ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The possibilities are numerous for using both the book and musical of *James and the Giant Peach* as a jumping off point for cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary study in your classroom.

From units on similes and metaphors to lessons on idioms or lessons on monologue writing from a character's point of view or writing from prompts inspired by the story, this classic novel offers a platform for reaching any number of educational goals.

Below are a few suggestions for curriculum incorporating both the book and musical *James and the Giant Peach* into your classroom studies.

Please also refer to the **ADDITIONAL RESOURCE** section at the end of this guide for links and resources to more curriculum ideas and lesson plans.
THE STORY

SYNOPSIS

James Henry Trotter lives with his two horrid aunts, Spiker and Sponge. He hasn’t got a single friend in the whole wide world. That is not, until he meets the Old Green Grasshopper and the rest of the insects aboard a giant, magical peach!

Roald Dahl’s classic tale is told through a lively musical score and all the characters from the original story are present—James and his insect friends – Miss Spider, Old-Green-Grasshopper, Centipede, Ladybird and Earthworm.

When James is sent by his conniving aunts to chop down their old fruit tree, he discovers a magic potion that results in a tremendous peach and launches a voyage of gigantic proportions. During their cross-ocean travels, James and the peach’s oversized insect residents encounter hunger, sharks and loads of disagreements, and James must learn to use his quick wit to finally land on New York’s Empire State Building.

THE BOOK & MUSICAL HISTORY

Roald Dahl’s novel, James and the Giant Peach was first published in 1961 to glowing reviews and is the beloved author’s first classic novel for children. It marks the beginning of his prolific career as a children's author. It is still a favorite almost 70 years later.

In 1996, an animated film version was released and featured the voices of Simon Callow, Richard Dreyfuss, Joanna Lumley, Miriam Margolyes, Pete Postlethwaite and Susan Sarandon. Two stage adaptations have been written over the last twenty years and this newest musical with music and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and a book by Timothy Allen McDonald premiered in 2010.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the story, the Earthworm “sticks his neck out” to save his friends. He goes “above and beyond” to help his friends. In the same way, James jumps to save the Centipede when he falls off the peach. What does it mean to “stick your neck out” for someone? Was there ever a time when you “stuck your neck out” for a friend? What happened? How did it turn out? Has anyone ever “stuck their neck out” for you? What happened? How did it turn out? How does “sticking your neck out” for someone show you are a friend? Is it important to show your friends what they mean to you? Why?

2. When James saves the Centipede from falling off the peach, the Centipede, who had been quite arrogant throughout the story, is humbled by James’ action and thanks him for his sacrifice. The Centipede then undergoes an “attitude change.” The Earthworm, who is rather pessimistic throughout the play, also has an “attitude change” after saving his friends from the birds. What does it mean to have an “attitude change?” Can you have good and bad attitude changes? Have you ever had an “attitude change?” Was it good or bad? What happened? How did you change? Do you know why you changed? How much control do we have over our attitudes?
THEATRE ARTS ACTIVITIES
Pre & Post Play Discussion *(All Grades)*

BEFORE THE PLAY: Read James and the Giant Peach. With student input, establish the expectations for the upcoming play. What actions or events might be seen on stage? What characters might the play include from the book? Students may draw or write about what they anticipate seeing.

Also, think about some of the logistics of transferring the story of the book to the stage. Such as, in the book, some of the characters are insects and of course, there is a giant peach, which are easy enough to draw, but on the stage humans will play these insect characters and, of course, the giant peach travels across the ocean to New York City. How do the students envision humans playing these characters? What are some of the things that you might see the actors do to portray these characters? What else might the director and designers do to help support the fantastical elements of the story? How may this be presented on stage?

Some thematic elements to discuss may include, how James grows in self-confidence through his friendship with the insects or the significance of James escaping from his life with his aunts to the adventure he encounters on his journey across the ocean.

AFTER THE PLAY: Revisit the expectations to see how many were realized. Discuss the similarities and differences from the book to the play, in terms of plot, characters, and action. Were the characters as portrayed on the stage faithful to the characters in the book? How or why? How would you describe the main “message” of the play? How was it similar or different from the book? Were the ideas and expectations you had going into the play different than what you saw? Did you see some of your expectations happen on stage?

Sequel Writing *(Grades 2-6)*

Once the show concludes, the story is not necessarily over! What happens to the characters after the play ends? Students can act out their own version of James and the Giant Peach or create their own sequel. Individually, or in small groups, or as an entire class, write and/or perform the next part of the ongoing story. What might a typical day be like for James in New York City or for one of his insect pals?
MONOLOGUES – WRITING FROM A CHARACTER’S POINT OF VIEW
(Grades 2-5)

In this exercise, students create character profiles and then use that information to write their own monologue to the audience telling their point of view of the story.

CREATE A CHARACTER PROFILE:
Have students choose James or one of the insects from the story, *James and the Giant Peach*.

Instruct them that they will be collecting information about that character and then writing from that character’s point of view.

Answer the following questions about the chosen character:
- What do they look like?
- What is their personality like?
- How do they treat others?
- Use three words to describe your character
- What are the important events in your character’s life? (List three at least)
- What are some of your character’s greatest accomplishments?
- Where does your character live?
- What are some of your character’s habits?
- What are some of your character’s talents or skills?
- What are the most important relationships for your character?
- What are some of your character’s greatest challenges?

WRITE A MONOLOGUE:
Write a monologue telling the audience about one of the events in the story:

- Write about how James felt when he first discovered the creatures inside the peach.
- Carry out some role play activities involving the main characters in the story. How did they feel about different events in the story? (Choose a specific event to tell the audience about from your character’s point of view.)
- Write about how your insect character felt when he/she first saw James inside the peach?

PERFORM THE MONOLOGUE TO AN AUDIENCE:
Have each student read and/or perform the monologue to the rest of the students as an audience. They should speak like the character. They should also try to look like the character using their body and imagination.
LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES

READING COMPREHENSION GUIDES
(Grades 1-5)

*NOTE: Only free on-line resources are listed.*

James and the Giant Peach is a classic book written by one of the most famous and prolific children's authors of the 20th Century. This fact makes online resources plentiful. There are numerous on-line comprehension guides available. Below is a list of some of the most comprehensive reading guide resources:

  - (Comprehensive reading guide with end of book activities, chapter questions and vocabulary words. (Grades 3-6)

  - (A 14-page comprehension guide including making predictions, word study, comprehension questions, description, visualizing, summarizing, handouts for vocabulary, characterization, and making connections.)

- [http://www.nancypolette.com/handouts/guide_jame speach.htm](http://www.nancypolette.com/handouts/guide_jamespeach.htm)
  - (Includes author information, vocabulary, comprehension guide, study questions and chapter projects and activities.)

- [http://cf.edliostatic.com/x1mDedjsKXDmwHA8W5qqlSoQDA9AjLOM.pdf](http://cf.edliostatic.com/x1mDedjsKXDmwHA8W5qqlSoQDA9AjLOM.pdf)
  - (Comprehension guide, including study questions, activities, vocabulary, chapter focus lessons, and "text to self" discussion prompts.)
AUNT SPONGE AND AUNT SPIKE
A LESSON IN SIMILE/METAPHOR
(Grades 2-5)

OVERVIEW
To explore metaphors and similes in the descriptions of Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker. Students will create a description of a new character using metaphors and similes.

FULL LESSON PLAN:

COMPARE AND CONTRAST – SPONGE VS. SPIKE
(Grades 2-5)

OVERVIEW & PLAN
Read chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6, then have students record characteristics about Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker. Then have students complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spike. Once students complete their Venn diagram, have them write a paragraph and draw a picture of either Aunt Sponge or Aunt Spike using the characteristics they listed.

Links to printable Venn diagrams:
- http://www.studenthandouts.com/Assortment-01/Graphic-Organizers/Blank-Venn-Diagrams-Instructions.html
IDIOM PICTURE BOOKS
(Grades 1-4)

Roald Dahl’s books are full of idioms. It is one of the rich ways the author uses language in his novels. This fact makes a lesson on idioms a fun and easy way to introduce the language concept to your students. Below is a lesson using some of the idioms found in the book, James and the Giant Peach.

An idiom is a word or phrase which means something different from its literal meaning. Idioms are common phrases without real meaning but can be understood by their popular use. Idioms are made of normal words that have a special meaning known by almost everyone.

LIST OF IDIOMS
"All in the same boat"
"Pulling my leg"
"Flood of Tears"
"Work Like Mad"
"White as a Sheet"

1) Introduce the idioms to your class. Discuss the meaning of idioms with your class. Place the typed idioms where all your students can see them. Read them aloud. Discuss the difference between literal meaning and figurative meaning.

2) Draw out the idiom’s literal meaning. Have each student draw a picture of the idiom’s literal meaning. There should be a separate drawing for each idiom. Five pages in all.

3) Share the drawings. Have students share their drawings with the class.

4) Decipher the idioms’ figurative meanings. Read the idiom in context as it was used in the story. Have students use the context clues to try to determine the idioms’ meanings. Have students create a definition for the idiom. Provide several examples of how the idiom is used in everyday life.

5) Draw out the idiom’s figurative meaning. Have students draw a picture of the figurative meaning of each idiom. Have them add a sentence to the drawing to explain the idioms’ meanings.

6) Share the drawings. Have students share their figurative drawings with the class.


8) Add to it. Students can continue to collect idioms to add to their idiom book, drawing both the literal meaning and figurative meaning.
Creative Writing Exercises

BIGGER IS BETTER? (Grades 3-5)

LESSON OVERVIEW

In *James and the Giant Peach* there is a scene where a giant piece of fruit causes much damage. In this exercise, students imitate this idea with their own original stories.

Students imagine and compose a descriptive paragraph that focuses on a gigantic object moving through a specific setting and leaving destruction in its wake. Students choose an object and a setting in which the catastrophe will take place. Using high-quality details and strong verbs students create a creative, descriptive paragraph.

Students will focus on idea development describing important settings and objects. Students will also focus on using strong verbs and inventing words or sounds.

LINK TO FULL LESSON PLAN:
http://writingfix.com/Chapter_Book_Prompts/JamesPeach1.htm
RESEARCH AND WRITING – DESTINATION UNKNOWN  
(Grades 2-5)

OVERVIEW
As James and the Giant Peach are floating through the air it is uncertain where they will land. Have your students pretend they are a travel agent and are to plan their destination, but can’t tell us where. Using the clues that are given, the class needs to figure it out.

LESSON PLAN
1. Have students choose a city, town, state or country. The world is open!
2. Have the students conduct research on their chosen destination and gather facts about it.
3. Using the research riddle below, have students describe their destination.

RIDDLE FORMAT
Let us go to brand new places 
And see the world's many faces.

We will find (list 6 specific details in phrases):
1. _________________________________
2. _________________________________
3. _________________________________
4. _________________________________
5. _________________________________
6. _________________________________

But that's not all (list 6 more details in phrases):
1. _________________________________
2. _________________________________
3. _________________________________
4. _________________________________
5. _________________________________
6. _________________________________

Do you know where we are?

Answer: ___________________________________________
RIDDLE EXAMPLE

Let us go to brand new places
And see the world's many faces.

We will find:
The muddy Missouri River rolling along the city's edges
Noah's Ark with elephants and tall giraffes
The first state Capitol of Missouri
Bumpy cobblestone streets reflecting the red of Christmas
Well preserved buildings from the 1800s
Decorated horse drawn carriages with holiday passengers

But that's not all:
Roasting chestnuts on warm fires
Elaborately dressed Santas from many lands
Live reindeer watching the crowds
Christmas parades delight children
Carolers in costume with voices raised in song
Concerts in the gazebo
Do you know where we are?

Answer: St. Charles, MO at the holiday season
ADDITIONAL WRITING IDEAS OR PROMPTS (Grades 2-5)

NEWSPAPER REPORTING

- Write a newspaper report about what happened to James' parents.
- Write a newspaper report about the siting of a giant peach floating across the ocean.
- Write newspaper report about the siting of giant insects.
- Write a newspaper report about a mysterious man carrying around a green glowing bag.
- Write a newspaper report about the peach's journey across the countryside.
- Write a newspaper report about a giant peach landing on the Empire State Building.

DIARY WRITING

- Write James' diary entry for one of his days at his aunts' house.
- Write a diary entry for one of the days James is in the giant peach.
- Write a diary entry for one of the days they are living in New York.
- Write a diary entry for one of the days James is with his parents before they go shopping in London.

OTHER DIARIES:

- Write diary entries for any of the insects in the story.
- Write a diary entry from one of the aunts' point of view on the day that the peach rolls away from their garden.
ADDITIONAL WRITING IDEAS OR PROMPTS (Continued)

FOR & AGAINST ARGUMENTS

- Write “for and against” arguments for going inside the peach? What would you do?
- Write “for and against” arguments for staying on the hill or going with the insects on the adventure.
- Write “for and against” arguments for James jumping off the peach to save the Centipede.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

- Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker are selfish, lazy and cruel. Can you think of any other words to describe them?
- Make a list of words that describe what a peach tastes like. Read / sing the centipede's song about food. What might some of the items in his song taste like?

STORY PROMPTS

- Write a new story with the opening paragraph… 'Something is about to happen, he told himself. Something peculiar is about to happen at any moment'.
- Imagine that you discovered a life-size insect. How would you feel? Could you write a new story about what might happen?
MATH EXTENSION IDEAS:

- Measure the height / circumference of a normal peach. What might the height and circumference of the giant peach be?
- How much would it cost for tickets to see the giant peach? How much might it cost for a family of four? How much would it be if they brought a camera?
- Find out how many legs different types of centipedes really have. Can you find pictures of different centipedes and count the legs?

SCIENCE EXTENSION IDEAS:

- Find out how fruit and vegetables grow. Make a poster to teach people how to grow their own fruit and vegetables.
- Find out about the insects in the story. What do they look like? What special features / abilities do they have? What do they eat? Can you make a food chain that includes one / some of them?
- What forces are involved when the peach starts to roll down the hill. Can you plan and carry out an investigation to find different types of surfaces that might make it roll more quickly / slowly?
- Why do things float? Can you investigate different objects (including a peach) to find out if they float or sink?
- How do real insects help us? Use the information in Chapter 25 to help you.

GEOGRAPHY EXTENSION IDEAS:

- Draw a map showing the locations used in the story.
- Can you draw a map showing the peach's journey?
- Look on a map and find some locations that could be used for a new film version of the book. What would be a suitable location for Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spike's house?
- In the story, Cloud-Men make different types of weather. Can you find out how rain / hailstones / rainbows are really made?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [http://www.quentinblake.com](http://www.quentinblake.com) – Official website of Quentin Blake, the illustrator of most of Roald Dahl’s books.
- [http://www.roalddahlfans.com/](http://www.roalddahlfans.com/) - a comprehensive fan website with a well thought out system of links to various Roald Dahl resources.
- [http://www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com) – The scholastic website has 83 activity, resource or idea items on Roald Dahl.

FURTHER READING

- The BFG (Big Friendly Giant)
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
- Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator
- Danny, the Champion of the World
- The Enormous Crocodile
- Esio Trot
- Fantastic Mr. Fox
- George’s Marvelous Machine
- The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me
- The Gremlins
- James and the Giant Peach
- The Magic Finger
- Matilda
- The Minipins
- The Twits
- The Vicar of Nibbleswicke
- The Witches