



8 Class Pets

+ 1 Squirrel ÷ 1 Dog =

CHAOS

by Vivian Vande Velde, illustrated by Steve Björkman

Summary: Meet Twitch, the school-yard squirrel, and then take a deep breath before you embark on a rollicking adventure set in the elementary school beside the playground that Twitch calls his own. It's not really Twitch's fault that hilarious chaos ensues when he darts inside the school...or is it? Prepare to scamper along with a bevy of class pets and pick up a few fascinating facts before the principal—and police and firemen—arrive on the scene!

Grade Levels: 2-4

Why Choose This Book? Illustrated in pen and ink, this lighthearted adventure is divided into eleven brief chapters told from the points of view of Twitch, the principal's dog Cuddles, and various classroom pets in an elementary school. *8 Class Pets* lends itself equally well to **reading aloud**, **guided reading**, and **independent reading**. Filled with animal facts expertly woven into each chapter, this enjoyable tale offers opportunities for further study related to the content areas and is an ideal text for **close reading**. Engaged and entertained, students learn as they follow Twitch on his high-speed high jinks.

Curriculum / Content Area Links & Common Core State Standards

English Language Arts

Point of View: “Here’s How I See It!”

Each chapter in this book highlights the thoughts and reactions of a different animal. After reading each chapter, ask students to identify specific characteristics of the animal’s **personality, perspective** (or viewpoint), and its **problem**. For instance, Miss Lucy Cottontail believes she is very smart; Nancy the turtle likes to nap. Twitch believes the playground in the school yard was installed to entertain him. List characteristics for each animal in columns on chart paper or the whiteboard (animal names going down, p’s going across). Compare similarities and differences.

In his chapter toward the end of the book, Cuddles the dog offers a different view of Twitch from the rest of the pets. This helps us understand why the principal’s dog might be chasing the busy squirrel and clues us in on this frustrated dog’s behavior. After reading this chapter, discuss how there are always two sides to a story. Ask children to share personal experiences. Share one of your own! (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1,3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2: 4,6; Gr.3:6; Gr.4:6; CCSS ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2 -4:1; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2-4:4,6; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

Conflict: “What’s the Problem?”

In this fast-moving tale, **problems** arise and pile up faster than a squirrel can scurry! After reading the book, or after each chapter, have students collaborate to chronicle the problems Twitch, Cuddles, and each classroom pet face. And let’s not forget the custodian and principal (though they are not classroom pets!). Ask: Do any of the characters face the same problem? Which problem is most serious? Funniest? Easiest to solve? Surprising? Ask children to **support opinions with details** from the story. (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1,3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2:4,6; Gr.3:6; Gr.4:6 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2-3:7; CCSS ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3: 4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)



Style and Tone: “The Gym Class Pet”

In each chapter, the author helps readers get to know the animal by the details she provides and the way in which she writes about them. In addition to plenty of ACTION and a PROBLEM, the **STYLE** in which she has written the thoughts and reactions of the animal helps the reader get a clear picture of each animal and its personality. Review each chapter for style and discuss. Direct students to add a chapter to the book by naming and describing the **Gym** or **Physical Education** Class Pet. Before writing, ask students to research and list the characteristics of the pet. Encourage students to consider **HOW** they will write from the animal’s perspective to help readers get to know the animal. What creative name will they choose for this class pet? (CCSS ELA RL: Literature Key Ideas and Details: Gr.4:1,3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2: 4; CCSS ELA W: Text Types and Purposes: Gr.2-4: 1-2; Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Gr.2-3:7-8; Gr.4:7-9; Range of Writing: Gr.3-4:10; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)



Sequence: “Follow Twitch’s Tail!”

Ask children to identify the main events in each chapter. List in complete sentences on strips of tagboard. Be sure each sentence offers enough detail to be able to recognize the chapter in which it occurred. Scramble the strips of tagboard and have students arrange in the order in which they occurred in the story. (CCSS ELA RL: Literature Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1; Gr.4:3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2-3:5; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:7; CCSS ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3:4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)





Speaking; Persuasive Writing: “CHAOS King (Or Queen)”

After finishing the story, ask students to choose their favorite character in the book. They will **prepare a brief talk** in which they try to persuade their classmates to vote for that animal as the class favorite. Encourage students to **be specific, offer details from the story, and clearly explain why** this animal is their favorite of the bunch. Students will begin and end their talks with the line from the book, “Being a _____ is the best thing in the world.” Note on chart paper or the whiteboard which animals the children choose. After all the talks are delivered, identify the top four pets chosen. Members of the class will **cast a vote** by private ballot for their favorite pet from that list. Tally votes. Add in some **MATH**: Which animal has the **majority** of votes? Which animal has the fewest? Which animals tied? With older children, figure out what **percentage of the vote** each pet received.

If time allows, break children into teams to **write the victory speech** and the **concession speeches** for the pets. Share with the class.

(CCSS ELA W: Text Types and Purposes: Gr.2-4: 1-2; Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Gr.2-3:7-8; Gr.4:7-9; Range of Writing: Gr.3-4:10; CCSS ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3:4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Gr.2-4:1-3; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

More! Discuss the names chosen for each animal in the story. What does the name refer to? How does the name fit the character? Ask children to cast a vote for their favorite animal name in the story and explain why it is their favorite. (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1,3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2:4,6; Gr.3:6; Gr.4:6 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2-3:7; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3: 4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

Science

Research; Close Reading: “On CLOSEr Inspection”

Vande Velde cleverly includes numerous factual details about each animal’s behavior and common attributes. For example, Sweetie the library rat explains that rats can’t see very well, which is why they like to stay near walls. In the chapter about Angel the corn snake, we learn that she feasts on frozen mice once a week, and from Green Eggs and Hamster we discover that both squirrels and hamsters are rodents. Assign one animal to each student or teams of students in the class. Ask them to closely reread the chapter about that animal to find details about its characteristics or behavior. List the details and then research the animal further in informational texts and online. Generate a list of questions to guide research. Ask: What additional facts about this animal did you uncover that you would add to the chapter? Are any details in the chapter inaccurate? Ask older students to cite resources. (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1,3; Craft and Structure: Gr.2:4,6; Gr.3:6; Gr.4:6 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2-3:7; ELA RI: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4: 1; Craft and Structure: Gr.2-3: 5; CCSS ELA W: Text Types and Purposes: Gr.2-4:2; Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Gr.2-3:7-8; Gr.4:7-9; Range of Writing: Gr.3-4:10; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3: 4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4: 1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)



Math

“Numbers Game”

Green Eggs and Hamster loves numbers! List all the equations this feisty first-grade pet mentions. **Add** additional equations based on the **details** provided in the chapter. (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2:1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3: 4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

For more math suggestions, see “**Chaos King (or Queen)**.”

Social Sciences

“Trace Twitch’s Travels!”

Have students use clues in the text to draw a map of the elementary school and playground area. Using dotted lines, trace Twitch’s path from the school yard to inside the classrooms and hallways to back outside again. ----- (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2:1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3:4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4: 1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

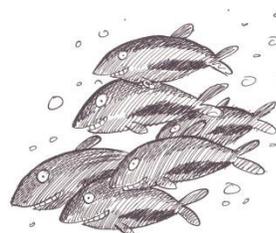
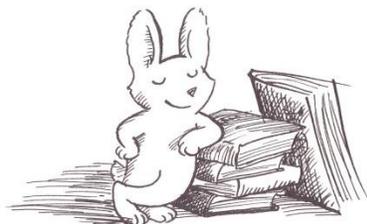
Character Education

“Manners Matter”

Throughout the book readers are treated to examples of kind and thoughtful behavior and good manners exhibited by the classroom pets. Ask students to locate such examples. Discuss the class pets’ actions and why they are examples of “manners that matter.” (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2:1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3:4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)

Art

Close read to catalog the art projects in each of the classrooms. Discuss and choose one to work on as a class! (CCSS ELA RL: Key Ideas and Details: Gr.2-4:1; ELA SL: Comprehension and Collaboration: Gr.2: 1-3; Gr.3-4:1-2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Gr.2:6; Gr.3: 4,6; Gr.4:4; CCSS ELA L: Conventions of Standard English: Gr.2-4:1-2; Knowledge of Language: Gr.2-4:3)



Extra Credit!

8 +1 More Ideas = Additional FUN With This Book!

- + Visit “Galileo and Newton” in the Science Lab and create a **Reader’s Theatre** script.
- + Read aloud the **dedication** in the front of the book. Ask children to recall classroom pets they have had and relate experiences. Discuss class pets they would like to have. Are you game to get one??
- + Read the **flap copy** on the inside front cover. Ask: What details about the story are revealed here? What would you add? Which of the details are most important? Least important? Which words make you want to read this book?
- + Ask students to write **riddles** about the class pets. Use details from the text. Share riddles and guess!
- + List all the **descriptions** of Cuddles in the book, such as “big noisy creature” and “nonsquirrel.”
- + Instruct children to write a **poem** Lenore would be proud of! Follow the style and rhyme scheme she—sort of—uses. Tell the children that if their poem is not perfect, not to worry. Recall Lenore’s words: “Okay, okay, I’m still working on it.”
- + Research the word **chaos**.
- + **Additional vocabulary!** Skim to locate the following words and phrases in the story: literary, considerate, veered, apparently, boundary, refrain, raven, innocent bystander, commotion, glimpses, misstep, transport, sulking, disorderly conduct, and vision (as used in context in the final chapter). Read in context. Define using context or a dictionary.
- + Would you **recommend** this book to a friend? Explain. Write in complete sentences.

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