🎯 Goal Directed Behavior

ABOUT MORNINGSIDE CENTER

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility's evidence-validated programs engage young people in learning essential social and emotional skills and help educators build productive and respectful schools. The 4Rs Program combines superior children's books with engaging SEL activities that explore community, feelings, relationships, conflict, and problem-solving, adding depth to literacy instruction.

Book Talk, Swimmy

By: The 4Rs

Book Talk: Swimmy

Note to the teacher:

This is the Book Talk section from The 4Rs™ [Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution] *Teaching Guide for Kindergarten*, Unit 7, Making a Difference, pp 88-90. All units in The 4Rs™ begin with a summary and comment section to inform the teacher, and include a read-aloud of a story followed by discussion and activities that help children relate to the themes.

Time: 40 minutes; or do half one day, the rest another day

Materials: *Swimmy*, by Leo Lionni, A Dragonfly Book, Alfred A. Knopf, © 1963; drawing materials; puppets

Summary

Somewhere, "in a corner of the sea," lived a "happy school of little fish." They were all red, except for Swimmy, who was black and who swam faster than all the others. One day a large, hungry tuna swooped down on them and swallowed all the red fish. Only fast-swimming Swimmy escaped. Now he was on his own in the "deep, wet world." He was scared and lonely and "very sad." However, "the sea was full of wonderful creatures," and as Swimmy traveled along he enjoyed all the marvels of jelly fish, lobster, sea anemones, even the seaweed. Then he saw another school of fish that looked much like his own. They, too, were red and little. He called to them to come out from their hiding place and see the world. "We can't.. The big fish will eat us all,"' they cried.

Swimmy is dismayed, but not for long. "'We must THINK of something,"' he admonishes. And he thinks and thinks. Finally he has it. The school will form itself into the shape of one big fish and learn to swim together in that shape. Swimmy became the eye. "And so they swam in the cool morning water and in the midday sun and chased the big fish away."

Comment

This is a deceptively simple story by an author whose many works deal with difference, prejudice, conflict, and community. It is a good lead-in to an author study, for the author himself changed his life, leaving a successful career in advertising to write children's books. He stated at one point, "I had defended myself from the threat of a predictable future."

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On one level, we can appreciate this book as a straightforward tale of group action against an outside oppressor. We may think of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., and this is certainly a main theme of the book. But as we look more closely we can ask questions about the role of leaders and of supporters, about the responsibility of the entire community.

Should Swimmy have brainstormed with the school to come up with a good idea? Why was Swimmy the eye? How do students feel about someone who tells them what to do? On the other hand, what would have happened to the school if some fish had decided not to participate? How important was each fish in this endeavor?

Book Talk: Read Aloud

Previewing the book

Look at the cover and ask the students what they think the book will be about. Have any of them read books by this author before? Which books? What do they like about his books? What do they think this book is about? What looks interesting about this book?

Reading and responding to the book

Read the book through, pausing only to explain unfamiliar words such as school of fish. (Do the students know how big a tuna fish is?) Ask the students to pair up and talk about the book. What interests them? What questions do they have? This book is extremely popular with adults and children. Why? Encourage the students to present and defend their ideas of why they like or don't like it.

Deepening students' understanding of the book

Say that you are going to read the book again, and this time you want the students to think about what this book is mainly about. We are also going to think about what the characters are feeling. How does Swimmy change over time? How is he feeling at the beginning, after his friends are eaten, as he swims around, when he finds new friends, when the group is

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acting together? Name the feelings. How do the red fish feel before they meet Swimmy? How do they feel as they are preparing to meet the big fish? Would any of them be thinking of breaking ranks and fleeing? What holds them together? Elicit as many ideas about the book as possible. Can students move from thinking about fish to seeing the story as a metaphor for humans?

At some point, pick up on the idea that it only takes one person overcoming fear and acting courageously to start changing things. One person may not be able to accomplish a goal alone, but his or her example can galvanize others.   The group can then act powerfully to change its situation. At the same time, this story raises issues about leaders and followers. What is the role of a leader? Does a leader need followers? Why? What is the difference between being what is called a blind follower and a supportive member of the team?

If everyone in the room was a red fish who was afraid of the big tuna and Swimmy came to the classroom and said we had to THINK of something, what are some things we would think of to protect ourselves?

Connecting the book to students' lives

Discussion: Have the students ever known anyone who had an idea and got other people to go along with it in order to change something?

Kindergarten students are among the youngest and smallest in the school. If we think of the school as an ocean, how do they see themselves in it? What would they like to change? Write down their suggestions. Brainstorm ideas for working on some of the suggestions. Take one suggestion that looks doable and make a plan for accomplishing it.

Writing: All of us are leaders and followers at different times. What do you like to encourage your classmates to do (read, play in the block area, talk, play tag)? Draw a picture of yourself encouraging a classmate.

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Role Play

Introduce the puppets. One is Swimmy and the other is a red fish named Squishy. The children in the class are the other red fish. Squishy and Swimmy meet each other while swimming around one day. Squishy likes Swimmy and his ideas. She calls a "town meeting" of the whole school of red fish to discuss Swimmy's plan.

As the skit opens, Squishy is introducing Swimmy to the group. She explains that after hearing Swimmy explain his plan, they will discuss it and then see if they want to do it.

Swimmy then explains his idea of swimming in formation and why he thinks it will benefit everyone. When Swimmy finishes, Squishy asks, "Okay, what do you think? If you have questions or disagreements with this plan, don't hesitate to say so."

The class now discusses Swimmy's plan. If the students have trouble thinking of questions or concerns, Squishy can prompt the audience. (For example, Squishy might say, "When I discussed Swimmy's idea with some of you earlier, you asked, "How do we know we can trust Swimmy? We don't know him. He's a stranger. How do we know he's not working for the big fish?" or "Some of you said that you thought it was safer just to hide. It would be too dangerous to swim around in the open. And the big fish would be able to tell that we're just a bunch of little fish.")

Encourage a lively discussion with students responding to each others' ideas. When the discussion has run its course, take a vote to see if the class will follow Swimmy's plan.

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