

Literature-based Social Studies Lesson

Title: The Sneetches

Author: Dr. Seuss

Summary:

There are two kinds of Sneetches—Star-Belly Sneetches and Plain-Belly Sneetches. The Star-Belly Sneetches think they are better than the Plain-Bellies because they have stars on their tummies and, therefore, do not include the Plain-Bellies in any of their activities. The Plain-Bellies sit around and mope until one day an odd fellow in an unusual looking vehicle approaches them and tells them that he can make them happy. Sylvester McMonkey McBean sets up a “very peculiar machine” and charges the Plain-Bellies three dollars to travel through it. The Plain-Bellies eagerly line up and as they pop out of the clunky device, they have stars on their bellies and smiles on their faces. When the original Star-Bellies see this, they are upset because they still think that they are the best Sneetches. McMonkey McBean is keen to this and now offers this sad group of Sneetches a trip through another type of machine—the Star-Off machine. This time the price is ten dollars. The originals line up; when they exit the machine, their tummies are bare and smiles have returned. They now brag to the Sneetches with stars, “The best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without!” As the day progresses, the Sneetches continue travelling through the machines—stars on, stars off, smiles appearing, smiles fading away. As the confusion of who is who peaks and the Sneetches have spent every last dollar, McBean drives away in his vehicle oozing with bills, with a satisfied grin. As the Sneetches watch McBean depart with all of their cash, all Sneetches are sad and their shoulders are drooped. At this point, the Sneetches wise up and realize that stars are not so important after all. All Sneetches now become friends; all are wearing smiles as they agree, “no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.”

Suggested Grade Level:

___ K X 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5

Content Connection

___ Geography ___ History X Economics X Civics

(Note: For this lesson, I am choosing to focus on the “civics” theme for first graders. This story would also be a good resource for a second grade “economics” lesson when the local business community is studied.)

Common Core Connection for the suggested grade level

X Literature ___ Informational Number of Standard 4

What BIG IDEA about social studies does this book help teach:

Even though we may look different on the outside, we all are similar on the inside—we all have feelings, want to have a sense of belonging, and want to be treated fairly.

What are two questions you would ask students after reading them the book?

When Sylveter McMonkey McBean drove off, he said . . . “They will never learn. No. You can’t teach a Sneetch!” Do you agree? Why? Did the Sneetches learn anything that day? How do you know? How did the Sneetches change?

Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt like a Plain-Belly Sneetch--when you weren’t being treated fairly and you felt like you didn’t belong? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?

Suggested Activity to go along with the book

The suggested activity is a role playing activity focusing on fairness and feelings and will go something like this . . .

Pass out stickers to half of the class (could be stars or any sticker). Advise the students who have stickers to place them on their foreheads. Invite the students with stickers to come and play a fun game in a designated area in the room (sit in a circle and roll the ball to each other; Duck, Duck, Goose; any game that the children enjoy will do). The others are not allowed to participate and must sit at their desks and watch. After a few minutes, the teacher tells the sticker-students . . . “Students with stickers, I have a special treat for you because your stickers are so awesome!” The teacher hands each of these students a small snack (ex., one animal cracker). She then tells the sticker-students that when the class lines up next (to go to the bathroom, lunch, a special, etc.), they will get to line up first!

Have the sticker-students return to their seats. Place a large “smiley face” on one side of the room and a large “sad face” on the other side of the room. Ask all students to stand on the side of the room that shows how they are feeling. *(It is expected that the sticker-students will be on the happy side and the non-sticker-students will be on the sad side . . . but, this may not be the case. Maybe some of the sticker-students will feel sad too?)* Engage the class in a discussion. Why are some of you happy? Why are some of you sad? What kind of Sneetch do you feel like? Was everyone treated fairly?

Now, have the sticker-students take off their stickers and give them to a classmate without a sticker. This group of sticker-students is now invited to play a fun game while the others sit and watch. After the game, the sticker-students are given a larger treat (ex., three animal cookies) and are told that they will get to line up first in line for the rest of the week!

Again, have students stand on the side of the room that conveys their feelings (happy or sad) and begin another class discussion. Why are some of you happy? Why are some of you sad? Do you think that everyone was treated fairly? Why or why not? What could we have done so that everyone was treated fairly? Do you think everyone would have been happy then? Do you think it’s important to treat everyone fairly? Why?

After completing the discussion, children with stickers throw them away and two more animal crackers are given to those students who only received one. Students are told that we will not be following the line-up rules that were given earlier because they are not fair.