

# Your Natural Learner



**Second Grade**

A Child-Led, Nature-Inspired Curriculum  
by Leah McDermott, M.Ed. © 2018



# INTRODUCTION

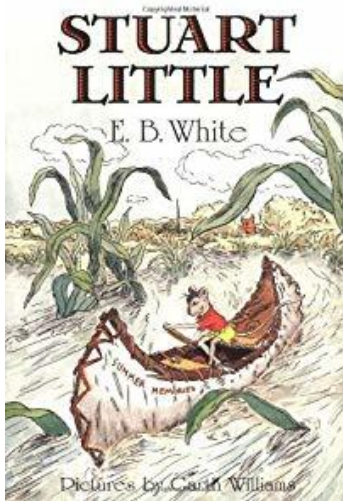
## Your Natural Learner Second Grade - Classic Fiction Theme

In this theme, your child will explore the classic tale of Stuart Little.

### Book Choice

*Stuart Little*

by E. B. White



### Subject Area Guide

Look for these symbols on each activity page to let you know which subject areas your child will be learning about while doing the activity!



= Literacy



= Social  
Connections



= Math



= Art and  
Expression



= Science



= Nature

### Overall Focus

Family and Perspective

### Intention

The classic tale of tiny Stuart Little is a beautiful story of fitting in, adjusting expectations, and learning to see life from another's perspective. Reading this story together is a fantastic family adventure, and the lessons and activities that can be pulled out of Stuart's journey throughout this theme will only make the story more exciting and adventurous for your children to enjoy. Throughout this book and theme, your child will be confronted with a variety of opportunities to take a silly, fictional situation and shift their perspective about things, a life skill that is amazing to have.

### Note to Parents

It is likely that your family has read *Stuart Little* as a read aloud before, but that shouldn't prevent you from rereading together as you explore this theme. There are always new and fun things that come out of reading a book all over again!

### Focus Words

perspective, instinct, ordinary, determination

### Opening Question

Ask your child this question before you begin reading or exploring through this theme:

"What do you think would have to change in our home if we adopted a mouse as a sibling?"

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*If you are viewing this digitally, you can click the activity or section and it will take you directly there!*



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# CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

## Engineering Challenge



**Key Learning:** In this activity, unlike the one where your child created mouse-sized objects with a large variety of tools and materials, your child will be presented with very specific materials and given more specific things that they need to try to construct. This gives your child the opportunity to challenge themselves to create within parameters, use problem solving skills, test and retry their builds, and explore different options to come to the same conclusion.

**Need:** popsicle sticks, clothespins, metal binder clips (try offering various sizes of each of the three materials if you can for more challenge and options)

**Directions:** *Note: This challenge works best on a flat surface, so use a table or hard floor as your working surface.*

Give your child the three building materials and tell them you will challenge them to build different structures using only those materials. You can do all of these in a row if your child is interested and engaged or spread out the challenges over several days.

**Challenge #1:** Build a bridge that can support a book. If you easily complete this challenge, try stacking multiple books on it - how many can your bridge hold? Can you make changes to the bridge to make it even stronger?

**Challenge #2:** Build a tower that is at least one foot tall. If you complete this challenge, how much taller can you make the tower? Can you build one as tall as you? Even taller?

**Challenge #3:** Make the following shapes: triangle, square, rectangle, star, rhombus, trapezoid, pentagon, hexagon, octagon, six-sided star. Start with making only 2D (flat) shapes, and then challenge yourself to make some of them 3D - can you do that with any of the shapes?

**Challenge #4:** Make a structure that uses only triangles. What would this look like as it gets taller? How do you need to be creative with the popsicle sticks and their angles to create with only triangles?

**Challenge #5:** Create a repeating pattern in a build. How can you make your pattern show? Which material will you use to repeat your pattern - or will you use multiple materials for your pattern?

**Extension idea:** Free play with the building materials - what else can you build?

### Suggested Reading:

*Anything is Possible* by  
Giulia Belloni

*The Most Magnificent  
Thing* by Ashley Spires

# CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

## Build a Birdhouse



**Key Learning:** Margalo is Stuart's best friend, and while she lives happily in their indoor planter for a time, we have to wonder if she would have been safer and lived there longer had she had her own little birdhouse to call her home. In this activity, your child will build a birdhouse for neighborhood birds to make their home. Your child will also have the opportunity to use real tools for construction, which is an exciting thing to introduce if they've never done this before, and might open the door to more amazing projects to come. Note, these are specific plans for building a wooden birdhouse. If you do not have access to tools that are needed for this project or do not feel like doing that, there are plenty of other DIY options for building a birdhouse from other materials - an upcycled soda bottle makes a quick and easy birdhouse, for example.

**Need:** wood (1"x6"x6' board), 1.5" long trim screws, wood glue, drill, saw (a hand saw will work, but will be laborious - if you have a power saw that will be easiest), drill bit large enough to make hole for birds to enter (about 1.5"), sandpaper, paint (optional)

**Directions:** *Note: Do this activity after Margalo has been introduced in the story.*

Begin by drawing out the design on your board. You should be able to fit every piece needed on one 6' long board with room for error. You'll need the following pieces:

- 1 rectangle 16" long x width of board (Back of house)
- 1 rectangle 9" long x width of board (Front of house)
- 2 rectangles 10" long x width of board (Sides of house - you can slant these pieces by cutting one side to 9" long if you like)
- 1 rectangle 7.5" long x width of board (Roof of house)
- 1 rectangle 4" long x width of board (Floor of house)

When your designs are drawn on, cut them out. As stated earlier, it is easiest to do this with a power saw (jigsaw or circular saw). This is likely a job just for the grownup, but if you're using a hand saw, your child might be able to pitch in (remember to have a safety discussion if this is the first time you've used real tools with your child).

Next, drill a hole for the birds' entrance in the front of the house piece. Drill it directly in the center, about 1/3 of the way down from the top.

Sand the cut edges of your birdhouse to make it nice and smooth.

Begin assembling your birdhouse by gluing the pieces with wood glue and then adding screws (you may want to drill some pilot holes for the screws first to avoid the wood splitting when you add the screws). Start by adding the floor and sides to the back piece - you'll want some space on the top and bottom of the back board for hanging your birdhouse. Then the front, and the roof last.

Finish by painting your birdhouse in any delightful, happy color or pattern your child wishes. You could also add a varnish or stain if you prefer the wood grain look.

Hang your birdhouse with long screws through the top and bottom exposed wood, either directly onto a tree or a fencepost.

**Extension idea:** Do some research about birds that live near you that might use your birdhouse so you can keep an eye on your new neighbors!

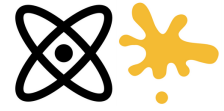
### Suggested Reading:

*The Antlered Ship* by  
Dashka Slater

*The Most Magnificent  
Thing* by Ashley Spires

# CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

## Straw Boat Challenge



**Key Learning:** Like the other engineering challenges in this section of the theme, your child will need to use given materials to complete a specific challenge. This time, they need to build a boat that is strong enough to hold the most weight.

**Need:** plastic drinking straws, scotch or packaging tape, glue, scissors, pennies, large container/pool/tub, water

**Directions:** *Note: This activity is best done as a competition style challenge, where your child and someone else competes to see who can build the strongest boat. This can be with you, a sibling, or a friend. It also makes a great neighborhood or party/gathering activity when lots of people can participate!*

Explain to your child(ren) that you are challenging them to build the strongest boat out of the drinking straws. You'll determine the strength of the boat by adding pennies one at a time to the top of the boat. They can design the boat however they'd like (show them that they have access to glue, tape, and scissors).

Brainstorm some ideas together about design concepts - a longer/wider boat might be able to hold a lot of pennies spread out, while a smaller boat with multiple layers might be able to hold a lot of pennies stacked up high. Think about stability - how can you ensure that your boat will not tip over? Maybe your boat needs edges vs a raft-style. Maybe a sail shape or mast would help stabilize it. Work out some thoughts and concepts aloud with everyone participating, and then let your child have at the design/creation!

You may want to provide the water area in advance for your child to test if their boat floats on its own, but wait to add pennies until everyone has completed their boat.

When everyone is finished, first place the boats in the water, then at the same time add pennies one at a time. Continue adding and counting pennies together until boats begin to sink or tip. Whichever boat is left floating with all of its pennies last has won the "Strongest Boat Challenge!"

**Extension idea:** If your child enjoyed this challenge, come up with other materials that could be used to recreate the challenge, such as popsicle sticks, toilet paper tubes, pool noodles, or an assortment of random materials. You could also change up what you add to test the weight of the boats - use a heavier coin like nickels or try to make favorite toys/action figures float on a boat. If you have an outdoor exploration table, this would be a great thing to keep setup for awhile as your child continues to test and explore their boat building skills.

### Suggested Reading:

*Ocean Meets Sky* by  
Terry Fan

*What Floats in a Moat*  
by Lynne Berry

# CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

## Perspective Drawing



**Key Learning:** Readers are forced to think about the world from a totally different perspective when reading *Stuart Little*. What does the big city look like from way down on the ground? How much bigger do trees and flowers seem? What actually IS small to a mouse? How far away does the horizon seem? In this drawing activity, your child will practice one-point perspective, usually introduced around this age. Your child should be able to understand that things that are closer to them appear larger than things that are far away, helping them shift the way that they draw going forward.

**Need:** drawing paper, pencils, ruler, crayons/colored pencils/markers

**Directions:** *Note: If your child is a visual learner, it might be helpful for you to demonstrate one-point perspective drawing to them, drawing your own image, step-by-step as they follow along. This is a fairly simple art technique, but if you feel a lack of confidence in teaching this skill, there are numerous YouTube videos aimed at perspective drawing for kids that you could look up and follow together!*

Explain what perspective is. Step outside and ask your child to look at the horizon (where the sky meets the ground). Notice the horizon line and the objects that you can see. Do they look small or large from where you stand? What about the objects that are close to you like your house or a tree - are they larger or smaller than the objects on the horizon. Discuss with your child that when we are drawing landscapes like this, we have to be aware of the perspective of how things look from where you're standing (or where the person looking at the art is supposedly standing in your drawing/painting).

Now it's time to draw a one-point perspective drawing. *Follow these simple steps:*

First, Decide what type of landscape you'd like to draw. For many beginners, doing something like a road, with trees and mountains alongside tends to be the easiest way to practice perspective drawing. But, anything goes... you can draw city streets with buildings lining them, an ocean with animals close/far away, or even draw what Stuart might have seen as he went driving on his journey looking for Margalo.

**Step 1** - Fold your piece of paper in thirds longways (hot dog style), open it and then fold it in half like a sandwich, then open and press flat. Find the point where the top 1/3 line meets the 1/2 line... that is your "vanishing point." Make a visible dot with a pencil at that spot.

**Step 2** - Using your ruler, draw a straight line for the horizon, extending to both sides of the page from the vanishing point. This is your horizon line. The objects that you draw closest to that line will be smaller than the objects that you draw further away from it, towards the bottom of the page.

**Step 3** - Now you need to draw your lines of perspective to help visualize the way the eye is looking. Place your ruler diagonally across the paper, with an edge touching the vanishing point. Draw a line from the vanishing point to the bottom of the page (think of it like drawing a road that starts at the bottom and connects at the vanishing point dot). Repeat this on the other side, making a triangle on the page. Note: You can darken these lines if you want to use them as a road in the drawing, or simply use them to help you determine how large/small to draw your objects and then erase them at the end.

**Step 4** - Begin drawing in your objects, keeping that perspective and size in mind. If you want to add anything into the horizon, like a sun or mountains or clouds, do that as well. After drawing, add color.

Ta-da! Check out how your perspective drawing appears to pop off the page in a 3-D way!

**Extension idea:** For the ambitious artist, consider drawing a one-point perspective drawing from the perspective of standing "mouse size" on city streets and looking up. Make the vanishing point the center of the sky, and draw the buildings around the page like you did using the ruler to create the perspective lines (large on the edge of the page and smaller towards the center of the page).

### Suggested Reading:

*The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires

*Ocean Meets Sky* by Terry Fan

# LITERACY EXPLORATION



## What is the Literacy Focus in the "Classic Fiction" Theme?

The literacy activities in this theme are mostly writing-focused, and encourage your child to expand on their thoughts and ideas of different topics in written form. Your child will practice writing a plan for something as they explore expository writing, they will envision themselves as "Chairman of the World" like Stuart Little did and imagine through writing what they would do if given the power of that position, and finally they will explore the resolution of the story of *Stuart Little* and decide if they would have made different decisions than that of the author. Each of these different writing activities gives your child the opportunity to not only practice their writing skills, but also give them a chance to express multiple ideas through their writing in meaningful ways.

## How Do I Use These Activities?

For the child who is not quite proficient or confident in their writing skills yet, remember to be as risk-free as possible. These prompts and activities do not need to be well-formed paragraphs or lengthy answers. Making lists is a fantastic way for an early writer to practice their skills with confidence, and each of the three activities here are designed to allow your child to fall well within their ability level - whether that be simply listing things off or writing complete sentences or paragraphs. Honor your child's abilities where they are in the moment and don't stress about where you think they could/should be purely based on other children or the "norm."

## How Do I Know My Child Is Learning?

You will have a very clear understanding of your child's writing abilities after these activities. I recommend saving these pieces of writing to use as assessment/documentation and compare them to projects written later in the year to observe growth.



# LITERACY EXPLORATION

## Make a Plan



**Key Learning:** Expository writing is used to explain something to the reader, and "how to" writing is one example of that. It is also one of the easiest ways to encourage writing with young writers, as it is simple to do, doesn't require a lot of extra "frilly" language, and quickly builds confidence in writing abilities. Examples of this kind of writing are things like recipes, to-do lists, step-by-step instructions, manuals, etc. In this activity, your child will make a plan for something (real or imagined) and write out the steps to complete that plan.

**Need:** paper or notebook, pencil

**Directions:** Stuart was quite a planner and often decided his steps for his many adventures in advance. Explain to your child that you want them to make a plan for something, and write out the steps for it.

First, decide what that plan will be....

It could be a plan to go on a road trip, like Stuart did. What would you need to bring along? How would you prepare for your trip? Where would your trip take you and what is important to remember along the way?

Or maybe you could imagine a plan to adapt your house for your new little mouse brother to move in! Where would he sleep and keep his things? How could you make sure he was comfortable? What things in your house might be dangerous to a little mouse that you need to fix or change before he arrives? What could you adapt to make easier for a mouse to use?

What other fun or silly things might you be able to imagine up a plan to make happen?

Choose a topic and then make a quick brainstorm list of all the thoughts that come to mind. Tell your child that this is a "brain dump" and helps them get all of the ideas out of their head and onto paper before they organize it into a final list. This prevents having to go back and add things or move stuff around while you're writing.

After brainstorming, write out your list. Keep in mind your child's writing ability level - for the early writer, simple words and phrases will suffice, while for the stronger writer, you can expect more lengthy sentences and descriptive words.

**Extension idea:** Do you have a friend or family member that would enjoy reading your plan? Send it to them!

### Suggested Reading:

*Anything is Possible* by  
Giulia Belloni

*The Most Magnificent  
Thing* by Ashley Spires