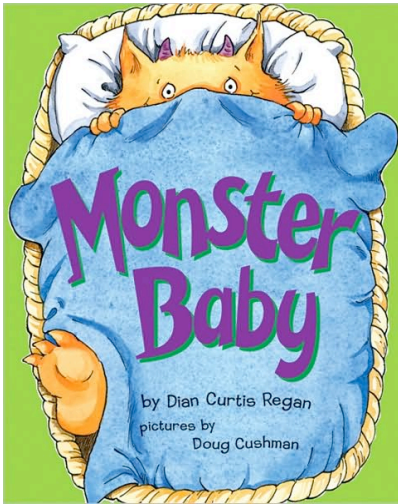


Curriculum Guide for *Monster Baby*

by Dian Curtis Regan



Created by: Jennifer Richard Jacobson

Summary: Mr. and Mrs. Oliver discover a baby in a basket on their front porch, but this isn't any ordinary baby. This Monster baby grows by leaps and bounds and can read the newspaper by the time he is two-days-old. What to do?

About the Author: The author of over fifty books for children, Dian Curtis Regan has no difficulty coming up with fun ideas. Of *Monster Baby* she writes, "I grew up being teased about being 'left on the doorstep' because I was the only redhead in my family.

"Since writers mine their own lives for ideas, all this memory needed was to be asked the question 'What if?' I'm a firm believer in the 'What if?' method of book plotting because it's worked for me time and again. So . . . What if the baby left on the doorstep was a MONSTER baby? (And what sort of fun as a writer could I have with that concept?)"

Reading Connections:

Before Reading: Introduce new vocabulary

Create a four-column grid. In the first column write *words* at the top, and list the new vocabulary words below. At the top of the next three columns draw: 2) a thumbs-up, 3) a thumbs-down, 4) a neutral thumb. As you pronounce each word, ask students to use their thumbs to show you whether or not they know its meaning. They may choose: *yes I know the meaning, no I don't know the meaning, or I think I might know the meaning.*

Discuss the definition of words when two or more students are confident in their understanding. If too few students know the meaning of a word, suggest everyone listen for the word during the read-aloud and try to determine its meaning in context. Here are some suggested new vocabulary:

proper
officially
proclaim
foster(parents, child)
enrolled
agriculture

During the Reading: Use critical thinking skills

Practice the use of context clues: Pause when you come to lesser-known words and encourage students to determine their meaning from context. For example:

*Mr. Oliver **fashioned** a lemon crate into a cradle . . .*
*Sheriff Grady rode out to the farmhouse to **officially proclaim** the Olivers **foster parents**.*

After Reading: Discuss

Why do you think the janitor, the nurse, and the principal attended the school meeting? What do you imagine each of these people might say about Olly?

Why do you think Mr. Oliver “did not comment on how odd it all seemed?” Why do you think he “could not help feeling a little bit proud of his monster foster son?”

Do the other schoolchildren enjoy working and playing with Olly? Why or why not?

Now that Olly has gotten used to his size, in what other ways do you think he could help children?

The author wrote that “Mr. and Mrs. Oliver hugged Olly the best they could.” What did she mean by that?

Response to literature: Make text-text connections

Create a Venn diagram: Compare Olly in this story to other “larger-than-life” characters. Some possibilities:

Clifford the Big Red Dog by Norman Bridwell

Granite Baby by Lynne Bertrand

Giant John by Arnold Lobel

Leonardo the Terrible Monster by Mo Willems

Paul Bunyan retold by Steven Kellogg

Writing Connections

Traits: Monster Baby makes an excellent mentor text. Model these traits:

Ideas: Quality details *show* us how a character is feeling rather than *telling* us. Examine the following sentences. Ask students to tell you what they learned about Mrs. Oliver:

“Mrs. Oliver’s hand shook as she pulled away the blanket.”

“And he’s ours,” she sang. ‘tra-la, tra-la, all ours.’”

Encourage students to *show* how they or their characters are feeling in their stories.

Organization: Dian Curtis Regan is a master of surprise endings. (Check out *Barnyard Slam* as well.) In *Monster Baby*, she creates a twist by introducing an even larger monster. Now, instead of wishing he were smaller, Olly wants to be bigger!

Invite students to find other books in your classroom library that have surprise endings. Take time to discuss how the author surprises readers by leading them to expect one thing, but delivering another!

Word choice: Vivid verbs create imagery, and infuse the written work with energy.

Draw a T-chart. As you reread, invite students to point out action words that are particularly strong. Record those verbs in the left-hand column. After reading, have students suggest the more familiar, less vivid verb the author could have used -- if she were not being so careful with her word choice!

<i>Padded</i>		<i>Walked</i>
<i>Fetched</i>		<i>Got</i>
<i>Gathered</i>		<i>Got</i>
<i>Sipping</i>		<i>Drinking</i>

Genre: Tall Tales

A tall tale is a humorous, exaggerated, unbelievable story told as if it were entirely true. (See *Chance*, another tall tale by Ms. Regan.) Invite your students to turn themselves into a tall tale character (giving themselves amazing abilities). Then have them do what Dian Curtis Regan does: ask, "What if?"

To inspire students (and to provide models), read tall tales retold by Steven Kellogg, Mary Pope Osborne, and Ezra Jack Keats.

Genre: fiction

For those students who are looking for a fun writing topic, suggest they write about finding a surprise on their doorstep.

Writing Process: Revision

The current ending was not the first ending author wrote. In an earlier draft, the story ended with the 'welcome to the family' party. But like all authors, Ms Regan spends a good deal of time rewriting -- trying to write the very best (and in this case, funniest) story she can. With students, discuss the author's choice in endings. Invite them to reread their own work to see if there are any improvements they can make to their own endings. Encourage students who have made changes to share their decision-making with the class.

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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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