

Story Study: I Want My Hat Back

Key themes and ideas:

Though animals do the talking and acting in Jon Klassen's *I Want My Hat Back*, the book touches on key themes of being human: the tension, or interesting difference, between what is said and what is meant, the effects of the subconscious on our behaviour, the danger of assumptions; the reality of power-based hierarchies and even the nature of justice. Your child/children can have fun with these concepts through the following discussion questions and activities.

Order of events:

1. Read the Story
2. Discussion Questions
3. **LEARNING ACTIVITY A:** The Great Hat Argument
4. **LEARNING ACTIVITY B:** Hats Around the World
5. **LEARNING ACTIVITY C:** Video Clip
6. **LEARNING ACTIVITY D:** Create a Puppet Show
7. **LEARNING ACTIVITY E:** Make a Book
8. **Other learning ideas**
9. **External Source Learning Activities - PDF** (<https://p4c.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/I-Want-My-Hat-Back-1.pdf>)

1 & 2 - Reading and discussion:

Pre-reading: Show your child/children the cover of the book and ask them to imagine what the story might be about. What kind of feelings do they associate with the statement "I Want My Hat Back"? Is the bear feeling anger? Sadness? Confusion?

After reading, ask them these plot-based questions:

- Why does the hat look so funny? They could have made a much more fashionable or dignified hat for the bear, why didn't they? Why is it more fun with a goofy hat?
- Why does the book show us the hat on the rabbit before the bear realizes? How does this add drama/suspense to the story? Why doesn't the bear realize the rabbit is wearing the hat?
 - The children enjoy using the pictures to figure out what is going on. It is fun for them to realize what's going on and the bear doesn't.
 - When we create our own books we want to use this technique. There will be tension between the picture and the action/narration. The pictures will reveal meaning in the story that the words alone do not. This not only makes the story more fun/engaging but it is also an important part of how the story helps the children improve their critical thinking / intellectual capacities.



- The colour of the text and the page when the bear realizes the rabbit lied to him help give the story vibrancies/enhances the meaning. How does the red page help us to realize that the bear is angry?
- Most pages have a small number of words but the page where the rabbit lies to the bear has a whole paragraph. How does this enhance the story? How is this like poetry?
- Why is this a major clue that he is lying
- The rabbit says to the bear: “I would not steal a hat”, even though nobody asked him if he did (they asked if he had seen a hat). Why is this such a big clue that he is in fact the thief?

- Which animals does the bear ask about his hat?
- Which animal stole the hat?
- What does the bear do when he realizes who stole his hat?
- Consider what the rabbit says when asked by the bear. How is his response different from the other animals’ response?
- Does the illustration of the animals and the colour of the text provide any clue as to whether they’re telling the truth?
- How do people change the way they talk and behave when they are thinking different things? When they’re happy? When they’re not telling the truth?
- The bear starts out the story as a victim being taken advantage of and feeling sorry for himself; but by the end he has murdered the rabbit (a worse crime than stealing). What does this tell us about a victim mindset? How can feeling sorry for ourselves make us more likely to do bad things? Why is it dangerous to carry a victim mindset?
- What can the story tell us about revenge? Do you think that it confirms or disconfirms the idea that if you go looking for revenge you should dig two graves?
- Do you think that the bear is going to get caught for eating the rabbit? What clues in the story make this seem likely? Do you think that the squirrel will realize later on that the bear was wearing the hat?

3 - LEARNING ACTIVITY A – The Great Hat Argument

1. At the end of the story the bear eats the rabbit.
Do you think the bear would have chosen to do this if the rabbit had not lied?
2. If the bear didn’t make his decision when he was angry, could it have gone differently?
3. Should it have gone differently?

4 - LEARNING ACTIVITY B - Hats Around the World

Different hats are worn in different areas of the world and for a variety of different purposes. Ask your child how many different hats they can think of and why they are useful.



Here are a few to add to your discussion (a quick internet search will give you host of images of each of them):

- Sombrero - Mexico's signature wide-brimmed hat was designed to protect wearers from the sun, taking its name from the Spanish word for "shadow" or "shade."
- Ushanka - A Russian fur cap with ear flaps that can be tied up to the top of the cap, or fastened at the chin to protect the ears, jaw, and lower chin from the cold.
- Conical Asian Hat - Found all over Asia. It's a practical hat that was designed to shield wearers from both sun and rain, making it an excellent choice for farmers everywhere from Vietnam to Japan.
- Mokorotlo – A straw hat worn in Lesotho. Its shape was inspired by the shape of Mount Qiloane. It was first used by judges in court, later chiefs started to wear them but after some time they became available to everyone. It is also the national symbol of Lesotho and it appears on the country's flag and licence plates.
- Side cap - A military cap that can be folded flat when not being worn. It is also known as a garrison cap or flight cap
- There are many hats of the world, see how many you can find!

Supplies:

- Paper
- Colouring materials
- String
- Tape
- Scissors

Instructions:

The goal of this activity is to help develop your child/children's global perspective and cultural awareness through the association of places around the world with headwear popular in those places. By looking at aspects of culture such as hats and the rituals surrounding them, we can identify similarities and differences between ourselves and others.

1. Look at different hats worn throughout the world and discuss the differences and similarities with your child (as outlined in the first section of this activity). Think about things like: is this hat for protection from sun or cold or both? Is it formal or informal? What kinds of materials are used to make it?
2. Encourage them to use the provided materials in any creative way possible to replicate one or a few of these "Hats of the World!"
3. Discuss why your child chose this specific hat, how difficult the hat is to replicate and whether they are happy with their construction or would have used different materials or a different method if they were to do the activity again. If you have time, allow them to have a second go at the hat making process.



5 - LEARNING ACTIVITY C- Watch: I Want My Hat Back

Supplies:

- Link to Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ_GdN3Xv-Y

Questions for discussion after watching the video:

- How were the characters portrayed in this version of the story?
- How was it different to the original book? How was it the same?
- Did it make a difference to the overall feeling of the story? If so, how?
- Do you think the creators of this video did a good job?

6 - LEARNING ACTIVITY D - Create a puppet show

Supplies needed for puppets and backdrop:

1. Cardboard
2. Popsicle sticks (or regular sticks from trees if you don't eat popsicles)
3. Glue
4. Scissors
5. Sponge paint / Colouring materials
6. Paper

Instructions:

- 1) With your child/children, create all of the characters using cardboard cut outs, using the book as a reference. These are to be stick puppets, each glued to its own popsicle stick. Also create a hat to fit the bear puppet.

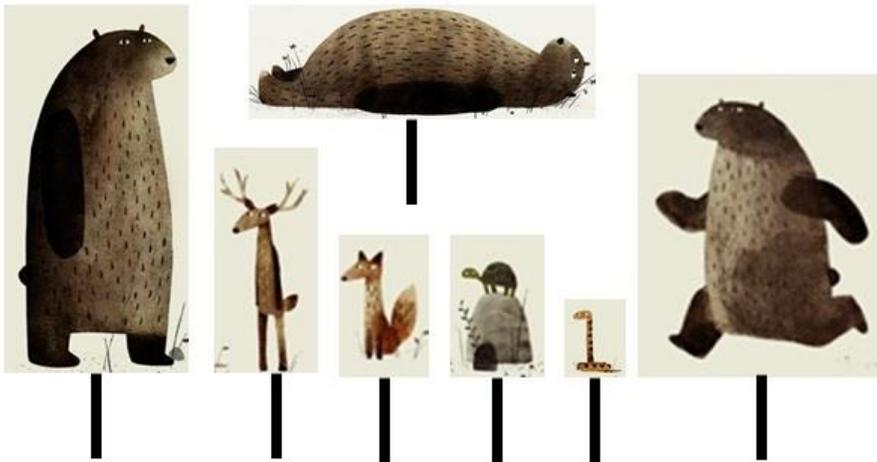
NOTE: The main character "bear" needs separate puppets for when he is walking in one direction (right to left), running back in the opposite direction (left to right), as well as a sitting and lying down. The rabbit also has two puppets, one for each direction (one with eyes looking forward and one looking up with narrow eyes).



The Characters to be made:

1. The standing Bear
 2. The lying down bear
 3. The running bear
 4. The sitting bear (with hat)
 5. The fox
 6. The frog
 7. The lying rabbit
 8. The scared rabbit
 9. The turtle
 10. The snake
 11. The mole
 12. The antelope
 13. The squirrel
- 2) Create a backdrop for the puppet show, using the book as a reference.
 - 3) Assign your child/children roles.
 - 4) Practice your puppet show by running through it a few times
 - 5) If there are other family members around, you and your child/children could perform the puppet show for them. If not, the show could be performed for an audience of stuffed animals.

Popsicle Puppets examples



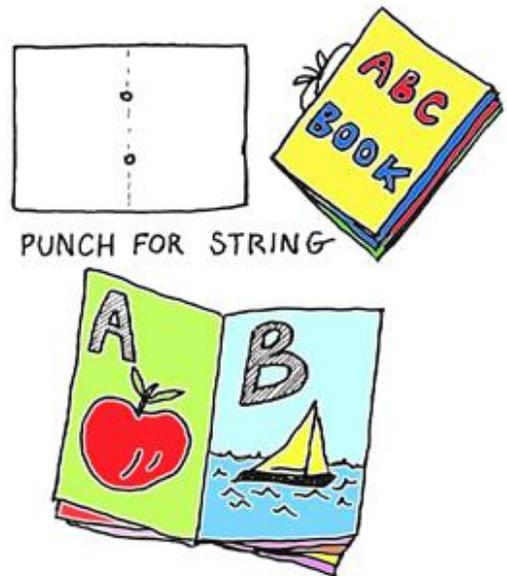
7 – LEARNING ACTIVITY E – Make Your Own Story

Supplies:

- Paper
- Colouring materials
- Awl or something to make holes in paper
- String

Instructions:

1. Explain to your child/children that they will now have the chance to create their own story book using the same techniques as I Want My Hat Back.
2. Let them come up with the basic narrative of the story and (depending on their age) either they or you will write down the basic outline of the story.
3. Then have your child think about how they will use the techniques in I Want My Hat Back in their own story to create tension. The idea is that the pictures will reveal meaning in the story that the words alone do not. Your child may want to tweak their story wording here to make for a better narrative in combination with the images.
4. Now that your child has their words and pictures finalized in draft, they can move to the story book itself.
5. Have them count how many pages their story will take to be told and then work out how many A4 pages they will need to make this happen. They can either use a full A4 page for each storybook page or turn the page to a landscape orientation and fold it in half. This means that they will now be working with A5 size book pages.
6. Pierce the spine in two places (through all of the pages) and tie them together with string.
7. You now have a blank book to populate with your child's story and illustrations
8. Once the book has been completed, have your child/children read their story (being sure to show the illustrations) to the other children in the session, or to family, friends or neighbours who might be close by.



8 – Other Learning Activities

Language-based projects:

- Rewrite the story in the form of a play script, adding stage directions for the characters.
 - Could you use your play script to make a performance?
- Think of different words to describe how the different animals are feeling at each point in the story.
- Think of a short caption to describe the action that is taking place in each of the book's illustrations.
- Write a prequel to the book.
 - Why did Rabbit decide to steal Bear's hat? Did he intend to steal it or did he just find it without its owner?
- Write a sequel to the book.
 - What happens to Bear next?

Art-based projects:

- Retell the story in the form of a comic strip.
- Using speech / thought bubbles in the correct places.
 - The author uses the colour red when Bear realises that he has seen his hat. What different colours are used to show different emotions?
- Make a poster to encourage people to look around for Bear's missing hat.

9 – External Source: LEARNING ACTIVITIES

(<https://p4c.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/I-Want-My-Hat-Back-1.pdf>)

Activities by Sue Lyle

Here are some suggestions for developing your child/children's appreciation of the concepts of lying, stealing and justice. Ideas have been inspired by Philip Cam's latest book: Teaching ethics in schools: a new approach to moral education.

Activity 1: Share the story

Read your child/children the book and make sure they get a good, long look at the illustrations. Ask your child/children to take some individual time to reflect on the story and ask them: *What were you thinking about when you were listening to that story?* Ask them to share their ideas in pairs and report back to the class.

Activity 2: Thinking about the characters in the story

The following suggestions can be used with any book where characters have behaved badly and/or well. After reading the story and/or performing the script (see activity 3) ask the children to consider:

- Were there things you liked about how the characters behaved in the story? What things were they?



- Were there things that you didn't like about how the characters behaved in the story? What were they?

Again, children can share their thoughts in pairs or small groups before feeding back to the class.

Activity 3: Making and Reading a Script

Following the reading of the story and exploration of characters, the children can make their own scripts to explore the story more. Ask pupils in groups to create a script to read aloud. Children read from their finished script and don't act out the story but use as much expression in their voices as possible and consider using music or other sound effects to mark time or for transitions between events. If there are multiple children taking part in your session, divide the roles among them (and yourself if necessary). After the reading. Discuss and reflect on the performances with your child/children.

Activity 4: Generating questions

Phillip Cam suggests a useful strategy to help children generate ethical questions and provides the following question starters. I have added the last three questions to link specifically, to the characters in this story.

Give your child/children one of the question starters and ask them to make up a question about the story by completing the following:

1. Was it right that.....?
2. Is it good to.....?
3. How bad was.....?
4. Would it have been better if.....?
5. Ought the bear to have.....?
6. How else could the bear have.....?
7. Should the rabbit have...?

If you have more than one child in your session, each child will pass their questions to another so that every child has another child's question. If there is a single child taking part in your session, you will pass the questions between the child and you, as facilitator. Ask each child to spend 5 minutes thinking about the question and then pass the question on, if there are more children in your session. Repeat this 2-3 times, depending on how many children you have in your session, to allow the children to explore each other's questions.

Activity 5: Concept stretching

A substantive concept in the story is lying. The rabbit that has stolen the bear's hat lies to the bear at the beginning of the story by saying he has not seen the lost hat (even though he is wearing it). At the end of the story the bear denies he has seen a rabbit wearing a hat (he has now wearing his recovered hat). Key questions to explore would include:

- Is it always wrong to lie?
- Can you have good lies?
- Are white lies OK?

To explore the concept of lying I recommend using a 'concept line'

Procedure: Using a skipping rope or equivalent to form a concept line and place a card saying 'good lie' on one side of the rope and 'bad lie' on the other. Read the statements below in turn and ask your child/ children to choose where to stand. If they are not sure they can stand on the rope. Ask the



children to give reasons for their choices and encourage them to change their minds as they listen to each other.

- Your favourite grandmother knits you a jumper for Xmas – you hate it – you say you love it. Good lie or Bad lie?
- A wicked queen asks who is the fairest in the land – she is not – but if you tell her she is not she will chop your head off – you tell her she is the fairest in the land. Good lie or Bad lie?
- Two school bullies come and ask you where two small boys are. You know where they are (to the left). You point to the right and say they went that way. Good lie? Bad Lie?
- You hate vegetables except potatoes. Your mum mashes up some parsnip and put it in the potato and tells you she has made your favourite vegetable potato – you eat it up. Good lie? Bad Lie?
- Children I have used this exercise with very frequently come up with the following ideas:
 - it is OK to lie to prevent hurting someone’s feelings
 - it is OK to lie to save your own life or to protect others
 - it is always wrong to lie
 - good people don’t lie
 - honesty is always the best policy

If your children put forward similar ideas, ask them look for counter examples when these ideas might not be the best ones to apply.

Activity 6: Drama

At the beginning of the story the bear has the following conversation with the rabbit (who is wearing a hat):

Bear: Have you seen my hat?

Rabbit: No. Why are you asking me?

I haven’t seen it.

I haven’t seen any hats anywhere

I would not steal a hat

Don’t ask me any more questions

Bear OK. Thank you anyway.

Ask the children to work in pairs and act out the dialogue. Then ask them to brainstorm a response to the following question:

- What’s the rabbit feeling in this dialogue?

Ask each group to report back. Younger children usually identify guilt, defensiveness, embarrassment and other emotions to describe the rabbit’s feelings. Useful questions to follow up this could include:

- Why is the rabbit being defensive?
- Do we feel guilt when we lie?
 - Why? Why not?
- If he had found the hat and kept it rather than intentionally stealing it – would we change our mind about how we think the rabbit is feeling?
 - Why? Why not?



Activity 7: Role-play

After the bear realises that the rabbit has stolen his hat he is angry and he shouts at the rabbit: 'YOU. YOU STOLE MY HAT'. On the next page the rabbit (still wearing the bear's hat) and the bear are looking at each other – there is no dialogue. Ask the children to work in pairs and prepare a script of the conversation they think the rabbit and bear might have had.

Set up a role-play in the round – children sit on the floor in a circle. Ask for a volunteer pair to move to the middle of the circle and perform a role-play for the other children based on their script. After they have been given a chance to get into their role-play, any one of the other children can move into the middle and tap either one of the children on the shoulder, swop places with them and continue with the role-play using ideas from their own script. Carry on swopping places until all children who want to have a go have had one.

Activity 8: Developing conditional reasoning using 'If... Then'

This activity introduces children to the language of conditional reasoning. Sitting in a circle ask the children in pairs to use the conditional 'If ... then' using the starters below:

- If the rabbit had said he found the hat then ...

Ask the children to take up this response and consider the new consequences:

- If the... (taking up the then answer) then...

Keep on going until the children run out of ideas. Then introduce a different 'If... then':

- If the rabbit hadn't told a lie... then...
e.g. If the rabbit had said he had found the hat then he might still be alive

Carry on as before:

- If the... (taking up the then answer) then.
e.g. If the rabbit was still alive then...

Activity 9: Considering consequences

After bear has confronted the rabbit we see him sitting alone with his hat on. Another animal strikes up a conversation that leads us to suspect he has eaten the rabbit. Remind the children of their role-play of the imaginary conversation between the rabbit and the bear – what could have happened in the actual conversation that lead to the bear eating the rabbit?

Ask the children the following question:

- Do you think there was a conversation between the rabbit and the bear if there had been a conversation before the bear ate the rabbit, what would they have said to each other?

Ask the children to consider what the bear might say to justify eating the rabbit. Ask them to discuss in groups of four:

- Can the bear justify eating the rabbit to others, including rabbit's friends?

Activity 10 Enquiry

At this stage the children will be well prepared to formulate their own questions for enquiry and they will usually devise a question linked to the concepts of lying, stealing, revenge and justice.

The following questions are substantive questions that might be useful for the you to introduce during the enquiry if they link to the children's ideas. I find it is helpful if, as part of my planning, I think about the kind of questions it would be useful to ask to help the children engage with the concepts.



- The rabbit could have said he'd found the hat and given it back – this might still have been a lie. Are some lies worse than others?
- The bear was so sad about losing his hat ('My poor hat. I miss it so much.'). Does feeling bad justify doing something wrong?
- Is revenge sweet?
- How does the bear feel after he has eaten the rabbit?
- How else could the bear have responded?
- Is it hard sometimes to be good?

Activity 9: Hot-seating

After the enquiry display ask your child/children to plan questions they would like to ask either the rabbit or the bear.

Hot-seating – volunteers take the role of the rabbit and bear and the class ask them questions.

Thanda is a non profit organisation based in rural Mtwalume, KwaZulu Natal South Africa. Our curriculum is made up of activities that we have developed over 12 years. The ideas and inspiration for our activities come from is a wonderful combination of educators, books, websites, YouTubers, and other places and people on the internet. We are very grateful for all of them. Where we use ideas or activities directly from a source, we always endeavour to give credit to the creator. We do not endeavour to profit from these story studies, we only wish to add value to the lives of people we may have the opportunity of crossing paths with.

Thanda is a non-profit Organisation based in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

www.thanda.org | info@thanda.org |

