love teaching this kind of poem; children take to it naturally, and love trying to guess each other's riddle.*

1. Read "A Small Green Riddle." After trying to guess the subject, find clues from the poem. Identify metaphors used.
2. Choose a different plant or animal to write about—it can be part of a current science unit.
3. As a class, brainstorm descriptive words for your creature. Where does it live? What does it eat? Create metaphors for how it looks, moves, sounds.
4. Create a class riddle poem on a large pad or whiteboard. Use first person—"become" the creature!

*WHAT AM I?*

With my white crown of feathers  
I am queen of the pond.  
Perched on orange stilts,  
my neck poised like a still, blue snake . . .

5. Then have each student pick their own subject for an individual poem, or they can work in pairs.
6. For individual work, have available library books about different creatures. This helps students focus on the looks and behavior of their animal/plant.
7. Schedule a sharing time so students can read their riddle poems aloud and guess each other's subjects.

### **Repeating Action Poem**

*A poetry exercise that emphasizes rhythm.*

1. Look at "Spring Splashdown" with your students. How does this poem look on the page? Why is it so long & skinny?
2. Read the poem aloud. What rhythms does it have? Which words repeat? Have students pick out some favorite words. If you made a list of all the words in the poem, could you figure out what animal it portrays (without the illustration)?
3. This poem is about something that happens in every wood duck's life. Write a class poem about something that happens in every student's life, like getting ready for bed or eating lunch in the cafeteria:

- Brainstorm/use vivid action words
- Think about what happens first, then next, then next . . . then last.
- Repeat words for emphasis & rhythm
- Follow the rhythm of the poem if you want (two 1-syllable words, followed by two 2-syllable words):

#### *SCHOOL LUNCH*

Wait, wait,  
stomach rumbling.  
Sniff, sniff,  
pizza waiting.  
Trays, trays,  
clatter, clatter . . .

4. Have each student write an individual poem about something they do everyday, using the repetitive rhythm illustrated above.
5. Share!

### **ART ACTIVITIES**

*I love the art in this book because of its varying perspectives.*

#### **New Point of View**

1. Look at the art on the "Spring Splashdown" page. Have your students try to figure out how the artist set up this picture. Where is the nest? Where is the mother duck? How would this scene look different from water level? Then look at "A Small Green Riddle" and "Fly, Dragonfly!" and figure out the viewpoint on those pages.
2. Have your students attempt to find a different-than-usual viewpoint:
  - Under a tree/swingset/building, staring straight up.
  - Cheek against the lawn, looking sideways at the landscape.
  - Looking down from a high window at something you usually see from below.
3. Encourage them to draw what they see from this new perspective.

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