

Focus Question:

In what ways are gray squirrels like acrobats?

Book Summary

Text Type: Nonfiction/Informational

Squirrel Acrobats introduces students to one of nature's most common, yet interesting, creatures. The text identifies gray squirrels as animals that can move quickly and easily across the ground and from tree to tree. Colorful, detailed photographs complement the information provided by the text. This book can also be used to teach students how to identify the main idea and details as well as the proper use of verbs in sentences.



Lesson Essentials

Instructional Focus

- ☐ Ask and answer questions to understand text
- ☐ Identify main idea and details in a text
- ☐ Describe information provided by photographs
- ☐ Discriminate initial consonant *br-* and *gr-* blends
- ☐ Identify initial consonant *br-* and *gr-* blends
- ☐ Recognize and use verbs
- ☐ Identify and use the high-frequency word *they*

Materials

- ☐ Book: *Squirrel Acrobats* (copy for each student)
- ☐ Main idea and details, initial consonant *br-* and *gr-* blends, verbs worksheets
- ☐ Discussion cards
- ☐ Book quiz
- ☐ Retelling rubric

Vocabulary

Boldface vocabulary words also appear in a pre-made lesson for this title on VocabularyA-Z.com.

- **High-frequency words:** *can*, *run*, *they*
- **Words to Know**
Story critical: *acrobats* (n.), *alert* (adj.), *balance* (n.), *direction* (n.), *escape* (v.), *squirrels* (n.)
- **Academic vocabulary:** *use* (v.)

Guiding the Reading

Before Reading

Build Background

- Place on the board pictures of acrobats on trapezes and high wires. Ask students to share with a partner any experiences they have had with watching acrobats. Have volunteers share some ideas with the class about what acrobats do.
- Discuss with students how squirrels might be like acrobats. Have students draw on a separate piece of paper a picture of a squirrel doing something an acrobat might do. Invite volunteers to share their picture with the rest of the class.

Introduce the Book

- Give students their copy of *Squirrel Acrobats*. Guide them to the front and back covers and read the title. Have students discuss what they see on the covers. Encourage them to offer ideas as to what type of book it is (genre, text type, and so on) and what it might be about.
- Show students the title page. Discuss the information on the page (title of book, author's name).

Introduce the Reading Strategy:

Ask and answer questions

Explain to students that engaged readers ask questions before and during reading, and then look for answers to those questions as they read. Point out that asking and answering questions while they read helps readers better remember and understand information in the book. Have students turn to the cover of the book and model asking questions about the squirrel shown. Have students work with a partner to create one question they hope the book will answer. Invite volunteers to share their question with the rest of the class and record these questions on the board.

Introduce the Comprehension Skill:

Main idea and details

- Explain to students that most books have a main idea, which is what the book is mostly about. Point out that the supporting details are facts used to describe the main idea and that these supporting details make the main idea clear to the reader.

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

- Discuss the cover pictures and title page with students, and explain that the pictures and title often provide clues about the book's main idea. Have students work with a partner to predict the main idea. Invite volunteers to share their predictions with the rest of the class. Guide the class to an agreement that the main idea is: *Gray squirrels are like acrobats*. Record the main idea on the board.

Vocabulary

Have students turn to the "Words to Know" box on the copyright page. Point out that these words can be found in the story and that understanding the meaning of each word will help them better understand what they read. Read the words aloud to students, and as a group, discuss the meaning of each word. On the basis of the definitions discussed, have students work in groups to illustrate each vocabulary word on a poster. Have students share their posters with the class.

Set the Purpose

- Have students read to find out more about squirrels. Write the Focus Question on the board. Invite students to look for evidence in the book to support their answer to the question.
- Have students make a small question mark in their book beside any word they do not understand or cannot pronounce. These can be addressed in a future discussion.

During Reading

Text-Dependent Questions

As students read the book, monitor their understanding with the following questions. Encourage students to support their answers by citing evidence from the book.

- *Why do squirrels move quickly?* (level 1) page 3
- *What are some animals a squirrel might need to escape from?* (level 1) pages 5 and 7
- *How does a gray squirrel use its tail?* (level 2) multiple pages
- *What special skills do gray squirrels have that make them similar to acrobats?* (level 3) multiple pages
- *Why did the author write this book about gray squirrels?* (level 3) multiple pages

Text Features: Photographs

Explain to students that photographs are pictures taken by a camera. Point out that nonfiction books often include photographs. Explain that photographs often include many details that tell readers more about the topic of a book. Have students look through the book and discuss details in the photographs with a partner. Ask students: *What did you learn about gray squirrels? What details do you see in the photographs that are not given in the text?* Have students choose

one photograph in the book and describe the details they see to a partner. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

Skill Review

- Model for students how you ask and answer questions as you read, and direct them to stop at several points during reading to ask and answer questions. Invite volunteers to share their questions or answers with the rest of the class. Discuss with students how this strategy helped them remember important information while reading.
- Have students work in groups to periodically review the main idea of the book and discuss the details they have read. Have groups share the details they found with the rest of the class. Record the details on the board.
- Model identifying details that support the main idea.

Think-aloud: *Earlier we agreed the main idea of this book is: Gray squirrels are like acrobats. As I read the book, I learned details about squirrels that make them similar to acrobats. Squirrels run and leap quickly, climb and change direction easily, as well as leap from one branch to another like an acrobat on a trapeze. These are a few of the important details I learned about squirrels that make them nature's acrobats. Thinking about the details that support the main idea helps me remember important information from the book.*

- Model how to complete the **main-idea-and-details worksheet**. Have students record the main idea on the worksheet. Then, have students discuss a detail with a partner and determine whether it supports the main idea. Have a volunteer share one detail with the class. Model how to place the detail on the worksheet.

After Reading

Ask students what words, if any, they marked in their book. Use this opportunity to model how they can read these words using decoding strategies and context clues.

Skill Review

Graphic Organizer: Main idea and details

Review the main-idea-and-details worksheet that students completed. Have students share their work in groups. Invite volunteers to share with the rest of the class the details they chose. Have students justify why each detail supports the main idea.

Comprehension Extension

Discussion cards covering comprehension skills and strategies not explicitly taught with the book are provided to be used for extension activities.

Response to Focus Question

Have students cite specific evidence from the book to answer the Focus Question. (Answers will vary.)

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

Reasons should include characteristics that make squirrels like acrobats. Samples: *Squirrels can quickly and easily climb, leap, and run. They can hang from branches and climb upside down. They can run across small branches or wires and use their tails to balance. They can leap from large to small branches.*

Comprehension Checks

- Book quiz
- Retelling rubric

Book Extension Activities

Build Skills

Phonological Awareness:

Initial consonant *br-* and *gr-*blends

- Say the word *branch* aloud to students, emphasizing the initial /br/ sound. Have students say the word aloud and then say the /br/ sound. Have students practice saying the /br/ sound to a partner.
- Repeat the process with the word *gray* and the initial consonant *gr*-blend.
- Have students work in groups to discuss the difference in the initial sounds of the words *branch* and *gray*. Point out that they create the initial consonant *br*-blend with their lips and the initial consonant *gr*-blend with their tongue to the roof of their mouth.
- **Check for understanding:** Say the following words one at a time, and have students clap their hands when they hear a word that begins with the *br*-blend and clap their desk when they hear a word that begins with a *gr*-blend: *grass, brown, brother, grid, grab, broom, green, and brush*.

Phonics: Initial consonant *br-* and *gr-*blends

- Write the words *branch* and *gray* on the board and read them aloud with students.
- Have students say the /br/ sound aloud. Then, run your finger under the letters in the word *branch* as students say the whole word aloud. Ask students to identify which letters represent the /br/ sound in the word *branch*. Repeat this process with the word *gray* and the initial consonant *gr*-blend.
- Say the words *brass* and *grasp* aloud, emphasizing the initial sounds, and have students write the words on a separate sheet of paper. Have students compare their words with a partner's. Reinforce with students the difference in sound between the *br*-blend and *gr*-blend.
- **Check for understanding:** Write the following words on the board, leaving off the initial consonant blend: *grip, brain, grape, and brave*. Say the first word aloud, and have students call out whether the word begins with the letters *gr* or *br*. Invite a volunteer to come to the board and add the initial consonant blend. Repeat with the remaining words.

- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [initial-consonant-br-and-gr-blends worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their answers.

Grammar and Mechanics: Verbs

- Review or explain that *verbs* are *words that name actions*. Have each student name at least one verb. Write the verbs on the board. Select several verbs for the class to act out.
- Have students read page 3 aloud with you. Ask them to identify the verbs (*move, find, escape*).
- Write several sentences about squirrels on the board; use examples that have easy-to-identify verbs. Invite volunteers to come to the board and circle the verb in each sentence. Have the class say the verbs aloud.
- **Check for understanding:** Have students locate and circle the verbs in the book. Have volunteers share one verb they found with the rest of the class. Have the rest of the class give the thumbs-up signal if they agree that the word is a verb.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [verbs worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their answers.

Word Work: High-frequency word *they*

- Write the word *they* on the board and read it aloud with students. Explain to students that they will often see this word in books they read and they should memorize it so they can decode it right away.
- Spell the word aloud while students write each letter in the air.
- Write the following sentence on the board: *They can climb quickly*. Read it aloud with students and discuss with them the meaning of the word *they*. Ask students to call out the noun that is replaced by the pronoun *they* in that sentence.
- Have students practice spelling *they* on their palm.
- **Check for understanding:** Have students work in pairs to create oral sentences about squirrels using the word *they*. Call on students to share a sentence with the rest of the class, and ask other students to give a thumbs-up signal if they used the word *they* correctly.

Connections

- See the back of the book for cross-curricular extension ideas.