



Grades 3-6

Authors and Educators Resources

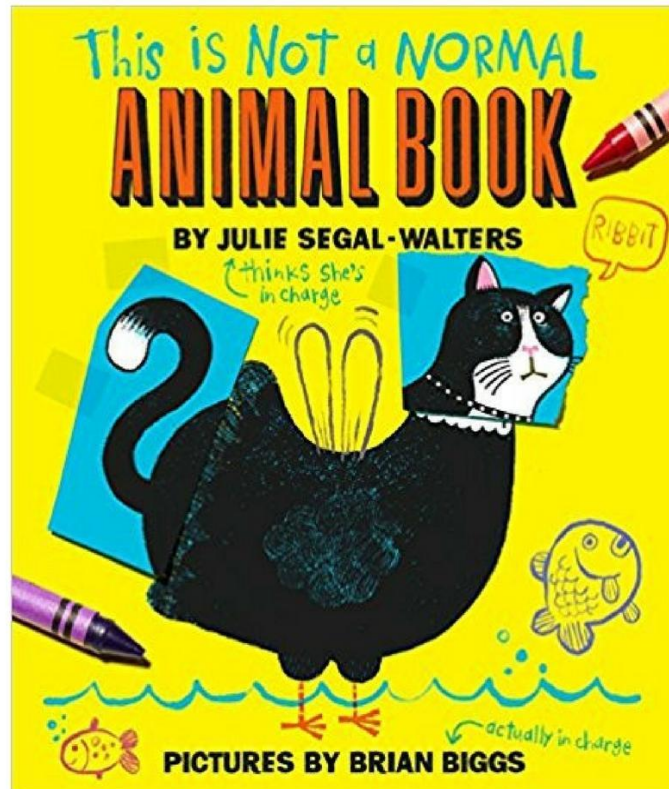


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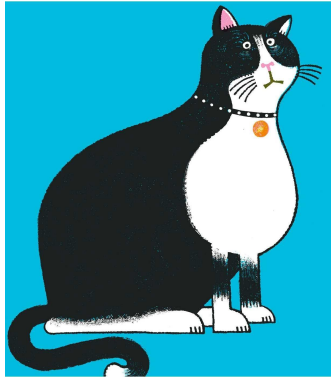
Teacher's Guide by Pamela Brunskill

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Purpose of Guide



In *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*, Julie Segal Walters uses humor and creative storytelling devices to present complex content. Scientific animal facts, social/emotional talking points, and the behind-the-scenes creative process involved in making picture books can all be found within its pages. To navigate this seemingly simple yet multi-layered book, use this guide as your teacher's map.

This educator's guide will provide you with everything you need to incorporate *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* into your classroom with lessons for:

- language arts that explore text structure, humor, and metafiction;
- science, with activities on animal facts and nonfiction back matter; and
- social-emotional development to help guide students in collaboration and compromise, and recognize the importance of making mistakes.

This guide offers suggestions and resources for integrating the book into your classroom for whatever time frame you need. Choose the activities you think best serve the needs of your students. You can choose all or some, and change the order accordingly. Use your professional judgment to adapt the ideas as necessary.

Turn the page to get started!

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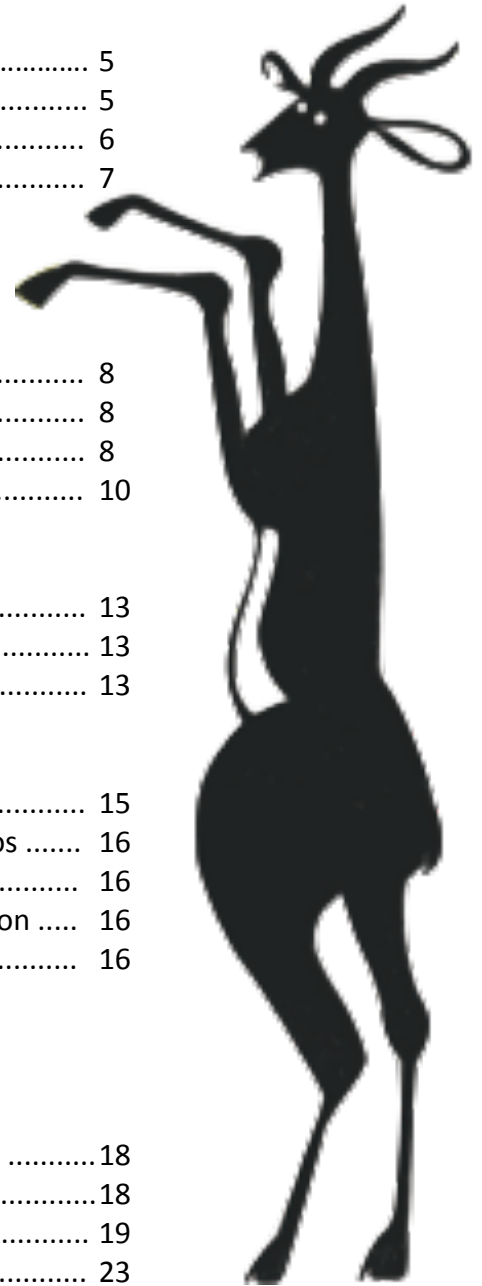
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BEFORE READING THE BOOK



Summary and Background Information

This is Not a Normal Animal Book begins as a stroll through common, everyday, normal animals – mammal, bird, amphibian, insect, reptile, and fish. The story quickly evolves, however, into a meta-fiction disagreement between the author and illustrator over how to draw the animals. The author wants simple, normal animal drawings. The illustrator, however, is confused and makes a bit of a mess. From a cat, to a hen, to a frog, to a bee, to a snake, the illustrator grows increasingly frustrated over how the author wants each animal presented. The conflict reaches its peak when the illustrator refuses to draw the author's choice of fish. Granted, the blobfish is an unusual choice of fish. The illustrator's sense of humor and author's deadpan seriousness come full circle in the closing line, when the author continues to frustrate the illustrator until the very end, and the illustrator continues to have the last word.

Based on a Yiddish proverb, the book is a behind-the-scenes look at the picture book creation process, the importance of collaboration and compromise, and the beauty of both words and art. *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* is a commercial story that breaks the fourth wall, while still remaining appropriate for classroom use. In addition to the themes and concepts mentioned, it also highlights the literary device metafiction and includes nonfiction back matter.

The language arts, science, and social-emotional lessons highlighted in this guide are just the start of how to use *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. Other discussion topics include:

- thinking outside of the box;
- learning from mistakes and the notion of a growth mindset;
- comparing and contrasting with other blobfish books, nonfiction informational animal books, meta-fiction stories, or books that reflect the behind the scenes of the picture book creation process. *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* is certainly not a normal animal book; it is so much more.

Pre-Reading Activity Suggestions



Language Arts

- Share the following Yiddish proverb with students: *If a cat laid an egg, she would be a hen.* (Revisit the proverb again after students read the book to see if their understandings of it improve.)
 - Think-Pair-Share. Have students think about what the proverb means, and then tell a partner what they think it means. After, have a few groups share. (The proverb means that if you want something to be different from its natural state, then it's no longer that thing. You can't wish for something to be different from its nature. If a cat laid an egg, then either she really was never a cat or she's no longer a cat because cats can't lay eggs. Also, it could be read to mean that wishing alone can't change facts. Only action can affect change.)
 - You may want to explain what a proverb is (definitions vary, but in general it's a short saying that offers advice).
 - Explain that Julie Segal-Walters was inspired by this proverb. Have students predict what this proverb has to do with *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*.
- Preview *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. Ask students what they think the title has to do with the book and who they think is telling the story. What does the art suggest about the mood and tone of the book?

Social-Emotional

- Ask students *How many times have you had to do something you don't want to do?*
 - Explore the themes of this book: ask students to share their experiences with collaboration and compromise, such as having to clean their rooms, going to bed, or sharing art supplies with a friend. Ask them what they do when they make mistakes. Have students record their experiences in response journals or on pieces of paper that they can revisit periodically.

Science

- Make a chart with the headings: Mammals, Birds, Amphibians, Insects, Reptiles, and Fish.
 - Have students share what they know about each, and record their responses in the appropriate columns. Ask them to pay attention to the animals in the book as you read to determine where they think they'll belong, and let them know that you'll revisit this chart after they read it.
- Have students identify animals they recognize and note the ones they don't.

Preparing to Read Aloud—A Book with Two Voices

Because *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* is written with two main characters talking back and forth, it will help students to follow the story during a read aloud if you complete the reading using two voices, puppets, or some other distinguishing cues.

About the Author--Julie Segal-Walters



Julie Segal-Walters is a children's book author who lives in Washington, D.C. with her husband, son, and pesky cat.

Before becoming a writer, Julie was the president and founder of Civic Action Strategies, a grassroots organizing and democracy development consulting firm. She worked in Kosovo, where she directed citizen engagement programs for U.S. and European organizations. Julie is a lawyer and former Congressional lobbyist for civil rights and civil liberties.

She is fluent in Spanish, has appeared as a commentator on Court TV, C-Span, NPR, and Univision, and taught courses at American University in lobbying and public policy advocacy. She can now be found advocating for her many favorite children's books to anyone who will listen. Julie also attended culinary school and spends most of her spare time browsing her cookbook library and cooking for family and friends. Julie does not bake. She thinks baking is too hard and has too many rules.

About the Illustrator--Brian Biggs



Brian was born in Arkansas in 1968, moved to Texas in 1979, fled to New York City in 1987 to attend Parsons School of Design, lived in Paris, France for a few years, ran away to San Francisco in 1993, and since 1999 he has lived in Philadelphia. He works in an old garage and writes about himself in the third person.

He has worked as an art director and graphic designer, animator for interactivity and multimedia projects, teacher, writer, and illustrator. He has written and drawn comics and graphic novels, designed publications, and illustrated for many, many magazines and newspapers. He illustrates children's books; for magazines, newspapers, and advertising; posters, toys and puzzles. He also works with animation, music, and various other media. Examples of all this stuff can be found on his website at <http://mrbiggs.com>.

Some notable clients include The Museum of Modern Art NY, The New York Times, The Washington Post, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Abrams Books, Random House/Knopf, Hyperion/Disney, The Penn Gazette, and Bell Sports.

EXPLORING THE BOOK

Language Arts Exercises meet the following learning goals: Identify Key Ideas and Details, Analyze Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- **The Visualizing Strategy**
The visualizing strategy allows students to engage actively with text. By seeing a “movie in the mind” while listening to or reading a book, students are better able to enter the story world. To activate the visualizing strategy, read *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* aloud to the students but do NOT show them the pages in the book. As you read, have students draw what they think the author is describing. Then, re-read the book and share the images with students. Compare the images in the book with those that the students created--how are they alike and different, and why do the students think that? Ask students if it was difficult to create images just from hearing the words.
- **Text Structure: Multigenre High-Concept Book**
Books can be categorized by type: fiction or nonfiction. Fiction books tell a story and have an arc that include elements of character, setting, plot, rising action, climax, and resolution. Some subtypes of fiction include mystery, fantasy, fairy tales, folktales, realistic fiction, and historical fiction. Nonfiction books provide factual information and are organized in a way to help readers understand the content provided. Some subtypes of nonfiction include autobiography, biography, concept, photo essays, and multigenre. *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* is a high concept, multigenre book. Explain that a concept book is an information book meant to explore a topic, such as numbers, colors, shapes, or weather. Concept books typically don’t have a story arc. *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* explores the classification of animals. It does not follow the typical layout of an informational book but rather employs a hybrid of information humor and narrative devices, including the arc found in fiction. The text structure allows for multiple understandings--readers can learn about animal types and also about working with another person on a project. It also has a narrative arc with a plot. You might want to ask students why they think *This is Not a Normal Book* ends the way it does. **(The book ends with the gerenuk because then the plot comes full-circle. It started with the cat, another mammal. This is a good place to examine the social-emotional impact of the author upsetting the illustrator again.)** Students can also compare the book with Steve Jenkins’ *The Animal Book*, which is a traditional, “normal,” animal concept book.
- **Discussion Questions**
Talking about a text can help students make sense of it. As psychologist Lev Vygotsky noted in his social development theory, students learn by interacting with others. Use the discussion questions on page 9 with your students to help them better understand various components of *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*.



<p>What is <i>This is Not a Normal Animal Book</i> about? What clues do Julie Segal-Walters and Brian Biggs provide to help you figure that out?</p> <p><i>This is Not a Normal Animal Book</i> is both a concept book about animals and a story about working with others. Segal-Walters and Biggs provide hints from the very beginning. The front cover exhibits the interplay between the author and illustrator. The first page of the “story” tells the reader about the concept of how to classify animals. This continues through the entire book.</p>	<p>How do the interactions between the author and illustrator characters contribute to the overall theme of the story?</p> <p>Answers will vary but should include the notion that the author is telling the illustrator what to do and the illustrator is pushing back. At first he tries to follow her words, but then he gets confused, and then frustrated, which leads to contention between the characters and the need to resolve their conflict to complete the book together. Their argument is all about describing the different animals.</p>
<p>What are some alternate titles that would fit <i>This is Not a Normal Animal Book</i>? Why do you think that?</p> <p>Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses.</p>	<p>What words stood out to you in the book? Why?</p> <p>Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses.</p>
<p>How would you describe the author? The illustrator?</p> <p>Answers will vary. Some options for describing the author include controlling, knowledgeable, and storyteller. Some options for describing the illustrator include frustrated, teasing, and funny.</p>	<p>How do the illustrations show what the author is or is not saying?</p> <p>The illustrations show the animals being described, both in hybrid and regular forms.</p>
<p>Where do you think this story takes place?</p> <p>Answers will vary. It could be in an office or a studio workspace--anywhere where the author and illustrator can interact.</p>	<p>Who is telling the story? Why do you think that?</p> <p>The author and illustrator both tell the story. It is a conversation between the two that tells about the different types of animals. As the illustrator figures out what is happening and why the author wants him to draw the things she does, that’s when the reader figures it out, too.</p>
<p>What surprised you most about this book?</p> <p>Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses.</p>	<p>Have students generate their own language arts-related question to the book!</p>

- Literary Device: Metafiction

Authors employ literary devices to connect with readers. They convey meaning in different ways. Julie Segal-Walters uses metafiction in *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. Metafiction is fiction *about* fiction. In theater, this often happens when an actor speaks directly to the audience and breaks the invisible “fourth wall.”

With students, investigate the author’s craft of breaking the 4th wall to engage with the reader. Share other examples of metafiction with the class, such as Jon Stone’s *The Monster at the End of this Book*, Mo Willems’ pigeon books, Barnett’s *Chloe and the Lion*, and David Ezra Stein’s *Interrupting Chicken*. (For more examples, go to Goodreads’ page on metafiction at

https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/82505.Picture_Books_That_Break_the_Fourth_Wall.) Have students identify similarities among these books with *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. Then distribute *What is Metafiction?* (page 11) to

students and have them work in pairs or independently to find examples and nonexamples in the book. Meet with students who need reinforcement and explain the answers. Challenge the students who are proficient in understanding metafiction to complete the Extension activity. Bring the whole class together to hold a discussion on how the interaction between the author and illustrator draw attention to the fact that the book is a work of fiction.

This is NOT a normal ANIMAL BOOK



BY JULIE SEGAL-WALTERS
PICTURES BY BRIAN BIGGS

↑(aren't they pretty?)

Name _____

Date _____

What is Metafiction?

Background

Metafiction is fiction about fiction. In theater, this often happens when an actor speaks directly to the audience and breaks the invisible “fourth wall” between the stage and the audience. In books, this happens when the author draws attention to the fact that the story is a work of fiction. Julie Segal-Walters uses metafiction in *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*.

Directions:

Read the statements about *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. Decide if the statement is an example of metafiction or not. Place an X in the appropriate column. Be prepared to explain your answer.

EXAMPLE OF METAFICTION?

	YES	NO
The book’s characters make the reader aware that there is a reality and a fiction.		
There is an actual photograph of a blobfish.		
The backmatter has facts about animals.		
The plot is about how to create the book itself.		
The humor involves poking fun at the narrator’s directions.		
The book’s characters break character and engage the audience and each other about the book itself.		

Think About It

How do these examples draw attention to the fact that this book is a work about the creative process?

Extension

Take out a story you have already written. Experiment with metafiction. How can you change the story to break the “fourth wall”?

ANSWER KEY

Name _____

Date _____

What is Metafiction?

Background

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Directions:

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EXAMPLE OF METAFICTION?

	YES	NO
The book’s characters make the reader aware that there is a reality and a fiction.	X	
There is an actual photograph of a blobfish.		X
The backmatter has facts about animals.		X
The plot is about how to create the book itself.	X	
The humor involves poking fun at the narrator’s directions.	X	
The book’s characters break character and engage the audience and each other about the book itself.	X	

Think About It

How do these examples draw attention to the fact that this book is a work about the creative process?

Extension

Take out a story you have already written. Experiment with metafiction. How can you change the story to break the “fourth wall”?

Science Lesson Suggestions

- Finding Animal Facts

Motivate students to participate in information writing by asking them which animal in the book was their favorite and why. Ask, “How does it differ from the other animals in the book?” Then have them recognize different ways of organizing information about animals by asking, “How are the animals described in *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*?” (The author explains how certain characteristics make an animal. For example, when she talks about the frog and says that if it made honey, then it would no longer be a frog; it would be a bee. She describes animals by their defining characteristics. Have students consider if there are characteristics determinative of that animal and explain why or why not.)

Transition to the general research skill of finding more information about animals.

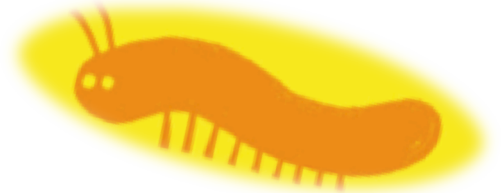
Demonstrate how to find information about animals in both print and online encyclopedias. www.britannica.com and www.encyclopedia.com are two good ones. Have students find more facts to add about mammals, birds, amphibians, insects, reptiles, and fish. Have them write down where they found their information, and add their facts to the class chart. Explain that noting where someone finds their information is important in case a fact needs to be checked. It also helps readers to know if the source is credible. Be sure to discuss the importance of research and reliable sources on finding facts versus rumor or inaccurate information. Engage students in a discussion about why it is important to verify what they read. Ask questions such as: *Are these facts correct?* and *How do I know?* A good reference site to start with is <http://abqlibrary.org/FakeNews/Home>. You can also ask students to find out what a gerenuk is (A gerenuk is a long-necked antelope found in Africa. It is a mammal).

- Fact-Checking the Illustrator

The illustrator makes some absurd comments at the end of the book; they are not intended to be facts. Help students research how animals are classified.

- A Research Project

Have students choose an animal that interests them and research more about that animal and its particular class. Perhaps some from the class will choose the gerenuk and share their findings! Use the checklist on page 14 to help guide the project.



Research Project Checklist

Directions

- Choose an animal you are interested in learning more about.
- Create a presentation to share with the class that includes a description of the animal, the class it belongs to, and images of the animal.
- Use the following checklist to help you with your presentation. You want to check “yes” for as many items as you can.



	Yes	No
Description of the animal is comprehensive: includes facts about where the animal lives, how long the animal typically lives, whether it lives by itself or in groups, unique characteristics, and/or interesting information about the animal		
Explains what the characteristics are of the class that the animal is part of		
Explains why animal belongs in that class using specific evidence		
Included several images of the animal in different settings		
Used multiple, credible sources to find information		
Cited sources		
Presentation is engaging and thought-provoking		
Information is presented in an interesting manner		

Social-Emotional Lesson Suggestions

- Discussion Questions:
 - What problem exists between the author and the illustrator? How do they resolve it? (The author has an unconventional approach to describing animals, and the illustrator has a hard time following it. He grows increasingly frustrated by the directions and starts to push back, drawing things that are not exactly what the author wants. They resolve their conflict when the illustrator finally includes an image of a blobfish, which finalizes the examples from each animal.)
 - Why do you think the narrator and illustrator don't agree? If you were the illustrator, how might you handle the conflict differently? What about the author? Do you think the author or the illustrator is considering the other's point of view enough? (Answers will vary. One possible response about why the two characters don't get along includes the notion that the author and illustrator have very different personalities. They view the project differently, and each wants the book to conform to their idea. This goes to the notion of perspectives and point of view. Students can offer suggestions for handling the interaction differently. Answers will vary according to individuals as to being the illustrator.)
 - As you read the story aloud, have students consider whether the author and illustrator are frustrated by their inability to control or change what they must accept. Stop periodically to examine the emotions of the characters. Have students compare the feelings and actions of the characters with their experiences that they wrote about in response to "How many times have you had to do something you don't want to do?"



- **Collaboration, Point of View, and Problem-Solution**
Being able to work together on a project is a theme in *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. It is also a common theme in classrooms and in the “real world.” You can adapt any of the activities in this guide to make them partner work or group projects. Additionally, if you get permission, you can post work online in a collaborative space such as Google Doc, and have students navigate the trials and tribulations of working with another person. Engage students in discussing different points of view, and acknowledging that others may view things differently. Hold discussions and role play scenarios in which students act out respectful and disrespectful ways of interacting with others.
- **Comparative Titles**
Find other examples of books that deal with collaboration and conflict resolution. Some include *The Little Red Hen* and Alexis O’Neill’s *The Recess Queen*. Make a list of the different ways the characters work collaboratively and solve their problems with one another. Have students decide on a strategy they would like to try out, and write it on the Collaboration Goal Sheet (page 17).
- **Discuss the Pros and Cons of the Author-Illustrator Interaction**
How did it make you feel? Did you connect with the author? The illustrator? Neither? Both? Why? Ask students about the characters’ motivations, feelings, and perspectives. *Why do you think the author or illustrator said or did X? How could the author and illustrator have resolved their conflict differently? What would you do differently?* After this discussion, have students revisit what they wrote about *How many times have you had to do something you don’t want to do?* Have students revise their writing to include insights about collaboration and compromise, and what they will do in future situations.
- **Conduct a Writing and Illustrating Exercise**
Have students work through a writing workshop on a short story that will be illustrated. Then, ask them to illustrate another student’s work. Discuss the challenges and benefits of relinquishing control over the art. Reflect on any conflicts or compromises that were encountered along the way.



COLLABORATION GOAL SHEET

Collaboration is the effort made by two or more people to achieve a common goal. It is not always easy. In *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*, the author and illustrator have to overcome their differences to produce a picture book about animals. There is give and take in their responses to one another, with neither one getting exactly what they want all the time.

Some qualities that make for good collaboration include:

- Listen to the other person
- Give clear directions
- Each person has a defined role in the project
- Each person knows and understands what is expected of them, and completes their part
- When you disagree with part of the project, disagree with the idea, not the person. (Respect one another.)
- Take some time away from the project if you find yourself getting frustrated, and return when you're ready to work productively again
- Apologize if you've offended a project partner
- Allow for compromise if there is a disagreement.

What other qualities can you think of that make for good collaboration?

The next time you work on a collaborative project, what is one goal you have for yourself?

AFTER THE BOOK

Bringing it All Together

- Revisit the Yiddish proverb with the students: *If a cat laid an egg, she would be a hen.*
 - Remind students that Julie Segal-Walters was inspired to write *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* based on this proverb, and it means that if you want something to be different from its natural state, then it's no longer that thing. You can't wish for something to be different from its nature. If a cat laid an egg, then either she really was never a cat or she's no longer a cat because cats can't lay eggs.
 - If students saved their predictions, have them consider how accurate their predictions were.
 - Have students discuss how the book fits with this proverb. Challenge them to find ways it doesn't fit the proverb. An extension activity could be to have the students write their own proverbs.
- The Picture Book Process

Explain that a good picture book utilizes the power of words and art when telling a story. Both are equally important. The author leaves room for the illustrator to tell a portion of the story.

Have students search the classroom library for other picture books that show the story told in both words and art. One suggestion is *How This Book Was Made* by Mac Barnett. Ask students to brainstorm a list of items that are often described in words and those that are often portrayed in art. Use the T-chart on page 20 to record their ideas. (In picture books, often names and action sequences are described in words while physical descriptions like color and shape are represented in art.)



FUN FACTS: Brian Biggs took multiple photos of each individual crayon in order to use images with consistent shadows. Also, Julie Segal-Walters wrote all of the words even though it seems like the pair collaborated!

- Fan Fiction Summative Assessment

Using *This is Not a Normal Animal Book* as a mentor text, students will participate in a Writer's Workshop to write a new story about animals using the same general formula from the book. To do so, make multiple copies of the writing paper on page 21, and instruct the students to write down an information piece about animals and their characteristics. Tell them that they will follow a similar procedure that Julie Segal-Walters and Brian Biggs did when they produced their book, wherein someone else will illustrate their writing! Students can all start off their stories with the same opening:

Animals can be classified into groups by their unique traits. Here are some examples of each category:

Then the students will choose different animals to describe by their characteristics, such as:

This is a lizard. If the lizard stored fat in a hump for weeks... it would be a camel.

The students should write solely as the author, and not include the dialogue between the author and illustrator that is shown in *This is Not a Normal Animal Book*. After the students have finished their stories, have them swap papers with a peer to illustrate it.

Debrief with the class as to how well the illustrator's images fit the writers' visions. Ask students how they felt about having someone else working on their story, and if they learned anything about collaboration in the process. Some prompts include: Did the illustrator bring something new to help you see that something had value? Did any conflicts or disagreements surface? How did you resolve them? Remind students that the goal is to wind up with something you write and then have the experience of reflection to have someone else take your words and do something with it.

This activity differs from *Conduct a Writing and Illustrating Exercise* in the social-emotional section because it can expand students' practice with and understanding of the topics explored in all three focus units: language arts, science, and socio-emotion.



Animals can be classified into groups by their unique traits.

Here are some examples of each category:

Name _____

Date _____

Picture Book T-Chart

Directions: Gather a bunch of picture books. Record items that are described in words and art in the chart below.

Items described in WORDS	Items described in ART



Name _____ Date _____



Name _____ Date _____

(title)

written by _____ pictures by _____

Standards (CCSS, Virginia, Indiana)

The activities in this guide meet the following language arts standards, as of 10/27/17.

Language Arts Common Core State Standards:

- Key Ideas and Details—CCRA.RA.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.3
- Craft and Structure—CCRA.R.5, CCRA.R.6
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas—CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.10
- Writing—CCRA.W.3, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.5, CCRA.W.7

Virginia Standards of Learning:

- Communication and Multimodal Literacies—3.1, 4.1., 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.3
- Reading—3.4, 3.5, 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5
- Writing—3.8, 3.9, 4.7, 4.8, 5.7, 5.9, 6.7, 6.8
- Research—3.10, 4.9, 5.9, 6.9

Indiana Academic Standards:

- Reading Foundations—3.RF.1, 4.RF.1, 5.RF.1 (more can be met, depending on how teachers structure lessons)
- Learning Outcome for Reading Literature—3.RL.1, 4.RL.1, 5.RL.1, 6.RL.1
- Key Ideas and Textual Support—3.RL.2.1, 3.RL.2.3, 3.RL.2.4, 4.RL.2.1, 4.RL.2.3, 4.RL.2.4, 5.RL.2.1, 5.RL.2.3, 5.RL. 2.4, 6.RL.2.1, 6.RL.2.2, 6.RL.2.3
- Structural Elements and Organization—3.RL.3.2, 4.RL.3.2, 5.RL.3.2, 6.RL.3.2
- Connection of Ideas—3.RL.4.1, 4.RL.4.1, 5.RL.4.1, 5.RL.4.2, 6.RL.4.2
- Learning Outcome for Writing—3.W.1, 4.W.1, 5.W.1, 6.W.1
- Writing Genres—3.W.3.3, 4.W.3.3, 5.W.3.3, 6.W.3.3
- The Research Process—3.W.5, 4.W.5, 5.W.5, 6.W.5

