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A Tale of Two Beasts

By Fiona Robertson

Introductory Activity

Because young children are still learning to think abstractly, this introductory activity using an animal puppet and a scarf serves to introduce them to the concept of two points of view.

1. Using the puppet, say: *Here's a story of how I met a little pig (or whatever animal the puppet is).*
I was walking along one day, when I came across a cute little pig. Then using facial exaggerations say: Oh, cute little pig, you are so adorable! I would love to take you home so we could play. I'm going to rescue you, wrap my scarf around you, and take you with me! Come along.
Then, smiling, wrap the puppet in the scarf and pretend to take him with you. Cheerfully say to the children: *Wasn't that nice of me to carry him safely home? I know he will love being my new friend!*
2. Quickly unwrap the pig for the next retelling. Say: *Let's tell the same story again, but in a different way.* Have the pig say: *I was walking along one day when I saw this giant person with big eyes and a really big mouth.* Make the puppet look right at your face as you smile broadly back. Have the pig say: *Why are you growling? And what is that thing you have? OH NO! Are you going to tie me up? Wrap the puppet again in the scarf, pretending to take him with you. As he goes out of sight, have him say: I can't believe you're going to carry me off to your secret lair!*
3. Say: *We just saw the same story, but it wasn't exactly the same, was it? What happened?* Lead the children in a discussion about the two sides to the same story. Explain that you and the puppet had **different points of view**, or different perspectives.

Read the Book

Pause briefly after the introductory activity and the discussion. Then, beginning with the title and the author, read the two parts of the book, pausing in between to be sure the children understand the story.

Vocabulary

For use during discussions or activities, based on the age and developmental stage of the children.

From the book:

Whining	Disgustingly clean
Rescue	Ridiculous
Ambush	Secret lair
Strange	Cunning Plan
Terrible	Retrieve
Beast	

For discussion:

Point of view
Perspective
Empathy
Boundaries



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Discussion Suggestions

For use after the first and subsequent readings. Adjust discussion time at each sitting based on the age and developmental stage of the children.

- What happened that was the same in both parts of the story?
- Why did the two stories seem so different?
- Was one story right and one wrong? Or were they both right because each character saw it differently?
- Talk about emotions and feelings. How did the girl feel during the first part? How did the beast feel? How did they each feel in the second part? Helping children label these emotions can contribute to their own emotional development.
- Find the last pages in each part of the story and show both of them to the children. Read the first: *...and I began to think that maybe, just maybe, he wasn't that strange after all* and then the second: *...and I began to think that maybe, just maybe, she wasn't that terrible after all*. Talk about the similarities.
- (For older children) Discuss why the author might have used the following quotes (appearing as signs in the woods) as her dedications.
 - *There are two sides to every story, and then there is the truth.* – Mark Twain
 - *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.* – Charles Dickens

Visual Discrimination

This activity enhances development of visual discrimination, an important skill in learning to read and improving reading skills.

Using two copies of the book, present the children with similar illustrations from the two stories, side by side, asking them to search for differences. Sometimes, they're as subtle as a look on the furry beast's face.

Music

- In the book, the girl heard the beast whining sadly, but he said he was singing happily. How can the same music sound so different? Play clips of different musical styles and ask the children what they think. Which style do they like best? Everyone's preferences and opinions are acceptable.
- Point out the musical notes on the last page of each part of the story. Working with the group and using the tune of a familiar song, let the children suggest lyrics that would be appropriate if this were the end of a movie. Older children may work alone or in small groups to write the lyrics.

Art

Use the contrasts in the book to inspire art creations. *Some children will want to do a representational drawing, while others may want to do something more abstract.*

- Rescue – ambush
- Wrapped warmly in my scarf – tied me up
- Carried safely home – carried off to secret lair
- Lovely bath – disgustingly clean
- Gorgeous hat & sweater – ridiculous hat & sweater
- Delicious bowl of fresh nuts – squirrel food
- Beautiful house – tiny box, nothing to do, nowhere to hang from
- Long walkies to keep fit and healthy – walk backwards & forwards & backwards again for no reason what-so-ever



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- Friends who loved him – wilder beasts just as terrible as she was
 - Something terrible – free once more
 - I missed him – deep dark woods a bit too peaceful
 - He seemed quite pleased to see me. – She seemed quite pleased to see me.
 - And I began to think that maybe, just maybe he/she wasn't that strange/terrible after all.

Suggestions for Creative Writing

Children may write their own or dictate to you.

1. What would you do if you spied a strange little beast in the deep dark woods?
2. Write your own story about a Strange Beast and a Terrible Beast.
3. Rewrite *A Tale of Two Beasts* from the point of view of Lord Rex, the toy lion.
4. Continue the story after the last page. What happens next?

Reminder ... read the book again – and again.

Repetition reinforces connections so that they become part of the brain's permanent circuitry. Each rereading not only facilitates a child's brain development, but offers opportunities to find new things in the illustrations and gain deeper insights from the story.