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Activity Guide

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Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

ABOUT THE STORY

In this Caldecott Medal-winning book, Joseph has an overcoat that he wears so much it develops holes. He makes it into a jacket, and wears that until it is worn out. As the coat grows smaller and smaller, readers will delight in the die-cut illustrations showing Joseph's ingenious solutions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Simms Tabak was born in the Bronx, New York, and received an art degree from Cooper Union in New York City. He has created posters, calendars, and greeting cards as well as picture books such as *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, another Live Oak Readalong. Simms Tabak lives in Willow, New York, with his wife.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they have ever had an article of clothing made from something else – cutoff shorts, for example, or a vest made from a sweater. Explain that in the book they will read, Joseph makes many, many things to wear from his original overcoat.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “What does Joseph first make out of his overcoat?”
- “What does Joseph make next?”
- “What happens to the button?”
- “What does Joseph make last?”
- “Why do you think the author cut holes to show what Joseph made?”
(Draw conclusions)
- “Do you agree that at the end Joseph made ‘something out of nothing’? What is the ‘nothing’ he worked with?” (Analyze)

Vocabulary

Write these words from the book and their definitions on the chalkboard. Have children copy them and draw lines linking each word to its definition.

handkerchief	group of singers
nephew	straps to hold up pants
chorus	son of a brother or sister
suspenders	attach
fasten	square of cloth

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Science: Barnyard Fowl

In the first picture spread of the book, Joseph is standing in a barnyard with several kinds of birds. Have children work in groups to find out about one of the animals – chicken, turkey, or duck. Groups can report on what the bird eats and how it is raised.

Health: Fruits and Vegetables Game

In the third spread of the book, Joseph is pictured among a large selection of vegetables and fruits. Have children work in groups to list the fruits and vegetables. Groups can race each other to see which group can list more fruits and vegetables from the picture in five minutes.

Social Studies: Life in Poland

Joseph lives in Poland. Children can find out about his country and the way people live there. Ask them to find the answers to these questions in encyclopedias or books about Poland. Children can report on what they learn to the rest of the class.

- Where is Poland located? How large is it? What landforms and bodies of water does it have?
- What are Poland's largest cities?
- What special holidays do Polish people celebrate? What special foods do they eat?

Music: Yiddish Songs

This book is based on an old Yiddish folk song. Find a collection of Yiddish folk songs to play for the children. Some possibilities include Yaacov Shapiro singing *The Best of Yiddish Folk Songs* and Jan Peerce Sings *Yiddish Folk Songs*. Explain to children that Yiddish is a language that over 4 million Jewish people all over the world speak. Have children offer their opinions of the songs as they listen.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Recycling

Joseph recycles his overcoat by making it into other useful items, until it is almost too small to see. Have children search the Internet using the keywords *How to recycle* to find out what other materials can be recycled and how. Children can report on what they find out to the rest of the class.