

## **My Chair**

by Betsy James, Illustrated by Mary Newell DePalma  
Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic 2004

*My Chair* is a joyful celebration of imaginative play; it is also about the experience of being an individual within a community. Readers should spend time looking at the illustrations; each one consists of real and imagined elements, and they expand and complete the narrative told in the words. Ask “what is happening in this picture?” “what do you see that made you say that?” and “what more can we find?”

### **Pre-Reading Activities**

Each child’s chair is their own ‘piece of place’ according to author Betsy James. In *My Chair*, each child shares their dreams and/or ideas with their friends. Each child’s unique contribution enriches the group experience.

- Ask about experiences with imaginative play
- Ask about playing alone/playing together
- Do you use props when you imagine?
- Do you have a favorite chair?

### **Social Studies**

One of the working titles was “Will there be Room for Rosa?” which spotlighted the new baby who arrives at the end of the story, and acknowledges the mixed feelings that may arise when thinking about making room for a new sibling.

Look at the illustrations and discuss:

- Who do you think these children are? How are they related?
- Where do they live? Where are they gathering?
- How are they alike/different? Do they remind you of your friends/family/classmates?
- What are they doing all together?
- How do they welcome the baby?
- Do you have family parties? What does your family do to celebrate?

What is imagined and what is real?

- Find an illustration where the imagined part is happy.
- Find an illustration where the imagined part is sad.
- Find an illustration where the imagined part is silly.

### **Math**

There are many chairs and many children in the story, they offer lots of opportunities for counting!

- Group chairs in categories--motion/materials/uses
- Who does use chairs? Brainstorm and list: dentist, life guard, crane operator...

### **Science**

- What are chairs made of?
- What different kinds of chair structure can you identify? (beanbag, woven sling, metal frame...)

These activities are shown in the book. Try one!

- make a tin can or paper cup telephone
- make shadows with your hands and body and a flashlight

### **Language**

- Find similes, metaphors, and examples of anthropomorphism in the text. Make up your own.
- Introduce prepositions: the children are in, under, beside, behind...the chairs.
- Think about what the phrases mean and how they make you feel.

- Write a story about one of the characters introduced in the book.

### **Art/Movement/Music**

Examine the illustrations and notice the visual language of the setting and the story. The children live in apartment buildings, which are one building that houses many different families. They gather outside in a common space, around an egg-shaped gift. (As the illustrator, I like that the 'egg' 'hatches' when the baby arrives). We are never told in words why the children are gathering, or about the gift or the new baby, that is all information we read in the pictures.

The children in *My Chair* amuse themselves and each other with their imagination and (mostly) home-made toys. Try some of these yourselves:

- Newspaper hats or paper bag masks/costumes
- Weave paper (like a lawn chair seat)
- Paper towel roll telescope
- Cat's cradle game with string
- Tap rhythms on a coffee-can drum
- Pat-a-cake thymes
- Hopscotch
- Jump rope
- Musical chairs