



Elmer and the Stranger

A sequence of activities for Key Stage 1

Session 1:

Share the front cover and title of the book with the children. Discuss the word 'stranger'. What do they think it means? What do they associate with the word? Who do they think is the stranger in this story? Read the first part of the story, up until "Let's talk to him". Why do you think the animals view Kangaroo as a stranger? Collect children's responses around a copy of the illustration on a working wall or as part of a shared journal. What do you think the animals should do next? Using shared writing to model, give each child the opportunity to write a letter to one of the animals hiding in the clearing telling them what they think they should do.

Session 2:

Re-read the story so far, and on to: "I'll be laughed at." Use role on the wall to explore the character of Kangaroo. Role on the wall is a technique that uses a displayed outline of the character to record feelings (inside the outline) and outward appearances (outside the outline) at various stopping points across the story. Using a different colour at each of the stopping points allows you to track changes in the character's emotional journey. You can include known facts such as physical appearance, age, gender, location and occupation, as well as subjective ideas such as likes/dislikes, friends/enemies, attitudes, motivations, secrets and dreams. Look carefully at the illustration of Elmer and the other animals watching him from the clearing. How do you think they see Kangaroo from an outside perspective? Note this on the outside of an outline drawing of Kangaroo. Encourage the children to make personal connections with the character to encourage empathy with his situation. Have they ever felt like they can't do something? Have they ever been laughed at? How did this make them feel? How do they think Kangaroo feels on the inside? Are there any words in the text that help us to see how he feels? Look at words like 'hesitated', 'sobbed', 'sniffed' and 'secretly'. Why have these words been chosen? What do they tell us about Kangaroo's feelings? Note this on the inside of the outline drawing. You might use this opportunity to explore further how to consider the feelings of others before making judgements about who they are or what they can (or can't) do.

Session 3:

Re-read the story so far, and on to "Elmer laughed and left them." Look carefully at the words used by the other animals to encourage Kangaroo: 'beautifully', 'impressive'. What are they trying to do here? Talk about how the animals might be able to encourage Kangaroo when they come back. Write in role as one of the characters a note of encouragement to Kangaroo. How will they choose and use words, such as the verbs, adverbs and adjectives which have already been explored that will build up Kangaroo's confidence and encourage him to keep trying? You may wish to model this first through Shared Writing. Swap the notes with a friend and encourage them to read these as if they were Kangaroo. Before reading, revisit the words on the inside of the role on the wall and think about how he is feeling at this point. Use your facial expressions and body positioning to exemplify the mood he is in. Then read the note; how does this note of encouragement make them feel now? Why? Discuss the choices of words and phrases that have been most effective in changing their mood.

Session 4:

Re-read the story so far, and on until "I didn't think about jumping." What did the animals do to help Kangaroo build his confidence and win the competition? Return to the Role on the Wall and discuss whether Kangaroo still feels the same inside now as he did at the beginning of the story. Explore the words and phrases used to show how he might be feeling in the text, such as: "bounced behind him, in front of him, around him and even over him", "laughed", "with an enormous bounce", "delighted", "Kangaroo gave a laugh", "thanked". How have his feelings changed? You might then go on to look at words and phrases that still show he is a bit tentative, like "You mean 'bounce'," said Kangaroo. "I can't jump." and "That will be hard to beat," said Kangaroo.' Encourage the children to, once again, link this to personal experience. Have they ever done something that at first they thought would be difficult? How did it feel when they managed to do it successfully? How could we describe how he feels on the inside now? Note these in a different colour on the inside of the outline of Kangaroo. Do you think others will see him differently on the outside now too? Revisit the words on the outside of the outline of Kangaroo from Session 2 and use another colour to show how they think Kangaroo will be seen by others now.

Session 5:

Re-read the whole book. Engage the children in book talk to explore their responses to the story. You might begin by asking the children the four basic questions from Aidan Chambers' 'Tell Me' approach from *Tell Me: Children, Reading & Talk with The Reading Environment* (Thimble Press, 2011). These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:

- Tell me... was there anything you liked about this book?
- Was there anything that you particularly disliked...?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns... any connections that you noticed...? (With young children, these are likely to be personal connections, although if they know the Elmer books well or any other stories with the theme of sharing and kindness, they may be able to make links with these).

The openness of these questions, unlike the more interrogative 'Why?' question, encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the 'wrong' answer.

Encourage the children to think back to the animals' first impressions of Kangaroo. How do they feel about him now? What might have happened if they had dismissed Kangaroo at the beginning for being 'strange' in their eyes? Engage the children in a wider discussion about not judging people on first impressions. What did Elmer and the animals do to support Kangaroo? Children who may have experienced being new to a class might be able to link to personal connections of what helped them fit in and make friends in the class. Others might talk about how their friends have been able to help them overcome challenges or difficulties they have had. End the sequence by focussing on what makes a good friend. Give each child a coloured square and encourage them to write something that makes a good friend on the square. Stick these to a large wall display of an outline of Elmer, and have the children stick on their squares as Elmer's patches.



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