

Winifred Weasel

Poetry

Content domain focus:

2a give/explain the meaning of words in context

2b retrieve and record information/identify key details from fiction and non-fiction

2d make inferences from the text/explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text

Text summary

'Winifred Weasel' is a poem by Brian Patten. Weasels are small mammals. Although they look quite cute, they are pretty bloodthirsty, greedy carnivores and need to eat about half their body weight every day. Weasels eat rodents, such as voles and mice, but they also supplement their diet with birds and eggs. Weasels perform a weird 'war dance', which is mentioned in the poem, when they have cornered their prey – twisting, hopping and somersaulting. Scientists aren't sure quite why they do this but think that the dance might hypnotise or transfix the weasel's prey. However, weasels have also been seen doing their dance when they aren't hunting, so perhaps there are other reasons why they dance.

Unit summary

The unit starts with three information-retrieval questions to tune the children into the poem. The children are then asked to make inferences from the text by linking information given in the poem and making connections with their own world knowledge. Finally, the questions focus on understanding the meaning of words and phrases in the text and how they add to overall understanding of the poem.



Teaching prompts

- Activate the children's prior knowledge of poetry by asking them to tell you about some poems they have read and enjoyed. Explore why they liked them and what they particularly remember about them.
- Ask what they know about the features of poems and poetry in general. Emphasise the rhythmical aspects of poetry and check that the children understand that poems don't have to rhyme.
- Establish that poems often describe things in different ways, e.g. by comparing one thing to another or giving the reader clues about it.
- Explain to the children that the text they are going to read is a poem. Suggest that they read the whole poem and think about what it is about and what they learn from it before starting to answer the questions.

Revisiting the text

Ask the children to:

- create a KWL grid on weasels, recording what they already know and what they would like to know in the K and W columns respectively
- carry out research on weasels on the internet. (There are videos available of weasels performing their war dance.) They can then add what they have found out about weasels in the L column of the grid

- draw labelled diagrams of a weasel
- create fact files about weasels and other members of their family, e.g. stoats and ferrets
- role-play the events described in the poem
- prepare and deliver a presentation reading of the poem.

Answers

Links to content domain requirements are in brackets after the answer.

1. long and thin [2b]
2. at night [2b]
3. She squeezes through a narrow gap. [2b]
4. She's at ease/happy; she's amazed with the food that she finds in there; she's wary – keeping one eye on the door. [2d]
5. carrots and cheese [2b]
6. The sound of a human outside the barn. [2d]
7. in great alarm [2a]
8. The barn had become a trap. [2a]
9. Because she has got fat. [2d]
10. Because she was greedy, and has got fatter, it means that she is stuck in the barn and she might get caught. [2a]

Assessment

The children can identify the meaning of words in context if they can match words and phrases with similar meanings.

The children are secure in their ability to retrieve information if they can identify key words in the questions that help them to look for specific words and phrases in the poem.

The children can make inferences if they are able to make links between information given in the poem and their own experience and knowledge. Are they able to think about how they would feel if they were the weasel?

Next steps

Using poems that include imagery, explore the language in the poems in order to build vocabulary knowledge and understanding. Encourage the children to concentrate on understanding the meaning of phrases, rather than individual words, in order to build a picture of what is being described in the poem.

Explore poems with a view to identifying and understanding literal descriptions and language as well as figurative descriptions. Focus the children on the use of figurative language and help them to unpick its meaning.