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Activity Guide

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Happy Birthday, Sam

ABOUT THE STORY

Even though Sam is another year older, he is still too short to reach things like the light switch, his clothes, the sink faucets, and the doorknob. When his parents give him a toy sailboat as a present, Sam can't even reach the sink to sail it. Luckily, the postman arrives with the perfect gift from Grandpa – a chair just Sam's size, which proves to be just the thing to help Sam put his troubles behind him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Pat Hutchins was born in England and loved drawing from the time she was very young. At age sixteen she received a scholarship to an art school and did art work for London's commercial field. After getting married she moved to New York where her popular book "Rosie's Walk" was published. Since then she has written and illustrated numerous books and has enjoyed success on both sides of the Atlantic. Hutchins currently lives in London with her husband, Laurence, also an artist, and their two sons, Morgan and Sam.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask the group to think about a time they tried to get something that they weren't able to reach on their own. How did it make them feel? Explain that in this story, even though Sam is another year older on his birthday, he is still unable to reach what he wants. This is the story of how his problem is solved.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- Why couldn't Sam turn on the light by himself? (too short)
- Why couldn't Sam get dressed on his own? (couldn't reach his clothes hanging in the wardrobe)
- What did Sam's parents give him for his birthday? (sailboat toy)
- Who sent Sam a present through the mail? (Grandpa)
- What was the first thing Sam did with his new chair? (used it to switch on the light in his bedroom)
- How was Sam able to open the door for his grandfather when he came to Sam's party? (using his new chair)

Vocabulary

Write these words on the chalkboard and review their meanings. Then ask volunteers to use the words in sentences.

climbed switch wardrobe beautiful postman's arrived

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

For Discussion: Life Skills: Reaching Out for Safety

In the story, Sam uses his chair for climbing on to reach things he normally couldn't get to on his own. Discuss if climbing on things is really a good idea. Point out that Sam's chair is small, and more stable (much like a stepstool), but that full-sized chairs could be dangerous.

Language Arts: Confounding Compounds!

Review the definition of a compound word (a word made up of two or more words). Write the following lists on the board and have volunteers draw a line linking the two words which, when combined, make up a new compound word found in the story.

birth	man
him	room
post	stairs
down	room
bath	day

Then have students take turns creating compound words of their own.

Science: Soapy Sails

Sam receives a boat as a birthday present. Have students experiment with basic principals of science by creating a boat of their own out of bar soap (such as Ivory that floats), straws, and construction paper.

Creative Thinking/Problem Solving: Birthday Bonus

Throw a class birthday party where it's everyone's birthday! Have each student bring in something that they think would be useful in solving a problem (like the chair was for Sam). Pair students up and have them exchange gifts. Tell how each item could be useful.

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.

Pat Hutchins

Have students research this prolific author to find out more about her. What are some other books she has written? Where does she live? Does she have children?

Boats

Have students research boats to find out some of the different kinds there are (speedboats, sailboats, canoes, cruise ships, etc.). Ask each student to select one for further investigation. Write brief reports and share with class.

Chairs

Have students research chairs to find out some of the different kinds there are (kitchen, recliners, Victorian, Adirondack, etc.). Ask each student to select one for further investigation. Write brief reports and share with class.