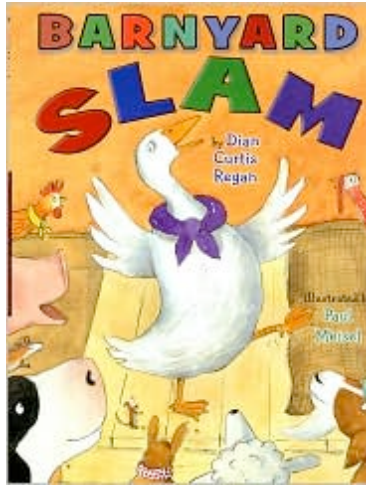


Curriculum Guide for *Barnyard Slam*

by Dian Curtis Regan



Created by: Jennifer Richard Jacobson

Summary: Unbeknownst to the farmer and his son, the barnyard animals participate in a lively poetry slam, hosted by Yo Mama Goose.

About the Author: With over 50 books for children, Dian Curtis Regan once again delights us with her masterful humor and passion for wordplay. “The idea came to me as I was driving from Kansas to Colorado Springs,” she recalls. “During the eight hour drive, the poems started coming to me. I knew I needed a framework for a story, or all I had was a pile of animal poems. Once I ‘met’ the characters, they started squabbling and inspired a story to connect the poems. During revisions, the editor suggested adding idioms, so I went hog wild with the idioms and it all clicked.”

Reading Connections

Before Reading: Increase background knowledge.

Introduce the concept of a Poetry Slam. Poetry Slams are competitions at which poets recite original poetry and are judged by members of the audience. Slams became popular in the eighties, but actually originated in ancient Greece.

Share literature referenced by the poetry in *Barnyard Slam*. You might consider sharing these texts before reading *Barnyard Slam*, thus allowing students to feel like true insiders.

- *The Story of Ferdinand*, by Munro Leaf. (Viking, 1936)
Published over 50 years ago, this classic is about a bull who preferred sitting under the cork tree and smelling flowers to fighting.
- *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type*, by Doreen Cronin. (Scholastic, 2005) Farmer Brown has a problem: his cows like to type.
- The poem “The Purple Cow” by Gelett Burgess (1866-1951)

*I never saw a Purple Cow,
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.*

- *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1962)
“I will not eat them here or there,” reads the classic text that Lamb can’t help modeling his poem, “Lamb-I-am” after.

During Reading: Interact with the text

Snap your fingers when you hear an idiom: Tell students that at poetry readings, listeners often snap their fingers when they hear something special. Ask students to snap (or clap) each time they hear an idiom. Explain that idioms are expressions whose meanings are not easily understood from the words alone. For example, the meaning of “letting the cat out of the bag,” has nothing to do with cats or bags. Suggest they snap their fingers when they recognize an idiom. Here are idioms included in this text:

*A lame duck
Changing horses in midstream
I heard it straight from the horse’s mouth
Two shakes of a lamb’s tail
Horsing around
A wild goose chase
Stop badgering me
Crying wolf
Don’t have a cow
Ruffled [goose’s] feathers
Lucky ducks
Blow my own horn
Pulling the wool over one’s eyes
A little bird told me
Letting the cat out of the bag
Put all my eggs in one basket
’Till the cows come home*

Use context clues to determine the meaning of idioms: Occasionally pause and ask students to determine the meaning of a lesser-known expression from the context. For example, Yo Mama says, “I have a program to follow. I cannot change horses in midstream.”

After Reading: Discuss

Why do you think the author chose to have Yo Mama begin the evening by saying, “Good evening animals and poultry?” What does *poultry* mean?

Which is your favorite poem? Why?

Both Cow and Pig wrote poems describing ways in which they feel misunderstood. How does Cow want to set the record straight? Pig?

Why didn’t Turkey want to perform? (Introduce the idea of a protest.)

Do you think the animals enjoyed participating in the poetry slam? Why or why not?

What do you think the farmer and his son heard when they came into the barn? How did the author let you know that this is what they heard?

Response to literature: Perform

Have a class poetry slam: Determine your class rules. Consider having a non-competitive event for young students, inviting independent judges (other teachers, community members) for older students. Set up the classroom to look like a café and arrange to have a microphone. Invite students to wear bandanas and do-rags like the animals in *Barnyard Slam*. Typically props, costumes, and music are not allowed – emphasis should be placed on voice control and body gestures. And as Duck pointed out, the host or hostess reads last.

Writing Connections

Traits: *Barnyard Slam* makes an excellent mentor text. Use this story to model:

Voice: Compare the voices of two barnyard poems. Ask student to provide adjectives that describe the voices. For example, students might describe the voice of “Hogwash” as *high-spirited, excited, joyful*, and *passionate*, whereas they might choose the words *peaceful, quiet, musical or poetic* to describe the voice in Goose’s poem.

If you have not read *Green Eggs and Ham* before *Barnyard Slam*, ask students if the voice of the author of “Lamb-I-Am” reminds them of any other author’s voice.

Word choice: *Barnyard Slam* explodes with puns: *Charley horse, quit hogging the stage, lamb chopped, give my regards to fraud-way* to name a few. Choose an animal that was not vocal at the barnyard slam and brainstorm a list of words associated with that animal. For example:

Cat

paws
whiskers
nine lives
fur
feline
meow
purr
calico
catnap

Then invite your students to create punny riddles throughout the day.

What do cats do when they’re watching a movie?
Paws for kibble.

Where do cats like to sleep?
Near the fur-nace.

What did the cat get on her test?
A purrfect score.

Sentence Fluency: Although variation in sentence beginnings is usually advised, poets often choose repetition instead. Find places in the text where the poets began lines in the same way. Discuss why repetition in poetry works so well. (Often it allows the poet to surprise the reader or build to a point.)

Conventions: *Barnyard Slam* provides many opportunities for examining possessive nouns and pronouns. Review the use of the apostrophe.

Genres: *Barnyard Slam* is a perfect springboard for poetry and persuasive essay.

Write poetry: In this story, there are several animals present for the poetry reading who do not participate: raccoon, the goats, bird, hen, turtle, the bats, mice, frog, rabbit, rooster, wolf, fox. Have students write poems from the points of view of these animals. Perhaps they can perform these poems during your own “barnyard slam.”

Persuasive essay: Which poem is best? Have students write persuasive essays defending their preferences.

Curriculum Connections

Art

Illustrate literal interpretations of idioms: Have students choose idioms from the story, or other animals idioms they know, and illustrate them literally. For example, a student could draw a horse standing behind a cart for *Don't put the cart before the horse*. Ask them to write a sentence or two explaining the figurative meaning on the back of the illustration. Post their illustrations on a bulletin board.

Technology:

Create a Podcast: Have students read their poetry aloud and post it on your website.

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**Jennifer Richard Jacobson** received her master's in education from Harvard Graduate School of Education. She has taught preschool through sixth grade and has served as Curriculum Coordinator, Head of Studies or Language Arts Specialist in several New England schools.

As a continuing author-in-residence and educational consultant, Jennifer has worked with thousands of teachers and administrators to help students reach their highest potential.

She is also the author of professional books for educators, as well as many books for young readers, including *Stained*, *Winnie at Her Best*, and the popular *Andy Shane* series.

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