

Classroom Guide – Hens for Friends
Guide written by Sandy De Lisle
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This classroom guide provides language arts activities that will involve other learning areas such as science. The purpose of this guide is to extend the themes of this story into learning activities that help to reinforce the main ideas of the book and to deepen understanding.

Story Summary

Aarón and his family rescue six hens from a chicken rescue after his village passes an ordinance allowing backyard hens. Aarón learns how to properly care for the birds—each with a different personality. He grows particularly close to one hen named Margaret and makes sure to mark all her eggs with the letter “M.” As Aarón observes the hens engaging in their natural behaviors such as pecking at insects and taking dust baths, his mother comments that most egg-producing hens do not get to do these things because they are kept inside large “factory farms” and not given room to move around. Aarón proclaims that the farms shouldn’t be so big and his mother wholeheartedly agrees. When Aarón’s little brother has his second birthday, Aarón makes sure that the birthday cake is made with Margaret’s eggs so that the cake will be extra special. Aarón even sneaks a piece of strawberry from the cake and gives it to Margaret, telling her he feels lucky to have her.

Vocabulary Words

Some of the vocabulary in this story is uncommon. We have provided definitions based on the context and use of the word in the story. Ask your students to use context clues to create meaning for these words. The Vocabulary Words section correlates to:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI. 5.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

On top of the world	to be excited about something
Rodents	small animals like mice and rats
Unfertilized	no baby chick living inside the egg
Factory farm	a large farm where many animals are kept in small spaces
Composter	a container into which plant matter is placed to decompose and break down into soil
Magnificent	something or someone very special
Roost	to rest or perch

Lesson One: Predicting, Comparing and Contrasting

Grades: 3-5

Objectives: To practice making predictions and comparing/contrasting, using *Hens for Friends*.

Students will be able to:

1. Make predictions about what will happen in the story and, after reading the story, compare their predictions to the actual story.
2. Students will be able to define new vocabulary words, including: unfertilized, roost and composter.
3. Students will be able to compare and contrast the lives of the backyard hens in the story with the lives of commercially raised hens using a Venn diagram.

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7

Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 3 topic or subject area*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.9

Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.

Materials Needed:

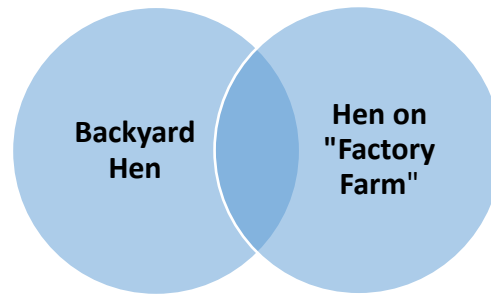
- Copy of *Hens for Friends* by Sandy De Lisle
- Chart paper and markers (or whiteboard)

Preparations:

1. Create the following chart on paper or on a whiteboard in the room

Characters	Actions	Possible New Information

2. Create a Venn diagram on chart paper or on a whiteboard:



Lesson Procedure:

Opening:

1. Ask students to raise their hands if they have a pet—and to keep their hands raised while you try to figure out what type of animal they have for pets. Ask them to put their hands down once you say the type of animal they have for a pet (if they have multiple pets, they can keep their hands up until you have listed all the pets in their household):

- Cat
- Dog
- Hamster
- Guinea pig
- Fish

At this point, you will most likely have mentioned all the types of pets the students have and all their hands will be down. However, if any students still have their hands raised, ask them what type of pets they have.

2. Once all the types of pets have been identified, show the students the cover of *Hens for Friends* and tell them that some people have chickens for pets.
3. Ask students to predict the following and record all the answers on the chart paper or board:
 - What characters do you think will be in the story?
 - What do you think will happen in the story?
 - What things might you learn about in this story?

Body:

1. Read *Hens for Friends* aloud to the class, pausing to discuss the following while reading:
 - When you get to the following words in the story, pause and ask the students to figure out what they mean from the context: unfertilized, composter and roost.
 - Why did some people not want hens living in their town? Do you think it's reasonable to be concerned about this? What did Aarón's family do to prevent the potential problems?
 - Why does Aarón say he is on top of the world when Margaret is on his head, and what does that expression mean?
 - Why do you think Aarón writes a letter "M" on Margaret's eggs?

- Aarón describes many different behaviors that the chickens have. Which one did you find most interesting and why?
- What do you think about keeping so many hens in a “factory farm?” Why do you think the farmers keep the hens in these conditions?

Activity:

1. Go back and compare the students’ predictions to what actually happened in the story. Make sure to review new content about hens: Hens have many interesting behaviors (purring like a cat, pecking at shoe laces and wind chimes and taking dust baths). Additionally, most hens (over 90% according to the ASPCA) live on commercial farms, which are sometimes called “factory farms.”
2. Show students photos of actual “factory farms” where egg-laying hens are raised: <https://www.asPCA.org/fight-cruelty/farm-animal-cruelty/birds-factory-farms>
3. Using the Venn diagram, have students compare and contrast the life of Aarón’s hens to those living on a commercial farm. Things to consider are space, access to outdoors, ability to roost, ability to peck, and level of danger from predators.

Closure:

Point out the last page of the book where the author provides information about where to find rescue hens and how to purchase eggs from farms where the hens are able to express many of their preferred behaviors, including roosting, and taking dust baths.

Extension:

- Have a discussion about anthropomorphism (giving animals human characteristics). Ask students to list examples from the text or pictures, of chickens exhibiting chicken behavior (roosting, pecking, etc.).
- Ask students for examples from the text or pictures, of chickens exhibiting behaviors that are typically considered to be human-only behaviors (illustrator made Margaret look like she is smiling in a few of the pictures). Ask the students why they think the illustrator made Margaret smile and if that was a good choice. (A pro is that a smiling chicken is endearing and may make the reader identify with Margaret, a con is that it may not be accurate and is projecting human feelings on her.)
- Ask students to come up with examples of other books where the animals are anthropomorphized (Click, Clack, Moo by Doreen Cronin and Charlotte’s Web by E.B. White, etc.)

Lesson Two: Your Grammar is Egg-cellent!

Grades: 3-5

Objective: To understand parts of speech using words from *Hens for Friends*.

Students will be able to:

1. Read and sort words from the book into different parts of speech: nouns, verbs and other (adverbs and adjectives).
2. Diagram a simple sentence. (extension activity)

Standard Addressed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.1.A

Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences.

Materials Needed

- Plastic eggs labeled with words from the story
- 3 baskets or containers (into which the plastic eggs will fit)
- Labels for each of the baskets/containers

Preparations



1. Choose as many words from the story as you have students and write one word on each of the plastic eggs. Make sure to choose nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives/adverbs. For example, you could use "Margaret," "he," "collect," "unfertilized," and "carefully."
2. Label each basket/container with a sticker or note card. Labels should be as follows: Nouns/Pronouns, Verbs and Adjectives/Adverbs.

Body

1. Define nouns/pronouns, verbs and adjectives/adverbs.
2. Show students the School House Rock videos that pertain to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk4N5kkifGQ&list=PL2Th9LBsWQg7SWCgd4aMjSIJkYwgGIZ->

Activity

1. Give each student a plastic egg with one of the words from the story written on it.
2. Take turns asking the students to read the word aloud and then place it in the basket or container where it best fits: Noun/Pronoun, Verb, or Adjective/Adverb. For younger students, you can do this as a group activity.
3. Have the students create new sentences by choosing one egg from each of the three baskets. For example, Aarón carefully collect(s) eggs.

Closure

Go around the room and ask students to share their favorite part of the lesson with the class.

Extension

1. Show students how to do basic sentence diagramming.
<http://www.wikihow.com/Diagram-Sentences>
2. Have students create their own sentences on a topic of their choosing. Have them trade sentences with another student and diagram the new sentences.

Lesson Three: Bird-brain!

Grades 3-5

Objectives: To understand that intelligence can be measured in different ways and to understand the latest research related to chicken cognition.

Students will be able to:

1. Explain Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory
2. Understand what their strengths are according to a survey based on the Multiple Intelligence Theory.
3. Apply the Multiple Intelligence Theory to chicken cognition

Next Generation Science Standards Addressed:

- 4-LS1-1. Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior, and reproduction. [Clarification Statement: Examples of structures could include thorns, stems, roots, colored petals, heart, stomach, lung, brain, and skin.]
- 4-LS1-2. Use a model to describe that animals receive different types of information through their senses, process the information in their brain, and respond to the information in different ways. [Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on systems of information transfer.]

Body

Explain to the students that there are different ways to measure intelligence. Share a Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory visual with them:



Source: connectionsacademy.com

In the story, we learned that hens can do many things: “purr,” put themselves to sleep by “telling time,” and show affection. Ask students if they have ever heard someone try to insult another person by calling him or her a “bird brain,” meaning that the person is not smart.

Share with the students that many studies have been done on chicken intelligence and much of it debunks the myth that chickens are not intelligent.

Review the infographic with students, reviewing the latest research on chicken cognition and emotions. Have the research referenced in the infographic handy so that you can refer to it when you are explaining the research findings.

CHICKEN MINDS

What recent science tells us



BRAIN AND SENSES

Discovery of lateralized, *left-right* chicken brain allowing for “multi-tasking” ^[1]

Brain wiring that controls complex memory and problem-solving similar to that of human brain ^[2]

Vision: highly-specialized, two fields of vision, one for close up focus and one for panoramic views ^[3]

Hearing: auditory frequency range of 10–15,000^{Hz}

PROBLEM SOLVING

Chicks demonstrate complex skills such as self control, basic arithmetic, physics and geometry ^[4]

Creative, flexible decision making, ability to break from routines to solve novel challenges ^[5]

SOCIAL WORLD

Domestic chickens seek to express same behaviors as those found in wild jungle fowl ancestors ^[6]

Complex hierarchy, with specific status for each individual member, maintains stability in groups ^[7]

Self-assessment: individuals compare themselves against others in group ^[8]

Recognition of up to 100 individuals in group by physical features and recognition of distinct social status for each individual ^[9]

Socially dominant individuals tend to be group leaders from whom others learn ^[10]

Sophisticated coordination of group activities such as foraging, nesting and group defense ^[11]

COMMUNICATION

Chicken talk involves visual, vocal (30+ calls), olfactory and tactile senses combined to convey numerous intentions, messages, and details ^[12]

Unhatched embryos communicate with each other and with their mother hen ^[13]

Mothers teach chicks all life skills and modify teaching based on chicks' learning progress ^[14]

Like primates, chickens use signals that are functionally referential and representational ^[15]

Communication customized based on audience ^[16]

MEMORY

Anticipation of future events and rewards ^[17]

Long term memory of individuals and events ^[18]

Retention and application of past learning ^[19]

EMOTIONS

Hens respond with empathy to chicks' distress ^[20]

Form strong inter-species bonds with others ^[21]

Express emotions like grief, fear, enthusiasm, anxiety, frustration, friendship and boredom ^[22]

Pleasure seeking: dust-bathing, sun-bathing, foraging — all elicit great contentment ^[23]

Activity

1. Have students take an online Multiple Intelligence assessment so they can see their relative strengths among Gardner's eight intelligences.
http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_ftp/client_ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/index.htm
2. Print a copy of the results and ask students if they agree with the results from the assessment.
3. Ask students what areas of intelligence are most tested in school. Are there any types that are rarely or never tested in school? If so, does that mean that these types of intelligence are not as important? Why?
4. Have students discuss which types of intelligence they think chickens display. Have them supply examples from the story or their personal experience to back up their statements.
5. Have students choose one of the eight types of intelligence and write a paragraph addressing the following two topics:
 - Give an example of chickens displaying that type of intelligence, including what internal and external structures they use to do so.
 - Discuss how stimuli received by chickens results in different responses

For example, a student might choose to write about emotional intelligence and how Margaret's brain responds to Aarón approaching him by flying on top of his head. However, if a fox or other predator approached Margaret, she would probably respond very differently. Aarón perceives Margaret perching on his head as affection, which it seems to be since she doesn't do this to everyone. This shows that Margaret has emotional intelligence.

Closure

Ask students how they would respond if someone referred to them as a bird brain in a negative way.

Extension

Have students choose other animals (dog, cat, dolphin, elephant, etc.) and repeat Activity #5 above.