

Welcome to the Mercy Watson Activity Kit!

Who says you can't learn about reading and writing while running around the classroom, oinking like a pig?

Well, Mercy Watson would not think oinking and learning were mutually exclusive. So the critically acclaimed education and media company Story Pirates has created a classroom activity kit featuring the *New York Times* best-selling Mercy Watson series by Newbery Medalist Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Chris Van Dusen.

This kit features Mercy Watson and her signature hijinks as it promotes literacy and arts education through writing projects, vocabulary-building games, and interactive drama activities. By exploring Kate DiCamillo's characterization, pacing, and use of language, students will discover new ways to improve their own writing and communication skills. Designed to align with the K–3 Common Core Standards, the activities are sure to be as appealing to kids as a tall stack of hot buttered toast is to Mercy Watson.

Included with the activity kit are masks, costume pieces, and delicious (but not edible!) Toast Cards intended for acting out scenes and characters from the dynamic, hilarious Mercy Watson series.

So please enjoy, and please don't forget to put a great deal of butter on your toast.



About Story Pirates

This packet was written by Story Pirates. Story Pirates is a nationally respected education and media company founded in 2003 to inspire a new generation of lifelong readers and writers. We create materials like these for classrooms all across the country and are excited to bring this mission to your classroom with the help of the porcine wonder herself, Mercy Watson. Find out more about us at www.storypirates.org.



Drama & Multimedia Activities

Talk Like a Character

The characters in the Mercy Watson books have distinct ways of speaking. Some have catchphrases, such as Leroy Ninker's "Yippee-i-oh." Others speak in specific kinds of sentences; for example, Eugenia Lincoln likes stating opinions, and Officer Tomilello always asks and answers his own questions.

Here is a game students can play where they read dialogue excerpts from the books, then try to figure out which character is speaking:

- Select dialogue samples for your students to read. You can choose your own, but we have also provided samples on this page.
- Ask student volunteers to read the quotes one at a time, while the rest of the class tries to guess which characters said them. To give the class extra clues, you can encourage the volunteers to read in a specific voice chosen for each character.
- Once the character has been guessed correctly, have the class discuss how they knew who it was. Ask: What clues did you hear in the dialogue? Some clues might come from hearing a specific catchphrase or way of speaking. Other clues might include noticing how the character is feeling about another character.
- When his or her turn is over, the student volunteer may be given the costume piece associated with the character. At the end of the game, all the volunteers can read their lines one more time while wearing the costume pieces, reinforcing the differences among the characters.

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Craft and Structure RL.2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

TALK LIKE A CHARACTER DIALOGUE!

You might choose to print an extra copy of this page and cut out these dialogue samples to hand to your students.

"A toast to our darling, our dear."
— Mrs. Watson

Illustrations copyright © 2005–2015 by Chris Van Dusen



"In my opinion, pigs belong on farms."
— Eugenia Lincoln

Illustrations copyright © 2005–2015 by Chris Van Dusen



"Yippee-i-oh, everything must go!"
— Leroy Ninker

Illustrations copyright © 2005–2015 by Chris Van Dusen



"Have laws been broken here? Most certainly, most definitely, laws have been broken here."
— Officer Tomilello

Illustrations copyright © 2005–2015 by Chris Van Dusen



"Oink!"
— Mercy Watson

Illustrations copyright © 2005–2015 by Chris Van Dusen



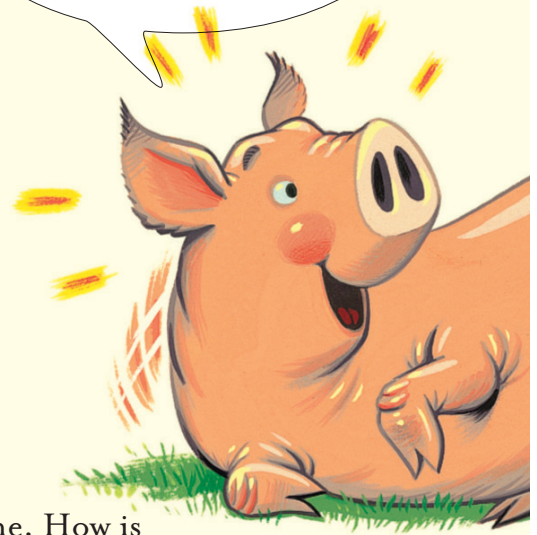
Mercy Watson

Oink!

Mercy Watson mostly just says one thing: "Oink!"

What she *means* by "Oink," however, changes a great deal based on the situation. Here is a game where students try to figure out how Mercy is feeling:

- Choose a section of dialogue in which Mercy responds with "Oink!" You can choose your own, but we have also provided samples on the next page.
- Ask student volunteers to act out the dialogue.
- Have the class discuss the meaning of the word *oink* in this scene. How is Mercy feeling? What clues allow you to figure it out? If Mercy could speak English, what words do you think she might be saying? How can you tell?
- Invite the student volunteers to read the scene again, and ask the student playing Mercy to focus on saying "Oink" with the emotion or intention the class has agreed upon.



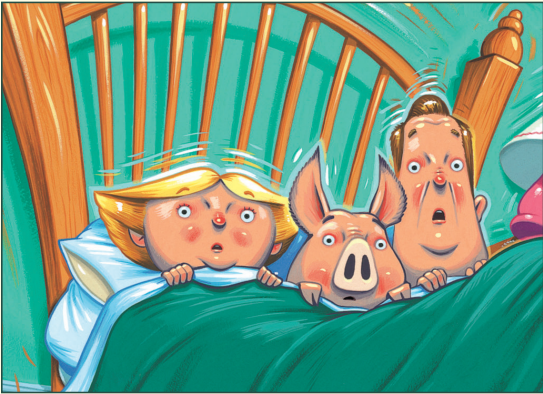
COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Key Ideas and Details RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

Drama & Multimedia Activities

“Oink!” Dialogue

Please note that these sections from the books are abridged.



From *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, Chapter 3

Narrator 1: *BOOM!*

Narrator 2: A hole opened under the Watsons' bed.

Narrator 1: *CRACK!*

Narrator 2: The Watsons' bed fell into the hole.

Mr. Watson: What the—?

Mercy: Oink?

Mrs. Watson: It's an earthquake! It's the end of the world!

From *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, Chapter 7

Narrator: Eugenia ran toward Mercy. Mercy's heart beat faster. There was going to be a chase! Mercy loved a chase. She let Eugenia get very close to her.

Mercy: Oink!

Narrator: She dashed away.

Eugenia: Get out of my yard!

Mercy: Oink-oink!

Eugenia: No pigs allowed!



From *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride*, Chapter 7

Narrator: Baby Lincoln is hiding in the back of the car, so Mr. Watson and Mercy do not see her at first.

Mr. Watson: There's nothing like a fast drive to clear the mind! Isn't that right, my dear?

Mercy: Oink.

Baby Lincoln: It is wonderful to go fast!

Mr. Watson: Who said that?

Baby Lincoln: Me. Hello, Mr. Watson.

Mercy: Oink!

Baby Lincoln: Hello, Mercy.



Toast Card Games

Here are a few different activities students can play using the Toast Cards, which can be found at the end of the activity kit.

ACTING OUT EMOTIONS: A student volunteer receives a Toast Card. Based on the picture on the card, the student acts out the emotion the character is feeling. The class tries to guess which emotion it is and discusses what the volunteer did to give them clues.



ACTING OUT EMOTIONS (ADVANCED): Same as the above, except along with guessing the emotion, students name as many synonyms for that emotion as possible. These synonyms may be vocabulary words you are studying with your students, but we have also provided a list of possible synonyms for each word. For each synonym, give another volunteer the chance to act out the emotion. If there are small differences between synonyms (for example, there are subtle differences between *angry* and *irate*), discuss those differences and see if the students can act out each synonym distinctly, to better perform that specific word.



ACTING OUT CHARACTERS: Instead of focusing on the emotion, a student volunteer acts out the character on the card. Discuss first how to make decisions about the way a character's voice sounds and how the character moves. A volunteer may speak lines he or she believes the character from the book would say, but not directly reveal the character's name. The class tries to guess the character and discusses what the volunteer did to give them clues.



EMOTION SYNONYMS

HAPPY
Cheerful

Glad

Jolly

Joyful

Pleased

SURPRISED

Amazed

Floored

Shocked

Startled

Stunned

SCARED

Afraid

Fearful

Frightened

Nervous

Petrified

ANGRY
Annoyed

Irate

Irritated

Mad

Raging

SAD

Blue

Gloomy

Melancholy

Sorry

Unhappy

CONFUSED

Baffled

Bewildered

Clueless

Perplexed

Puzzled

COMMON CORE CONNECTION Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.2.7:

Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

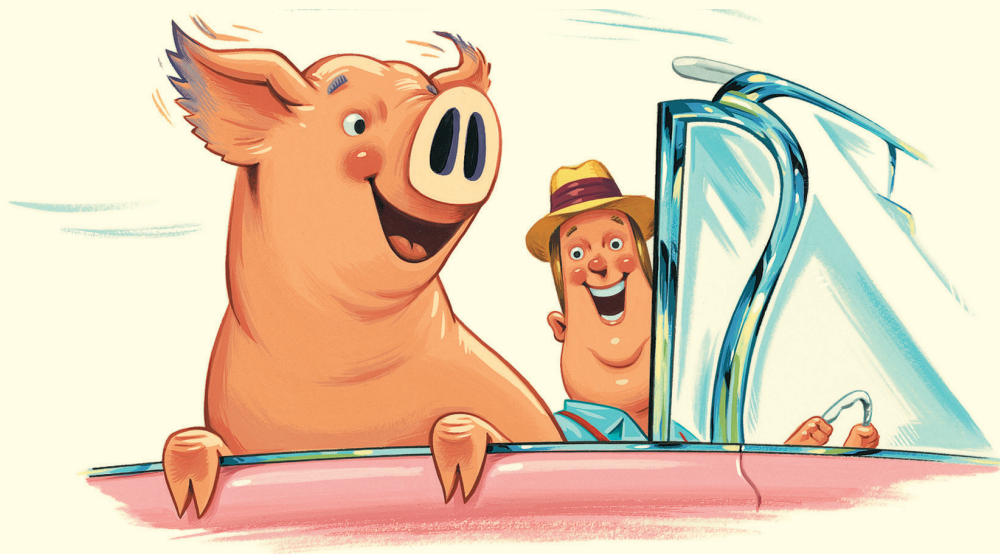
Drama & Multimedia Activities

“Therefore” Stories

In Chapter 9 of *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride*, there is an entertaining sequence in which Mr. Watson uses the word *therefore* to explain why he can't stop his speeding car.

The Common Core mandates that students be able to use transition words like *therefore* in persuasive writing, but there is also a lot of fun to be had using them in fiction. In fact, it is an adage among many fiction writers that the most interesting way to write a story is not to ask what happens “first, next, and finally,” but rather to ask what happens “first, therefore, and therefore.” Here is a game that helps students understand how transition words work and provides a fun context to practice using them outside of nonfiction writing:

- Read Chapter 9 of *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride* and have a discussion about the meaning of the word *therefore*. Explain that you're going to be playing a game all about using the word *therefore* to tell an imaginary story.
- The class decides on a character and determines what that character wants more than anything in the world. (One example is Mercy Watson, who wants toast more than anything in the world.)
- A student volunteer is selected to play the main character. As other characters enter the story, more student volunteers can join.
- The first sentence of the story should set up the basic scenario. For example, the first sentence could be, “Mercy Watson was a pig who wanted toast more than anything in the world. Therefore . . .”



Drama & Multimedia Activities

“Therefore” Stories

- Students decide what happens next. (For example, “Therefore, she ran around the yard trying to sniff for butter.”) The student volunteer playing the main character can act this out.
- The students continue telling the story, and for the purposes of this game, every sentence begins with the word *therefore* (or, if you prefer, another transition word that shows cause and effect, such as *thus* or *consequently*). For example, the story might go like this: “Mercy Watson was a pig who wanted toast more than anything in the world. Therefore, she ran around the yard trying to sniff for butter. Therefore, her next-door neighbor Eugenia saw her and started yelling. Therefore, Mercy ran next door to see if Eugenia was yelling about toast,” and so on. The class can continue the game for as long as you want, or until they reach a logical conclusion of some kind.

While the main focus of this game is simply to practice using the word *therefore* and have fun in the process, you may note that repeatedly using *therefore* also keeps the tension high in the story. There is never an opportunity for the action to slow down, because every single sentence has to show the effect of the actions in the last sentence, and the story is constantly propelled forward. You may choose to refer back to this game at some point when the students are doing fiction writing and talk about how to use transition words to build tension.



COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Drama & Multimedia Activities

“Wonky” Videos

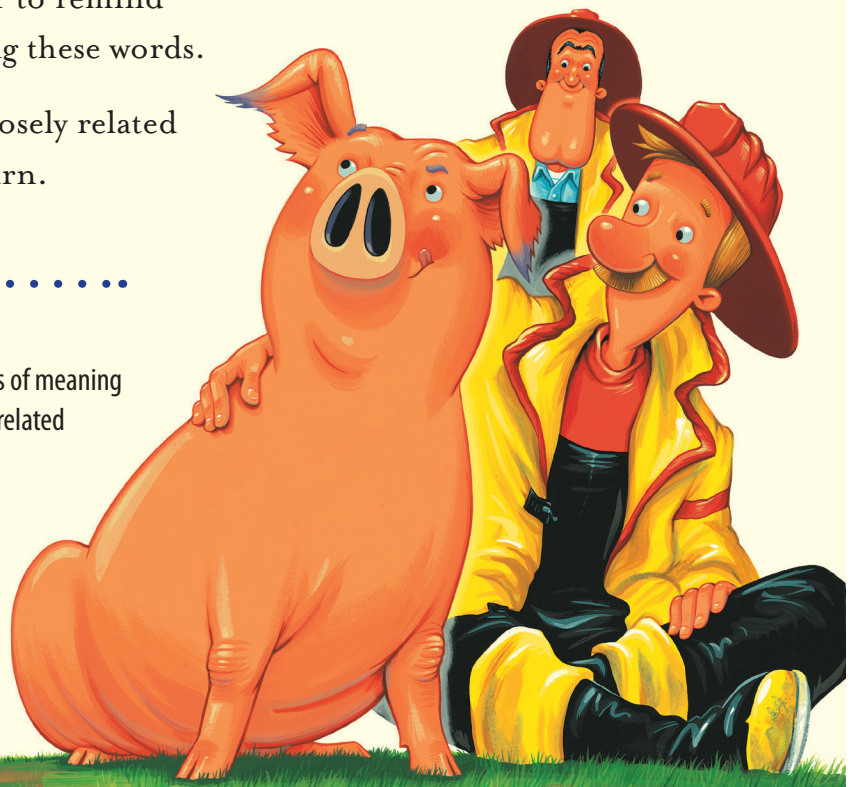


The final Mercy Watson book is called *Something Wonky This Way Comes*. *Wonky* in this context is a great synonym for *weird*. Here’s an activity you can play with these words or with other closely related vocabulary words:

- Make a list of several words with a meaning similar to *wonky*. For example: *wacky*, *bizarre*, *peculiar*. (Alternately, choose an entirely different set of closely related words that your students are studying.)
- Have a discussion with your students about the differences among these words.
- Decide as a class on ways that you might dramatize the differences among these words. For example, to dramatize *wacky*, a student could pretend to slip; to dramatize *bizarre*, one student might do a funny dance while another student watches with an astounded look on her face; to dramatize *peculiar*, a student acting like a detective might notice that all the dry-erase markers are missing. “Hmm, peculiar . . .”
- Once you have decided how to dramatize the words, make a short video of each scene (you might just use the camera on your phone). Watch these videos with your students as often as you want throughout the year to remind everyone of the subtle differences among these words.
- This activity could work for any set of closely related words that you want your students to learn.
Get as wonky as you’d like!

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use L.2.5.B: Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., *toss*, *throw*, *hurl*) and closely related adjectives (e.g., *thin*, *slender*, *skinny*, *scrawny*).





Different Perspectives on a Pig

In all the *Mercy Watson* books, but especially in the original *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, the plot depends on different characters having extremely different ideas of what is actually happening. For example, when the Watsons' bed falls through the floor and Mercy runs downstairs, the Watsons think Mercy is looking for help, Mercy thinks she's just looking for food, and Eugenia thinks Mercy is looking for trouble. The conflict between these clashing perspectives moves the story forward.

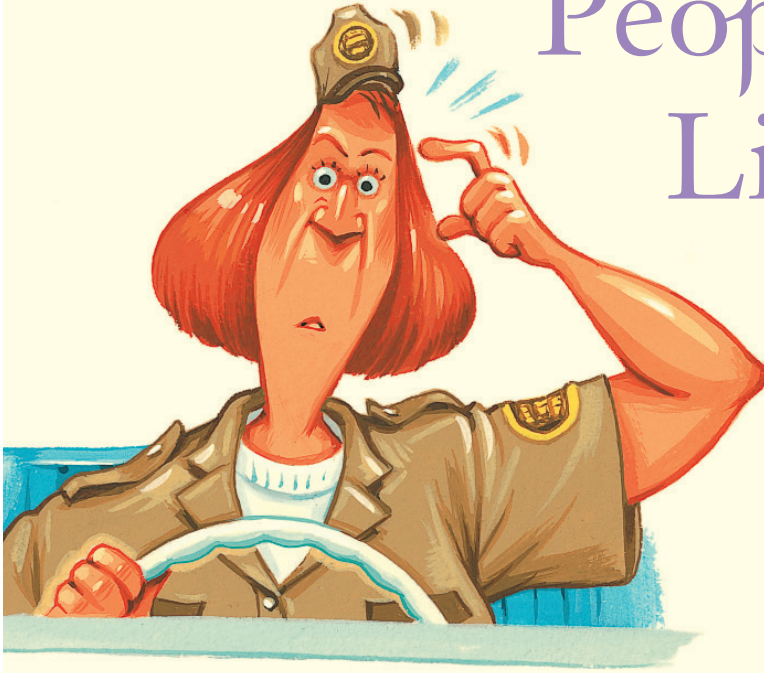
In the spirit of this idea, here is a simple drama game about seeing things from different perspectives:

- Read *Mercy Watson to the Rescue* and discuss the perspective that each character has on the events of the book.
- Have one student volunteer to act out Mercy Watson performing a very simple action. It might be something from the book (for example, Mercy Watson runs around Eugenia's backyard) or it might be something from your students' imaginations (for example, Mercy Watson plays the piano).
- Invite students to brainstorm what the different characters in the book might say if they saw Mercy performing this action. There won't necessarily be one correct thing for each character, but the class should be able to justify why it makes sense for a certain character to say a certain thing based on what they know from their reading.
- While the initial volunteer continues to act like Mercy Watson, have new volunteers act out the characters responding to Mercy.
- You can expand on this game to include characters from outside the *Mercy Watson* books as well. Try it with characters from other books or create new characters from your students' imaginations. Have the class decide how the characters might interpret the same events differently.



COMMON CORE CONNECTION Craft and Structure RL.2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

People Who Look Like Animals



In the illustrator's note for *Mercy Watson Thinks Like a Pig*, Chris Van Dusen says that when he was figuring out how to illustrate Francine Poulet, he decided that she had to look like a chicken.

Turning an animal into a human is a great way for anybody to come up with an interesting, detailed character. Here is a drama game in which students can practice this concept:

- Read *Mercy Watson Thinks Like a Pig* and discuss the illustration of Francine Poulet. Do you agree that she looks like a chicken? What are some of the things the illustrator did to make her look that way? As a bonus piece of insight, you might discuss the fact that *poulet* is in fact French for *chicken*.
- Select an animal for all the students to act out. Make a list of actions this animal is likely to do so that students have specific ways to act. For example, a dog will pant, bark, scratch an itch, and so on.
- As the students are acting out the animal, have them slowly turn into humans while keeping some of the actions of the animal. For example, are you a human who is always exercising and thus pants a lot? Are you a loud human who talks in loud "barks" of words? Are you always scratching an itch behind your ear with a huge arm motion?
- After students play a few rounds of this game, acting out a different animal each time, have them pick out one animal. Ask them to create a human character that shares a few specific similarities with that animal, noting that these kinds of strange but specific details make characters memorable.

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COMMON CORE CONNECTION Text Types and Purposes W.2.3: Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

Writing Activities

Repetition! Repetition to Build! Repetition to Build Suspense!



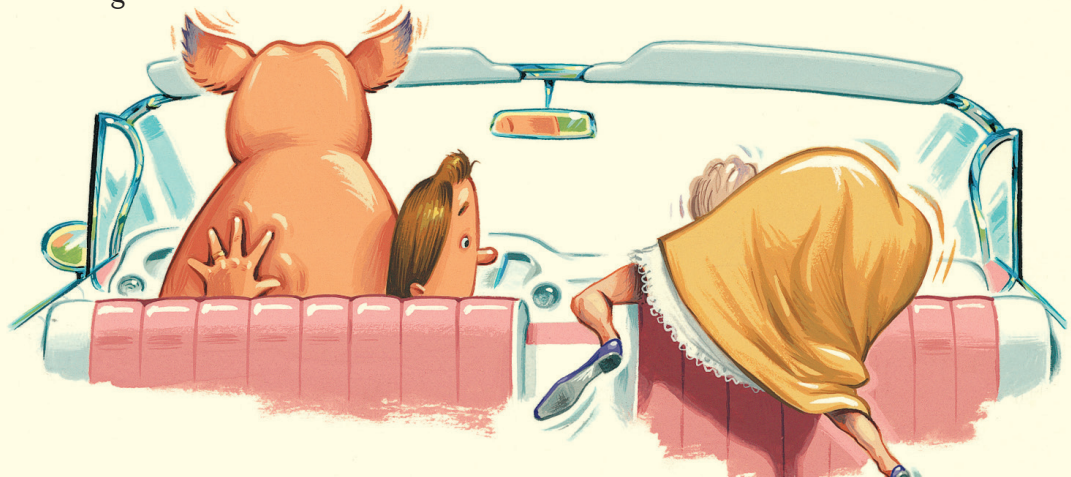
One of the most notable aspects of Kate DiCamillo's writing style in the Mercy Watson books is her use of repetition.

She repeats words and phrases both as a device to build suspense and to smoothly add details into the story.

There are numerous examples, such as this one from *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride* in which Baby Lincoln tries to find the brake pedal to stop a speeding car:

Baby unbuckled her seat belt. She climbed into the front seat. She put her seat belt on. She slid as close to Mr. Watson as she could. She looked down. She saw Mr. Watson's foot. She saw the pedal next to it.

Each of these sentences repeats the word *she* and each one adds just a little bit more information about what Baby is doing to stop the car. This is a deceptively simple way to keep the reader in growing suspense while also including lots of details about Baby's actions. In contrast, imagine if this same section were written simply as "Baby got into the front seat and found the brake." Your students will probably agree that this would be much less interesting!



Writing Activities

Repetition! Repetition to Build! Repetition to Build Suspense!



- Read a section from a Mercy Watson book that uses repetition to build suspense. You can either use the sample given on the previous page or another of your choosing (there are many in all of the books). Discuss the repetition and note how each sentence gives the reader a little bit of new information, building suspense about what is going to happen next.

- Now the students can practice using this writing technique.

Have the class decide on a character and a goal that character is trying to accomplish. Then ask everybody to work together to write a few sentences that use repetition to build suspense about what the character is going to do. For example, if the character is a basketball-playing turtle who wants to make a basket, the sentences might look like this:
The turtle walked slowly. He was moving toward the ball. He reached for the ball. He didn't even have hands, but he was going to try to make a basket. He squeezed the basketball between his turtle feet. He picked the ball up.

- The final sentence can be a release of tension, in which the suspense is over and we find out what finally happened. For example, Baby Lincoln announces that she has found the brake pedal and presses it. Perhaps the basketball-playing turtle would shoot and either make the basket or not.
- Now the students can try this activity individually with their own characters, having them accomplish other goals. While obviously this method of writing is not something that should run the entire length of a story, if used judiciously it can help add suspense to any piece of narrative writing the students are working on.

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COMMON CORE CONNECTION Craft and Structure RL.2.4: Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

Writing Activities

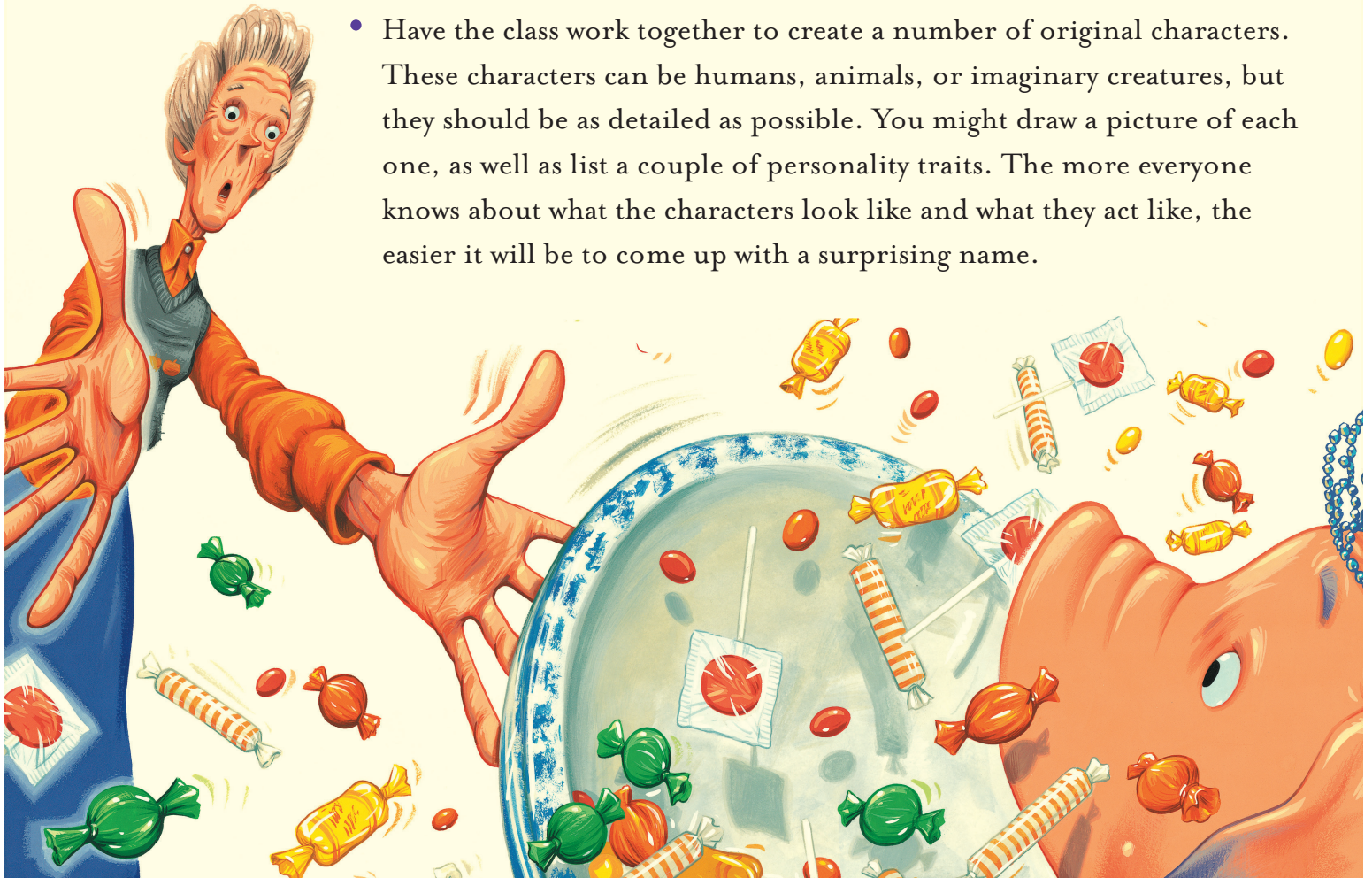
Oh, the Irony



There are several characters in the Mercy Watson books who have unexpected names. Two examples are Baby Lincoln (who is in fact not a baby, but an elderly woman) and General Washington (who is a grumpy cat and can mainly be found in *Mercy Watson: Princess in Disguise*).

Character names such as these are basic examples of literary irony, a concept that students will mainly be studying when they are much older. But why not give them a head start in elementary school? Irony can be lots of fun, and there are ways to discuss it on the level of whatever age your students happen to be. Here is one idea of how to do it:

- Read *Mercy Watson: Princess in Disguise* and discuss the characters of Baby Lincoln and General Washington. Are their names surprising based on what you know about the characters? What especially surprises you?
- Have the class work together to create a number of original characters. These characters can be humans, animals, or imaginary creatures, but they should be as detailed as possible. You might draw a picture of each one, as well as list a couple of personality traits. The more everyone knows about what the characters look like and what they act like, the easier it will be to come up with a surprising name.



Writing Activities

Oh, the Irony

- As each character is created, the class decides on a surprising name. You can give the students as much help as necessary in figuring out how to choose such a name, but here are a few types of questions you can ask to direct the discussion:
 - This character is kind and generous. Can we think of a surprising name that sounds like someone who would *not* be kind and generous?
 - This character has a million pointy teeth. What is a surprising name that sounds like a really cute, adorable character who would *not* have a million pointy teeth?
 - This character is a princess. What is the weirdest, craziest name that you would *never* expect a princess to have?
- Have the class pick one of these characters and write a story about the character trying to get something that he or she wants. How does the character's name affect the story? Are people surprised when they meet the character? Does a scary name cause problems for a nice character? Does a nice name help out a scary character?

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Craft and Structure RL.2.4: Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.





Writing Prompts

After reading the Mercy Watson books and participating in some of the activities in this packet, students will be excited to create stories of their own, inspired by some of Kate DiCamillo's characters and themes. Below is a list of writing prompts to help get them started. You may also choose to use the Character Map (on the next page), on which the students can design their own imaginative characters.

- Mercy Watson loves toast more than anything. Leroy Ninker wants to be a cowboy more than anything. Write a story about a character from your imagination and what he or she loves the most. How does this character try to get that thing?
- The Watsons are an unusual family, but they all love one another.

Write a story about an unusual family from your imagination.

- Eugenia Lincoln doesn't like pigs, but she lives next door to one who is always having crazy adventures in her yard. Write about two characters from your imagination who don't get along and what crazy things happen when they meet up.
- Mercy Watson once went to see a movie called *When Pigs Fly*, but then spent the whole night looking for popcorn and never got to watch the movie. Write the story of what that movie could be about.
- Things don't usually go as planned in Mercy Watson's world. In fact, things usually get wildly out of control very quickly! Write a story about a character from your imagination who makes a plan and show what happens when it all goes wrong.
- In *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, Mercy accidentally saves her family when all she was trying to do was find some delicious buttered toast. Write a story about a character from your imagination who tries to do something silly but accidentally saves the day instead.

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Text Types and Purposes W.2.3: Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

Writing Activities

Name _____ Class _____

Mercy Watson Character Map

What does your
character want more than
anything in the world?

What does your
character look like?

Draw Your Character

Character's Name

What is your character's
personality like?

What does your
character like to do?

Where does your
character live?



Porcine Wonder, Porcine _____

Mercy Watson is a porcine wonder, but what other kinds of porcine characters are out there?

Using the Porcine Character Sheet on the next page, have students decide what kind of character their pig will be. You can suggest any character traits you like, but here are a few ideas you could use:

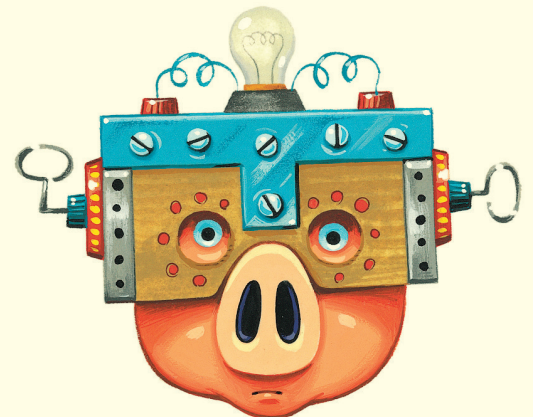


- Porcine Artist
- Porcine Athlete
- Porcine Superstar
- Porcine Teacher
- Porcine Genius
- Porcine Adventurer

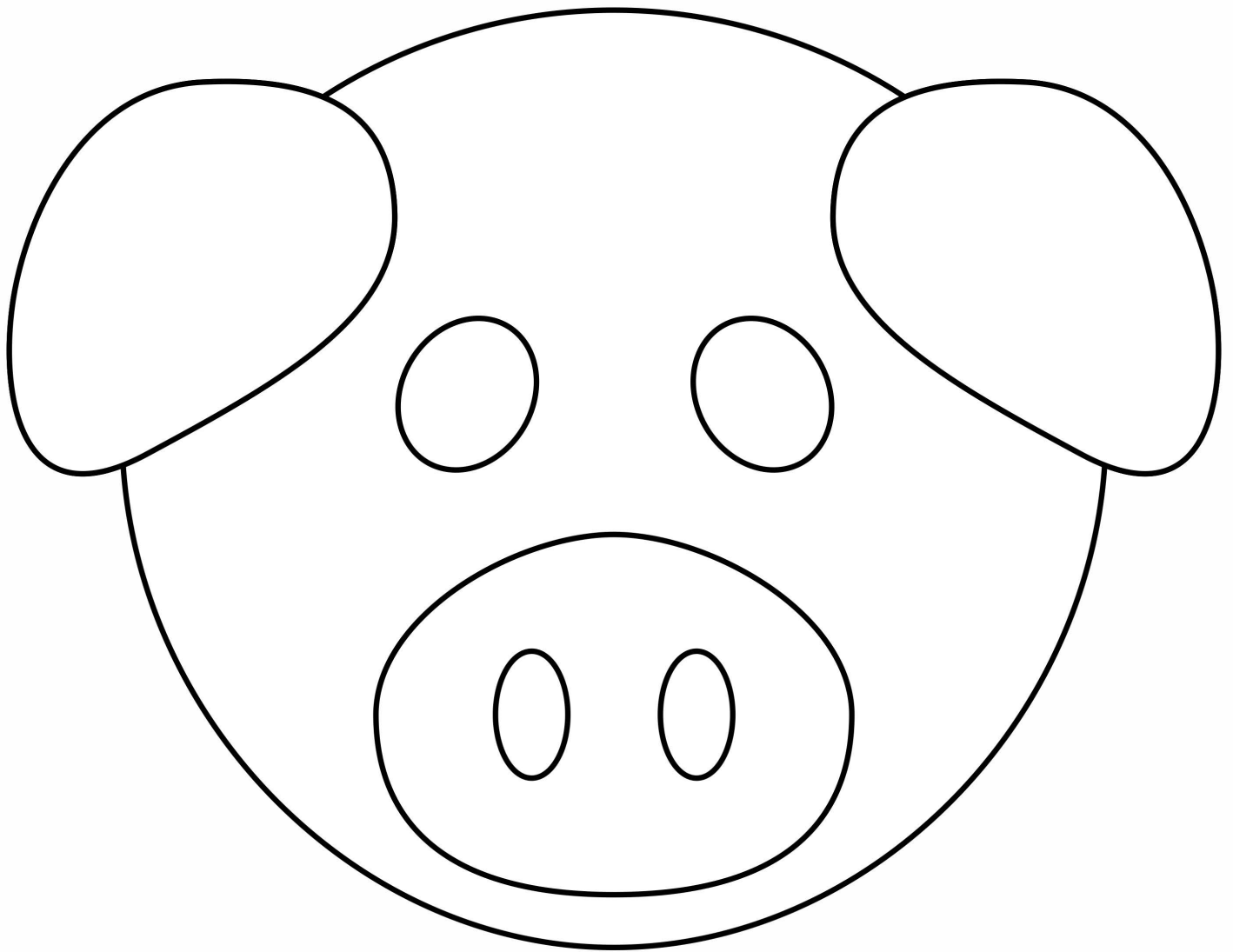
Ask students to fill in what kind of porcine character they would like to create, then draw their pig's face on the Porcine Character Sheet. You can also reference pages 4–5 of *Mercy Watson: Princess in Disguise* for examples of some different kinds of pig characters.

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Text Types and Purposes W.2.3: Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.



Porcine Character Sheet



My pig is a Porcine _____.

The Animal Was Where?



In *Mercy Watson Thinks Like a Pig*, Animal Control Officer Francine Poulet recites a memorable list of animals in unexpected places, including a raccoon in the trash, a squirrel in the chimney, and a snake in the toilet. Here is an easy art project that explores more examples along these lines:

- Have the class make a list of as many exotic wild animals as possible (the wilder and weirder the animals are, the more fun this project usually is for students). If you are already studying certain wild animals in class, these animals will serve perfectly.
- Ask the class to brainstorm a list of the most normal, everyday, unexpected places where you would never expect to see these animals hiding. In a school desk? Under the carpet? Inside a mailbox? And so on.
- Invite students to choose an animal and draw a detailed picture of it.
- On a piece of card stock, have students draw a picture of the unexpected place where they would never expect to see the animal.
- Tape one edge of the card stock onto the paper, covering the animal. This, in effect, creates a pop-up page where students can lift up the ordinary object to reveal the unexpected animal. Hilarity ensues.
- If you are using animals that you are studying in class, you can add to this conversation by having students pick unexpected places where the animal could survive. For example, if you've been studying amphibians, what kind of habitats are these animals most likely to inhabit? What type of normal, everyday place has something in common with those habitats? Indeed, maybe an amphibian would end up in the kitchen sink.

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.2.8: Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

Arts and Crafts

Put These On to Act It Out!

Some of the activities in this packet involve students acting out characters from the Mercy Watson books. These costume pieces can be cut out for students to use while bringing the characters to life!

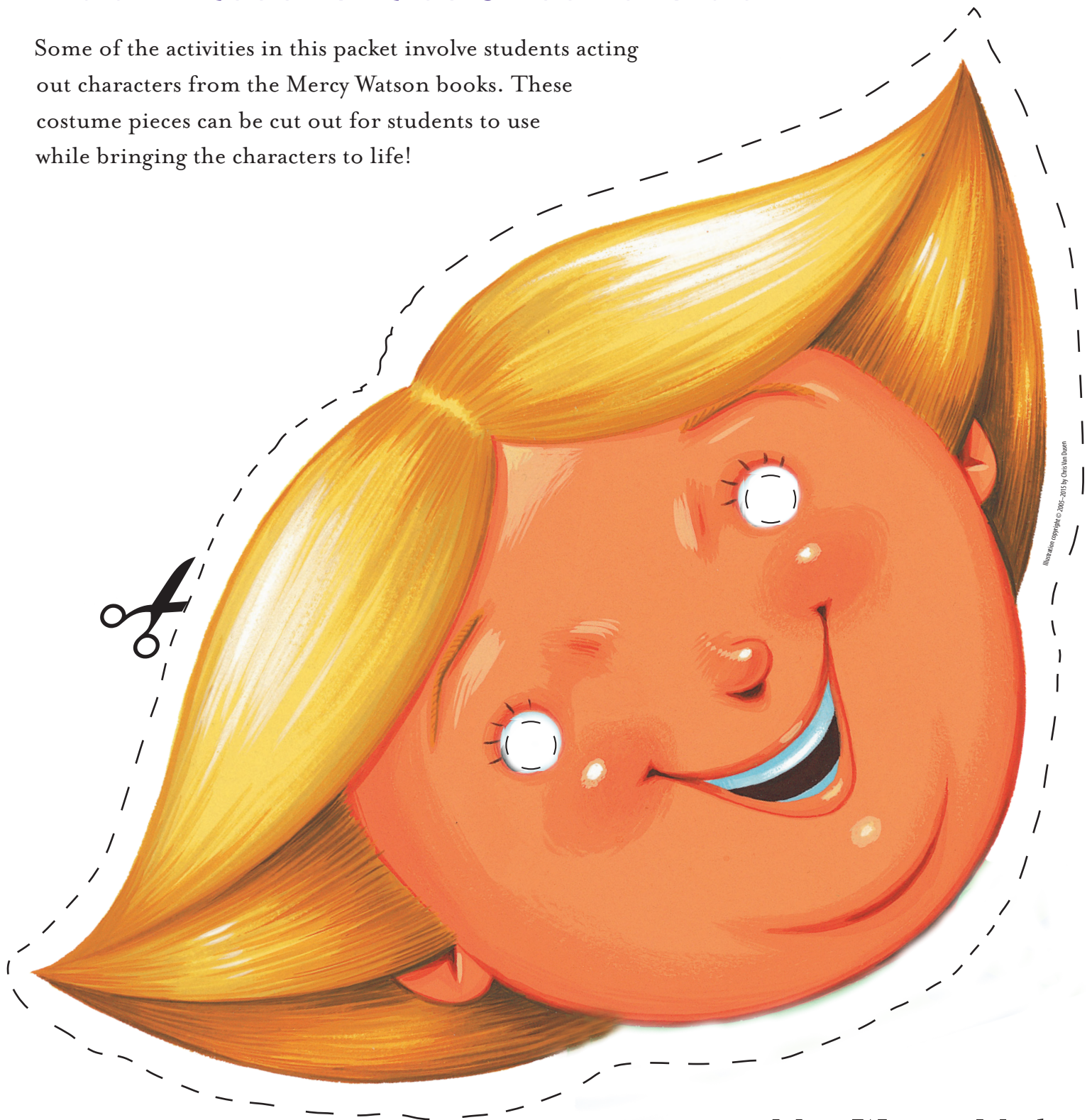


Mercy Watson Mask

Arts and Crafts

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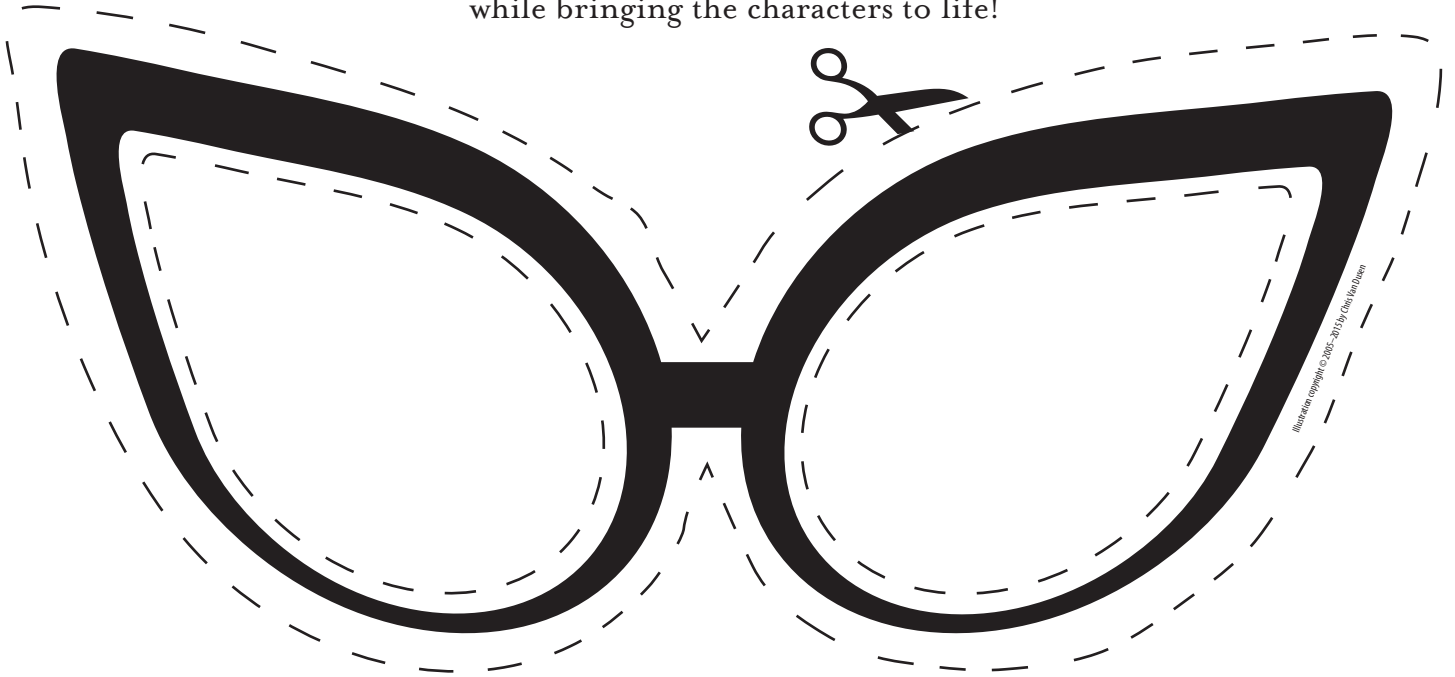


Mrs. Watson Mask

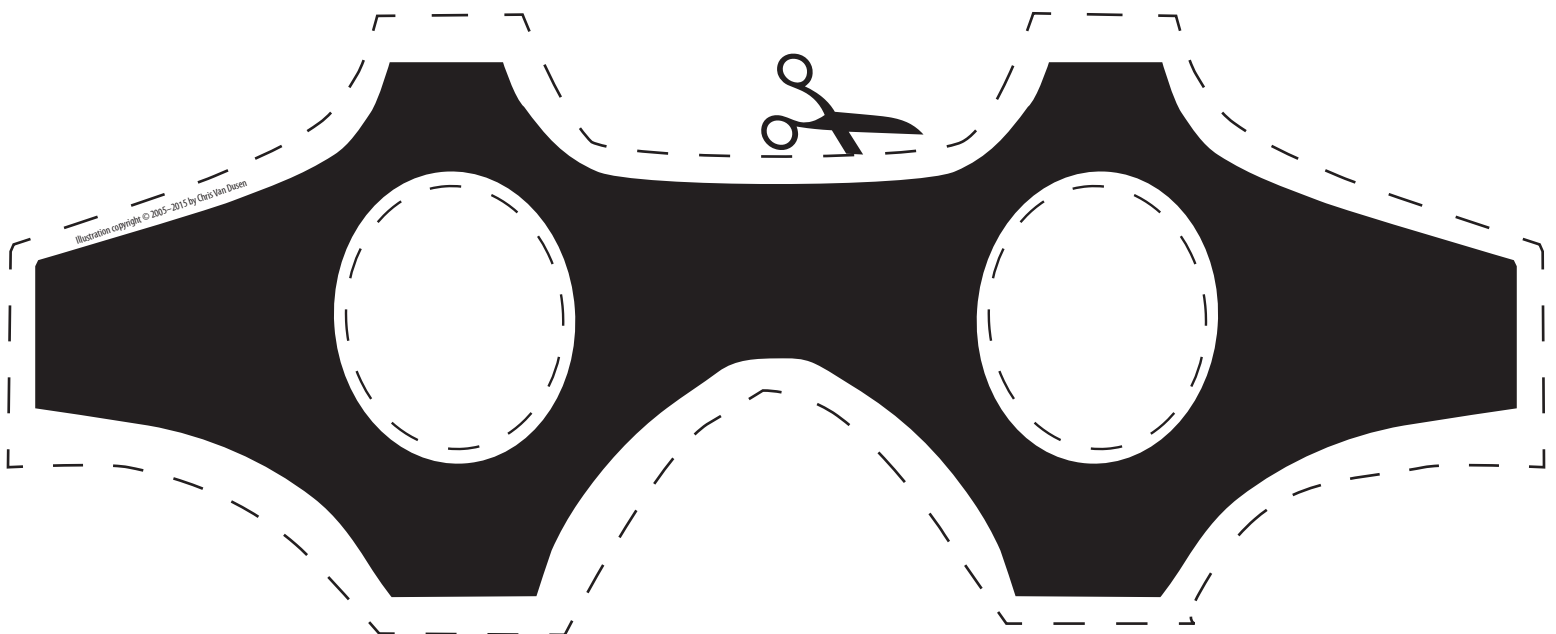
Arts and Crafts

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Eugenia Lincoln Mask



Leroy Ninker Mask

Arts and Crafts

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Some of the activities in this packet involve students acting out characters from the Mercy Watson books. These costume pieces can be cut out for students to use while bringing the characters to life!



Officer Tomilello Hat

Arts and Crafts

Toast Cards



ANGRY



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HAPPY



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SAD



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SURPRISED



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CONFUSED



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SCARED



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Arts and Crafts



Toast Cards

