An Odd Job for Bob and Benny

Author: Nick Warburton
Range: Animal story
Theme: Humour through misunderstandings
Teaching Notes author: Thelma Page

Synopsis
Two helpful boys agree to look after a baby, not realising that it is a baby elephant. That is just the beginning of their problems.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book
- Look at the picture on the front cover and read the blurb on the back. Have the children ever read any stories about elephants?
- Read the title of the story. Ask: What might the odd job be?
- Read the name of the author. Do the children recognise this name? What else has Nick Warburton written?
- Look at the sign in the illustration on page 4. What kind of work do Bob and Benny do?

Strategy check
- Ask the children to explain what to do if the story does not seem to make sense. Talk about rereading the sentence or the paragraph, using the pictures, and going back to previous pages.
- Ask the children to say whether they think this story will be a realistic story or a funny story. How can you tell? Will you expect some rather unusual things to happen?

Independent reading
Focus: Explain to the children that you want them to think about the following question while they are reading independently: Why do the misunderstandings happen?
- Ask the children to read the first chapter independently.
- When a child has read aloud to you, ask questions about what Benny heard and what Mrs Catkin said. As each child reads aloud to you, notice the strategies the child uses to cope with new words.
- In later chapters ask the children questions to make sure that they understand why Bob and Benny are behaving so oddly.

Returning and responding to the text
- Ask the children to explain how the misunderstandings occurred, e.g. Why didn’t Benny realise they were asked to look after a baby elephant? Why did they think Daisy needed a bed and the sun?
- Encourage the children to find the place in the text that shows where the misunderstandings occur.
- Ask the children to explain Bob and Benny’s odd behaviour, looking for the sentences in the text that explain why they acted as they did, e.g. Why did they try to move the bed into the garden? Why did they make a hole in the roof? Why did they buy two umbrellas?
What have the children found out about Bob and Benny? Are they good listeners? Are they careful, or careless? Are they logical? Are they kind and sensible?

Invite some children to say which parts of the book they thought were funny. How did the author create funny situations?

Speaking and listening activities

Talk about what happened at the beginning of the story when Mrs Catkin asked Benny to look after her elephant. What did Mrs Catkin say? Find the place in the book to check (page 6).

What was the job that Benny told Bob? Ask them to check in the book, if necessary (page 9).

Ask volunteers to be Bob, Benny and Mrs Catkin and to act out the beginning of the story.

Ask the audience to say what they liked about the way the three children performed.

Ask pairs of children to make up the conversation the boys had when they discovered that they couldn’t move the bed. Begin with the idea that they should move Daisy off the bed first, and end with making the hole in the roof.

Ask different pairs to act out this part of the story, using the conversation they have made up. They should listen to each other and say what they liked about the performance of each pair.

Draw attention to the best parts of each performance, e.g. the best dialogue, the best action.

Further reading activities

Ask the children, with adult support, to use the library’s coding system to find the animals section.

Ask them to use reference books to find out whether elephants would make good pets.

Suggest that the children choose another book by Nick Warburton to read, to see if it is a funny story too.

Suggestions for using ICT

Look up more information about elephants on the Internet. Ensure that the children only have access to child-friendly sites.

Writing activities

Discuss Bob and Benny’s characters, using all the information you gathered in the Returning and responding to the text session.

Make a list of their characteristics, e.g. careless, logical, hard-working, kind, untidy.

Work with the children to make up sentences about Bob or Benny that include when that aspect of their character was shown to be true, e.g. ‘Benny didn’t listen to Mrs Catkin’; ‘Benny and Bob were both kind when they let the elephant have their own bed’; ‘It was logical for them to move the bed into the garden because they thought the elephant needed the sun.’

Ask the children to write more sentences using adjectives from the list you compiled together.

Encourage them to look for evidence of other aspects of Benny and Bob’s characters and write sentences about them.

Ask each child to read one of their sentences aloud to the group. Praise children for providing the evidence about the characters.