

SYLVESTER AND THE MAGIC PEBBLE

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble
by William Steig (Simon & Shuster)

Themes: Family/Magic

Grade Level: K-2

Running Time: 11 minutes (approx.), animated

Summary

Sylvester Duncan is a young donkey whose hobby is collecting pebbles. One day he discovers that one of the pebbles is magic. Each time he holds the pebble and makes a wish, the wish comes true.

Frightened by an approaching lion, Sylvester wishes on the magic pebble that he be turned into a rock. And that is precisely what happens! Since Sylvester could no longer hold the pebble in his hand and wish to be a donkey again, his wishing days are over. Sylvester's parents worry about their son throughout the year. They decide to make the best of their unhappy existence without their son, and, the following spring, plan to have a picnic. As fate would have it, their picnic takes place on a rock that just happens to be the rock that is Sylvester.

The story ends with Sylvester's father picking up the pebble and placing it on the rock. When Sylvester wishes to be himself again, he magically turns into his old self! Sylvester and his parents have nothing left to wish for-- they have all they ever wanted--each other!

Objectives

- Children will learn about family relationships
- Children will understand the importance of appreciating their relationships with family and friends
- Children will enjoy a magical adventure

Before Viewing Activities

Share the book *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* with children.

Then ask:

If the story of *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* continued after the end of the story, in what ways do you think the Duncan's life would be different from the way it was at the beginning of the story? Why do you think these changes would happen?

Talk with children about what they might wish for if they found a magic pebble. Ask: Why would you wish for these things? How would these things make your life better? Later, print children's wishes on small slips of paper. Put the wishes in a hat or box. Have children take turns pulling a wish out of the hat and seeing if they can identify the child in the group who made the wish.

Discuss with children the kinds of things they enjoy doing with their family members. Encourage children to describe those things they particularly like about their parents, guardians, siblings, relatives, and special events they may have shared with them.

Talk about special collections the children may have had similar to the pebble collection that Sylvester had.

After Viewing Activities

Cut out at least twenty circles, to represent pebbles, from light-weight cardboard. Make different markings on the circles. Be sure that each circle has markings that are identical to one of the other circles. Place all of the circles face up on the tabletop. Have children pretend that the circles are magic pebbles. Then have children take turns looking for the matching pairs of "magic pebbles." (Make your own variations on this visual discrimination game by increasing or decreasing the amount of detail in the markings on the circles, depending on the ability levels of children in your class. For example, for younger children, you might want

children to look for circles with matching colors. For older children, you might want to have them hunt for circles with matching detailed patterns.) When each child has had an opportunity to find "matching magic pebbles" celebrate with a classroom picnic similar to the one the Duncan family enjoyed.

Take a walk outdoors with children. Have children stop by a large rock, tree, or tree stump. Ask children: If this rock (tree, tree stump) could talk, what do you think it might say? How do you think it would feel about where it lives and how it spends each day? How do you think it would feel about having visitors? When you return to the classroom, have children write or dictate stories about the magic rock (tree, tree stump) that came to life. Later, have children illustrate their stories and share them with their classmates.

Remind children of the problems Sylvester faced in the story. Encourage children to think critically by asking, if you were Sylvester and you saw a lion approaching, how would you have used the magic pebble to help you?

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