

Sharing books...

The Mitten

by **Jan Brett** (1989)



The *Mitten*, based on a Ukrainian folktale, is a perfect story to share with children in winter. Both the illustrations, based on traditional Ukrainian culture, and the layouts feel unusual – it is as if the story is being told through a picture frame on a cottage wall.

In the story, Nicki's grandmother finally agrees to knit him a pair of white mittens, but warns that if he loses them, he will not be able to see them in the snow. When out playing, Nicki loses a mitten, which soon becomes home to a mole, a hedgehog, an owl, a bear... and with each arrival the mitten becomes larger and larger.

Finally, a mouse comes in search of warmth and tickles the bear's whiskers, causing it to sneeze and eject all the animals from the mitten. Nicki is able to retrieve the mitten, but grandmother is left very puzzled why one mitten is larger than the other.

Numerous editions of this bestselling classic are available on Amazon. You may want to buy a boardbook version, to allow for frequent handling and enable children to access the story independently.

A GOOD CHOICE

This book will suit three- to six-year-olds, who have moved beyond simple repetitive picture books. While the story is simple, the text is rich with expressions such as 'white as snow' and verbs such as 'wiggled' and 'jostled', making it perfect for building a love of language.

SHARING THIS BOOK

Given the level of detail in the illustrations, this book is best shared in close-up and read at least three times with children.

On the first reading, children will

enjoy hearing the story and looking at how all the animals fit into the mitten. Second time around, draw their attention to the smaller images bordering the page and the stories contained within these. For example, some show what Nicki is doing while the animals are piling into the mitten. They also provide a first glimpse of the animal that is about to feature overleaf and seek refuge in the mitten.

Third or fourth time around, you may like to focus children's attention on some of the finer details of the illustrations, such as the nest on the roof of the cottage or the way that you can see the spikes of the hedgehog poking through the mitten. There is plenty to explore, and the story lends itself to some follow-up activities.

Personal, social and emotional development

The relationship between Nicki and his grandmother is worth exploring. Nicki calls his grandmother 'baba'. Do children in your setting see their grandparents, and if so what do they call them? You could also look at the way the grandmother looks out for



ABOUT THIS SERIES

Over the course of this monthly series on sharing books with children, **Penny Tassoni** will look at a range of fiction and non-fiction titles, from rhyming books for babies to picture books that adults and children can explore together.

her grandson and is keen to know he is 'safe and sound'. This could lead into a discussion about why adults have rules about where and how to play.

Language development

This book will encourage plenty of comments from children as the illustrations are so interesting. You can also encourage children to tell the story about what Nicki was doing. The illustrations on the side of the page will help with this. With older children, you could also see if they can tell the story from Nicki's perspective. At what point did he miss the glove? What did he think his grandmother would say?

Mathematics

In the story, the mitten seems to accommodate many animals. Explore this further with children by providing a selection of gloves of different sizes and textures. How many objects can the children fit inside a glove? Which glove will hold the most?

Younger children could revisit the story and count how many animals try to get into the glove.

Understanding the world

You might like to engage the children in finding out more about the animals from the story – for example, the names of their young and their homes. You could extend the theme to other animal homes (a stable, hutch, sty, etc.) and people's homes (cottage, flat, bungalow, barge, etc.).

This book also presents many opportunities to explore traditions and cultures. You could point out what Nicki is wearing and with older children go on to explore national and traditional costumes. (Remember to point out, though, that national and traditional costumes are now used mainly on special occasions.) ■

