Understanding “America the Beautiful”

Young children often understand the meaning of a word intuitively by how it is used and the context in which it is spoken, but we have all been privy to their charming and often humorous misunderstanding of words, too.

This storytime program provides an opportunity for children to think about, discuss, and more fully understand the phrases describing the land and sky in the beloved song, “America, the Beautiful.”

Note: Showing the corresponding illustration in the picture book for each discussion question will be helpful for encouraging responses.

Book

America the Beautiful, poem by Katharine Lee Bates with illustrations by Wendell Minor (Putnam, 2003)
Katharine Lee Bates penned “America the Beautiful” more than one hundred years ago after traveling across the country. The poem still serves as a reminder of the varied natural wealth and beauty of our country.

Open the storytime program by introducing the first part of the book while singing or playing a recording of the first verse of the song. The tune can be heard at http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/lyrics/america.htm.

“Spacious Skies”
Discussion question: What are “spacious skies”? We live in a very large country with a big sky overhead. Ask the children if they have ever watched clouds and imagined that the clouds were shaped like animals and objects.

Game

Birds Fly
Whenever you call out the name of something that flies, the children must flap their arms like wings. If you call out the name of something that does not fly, they must be still. Things that fly might include blue jays, eagles, airplanes, kites, robins, hawks, balloons, and butterflies. Things that do not fly might include cats, penguins, elephants, and refrigerators. It gets very silly as you go faster and faster and call out more and more ridiculous non-fliers!

“Amber waves of grain”
Discussion question: What are “amber waves of grain”? Ask the group what foods are made with grain. Explain that some of our land is used to grow food for the millions of people who live here. Ask the children if they have ever tried to grow something to eat.

Book

Share the story with your audience and, if you can find it, play a copy of the record, “The Carrot Seed.”
Storytime

Seed.” Put out by The Children’s Record Guild in the 1950s, it includes the charming songs sung to the little boy by each member of his family. They are easy to learn and fun to slip into the reading to give it added interest. You can usually get a copy on EBay. Just remember, you’ll need a record player to hear this old 78.

“For purple mountains majesty above the fruited plain”
Discussion question: What are “purple mountains majesty”? And what are “fruited plains”? Explain that America’s great mountains and lands have abundant plant and animal life.

Song/Prop

“The Bear Went Over the Mountain”
The words and music can be found at www.kididdles.com/lyrics/b005.html

Make a simple prop for this song by attaching a cardboard strip to one side of a sturdy paper plate using a paper fastener. The strip should be about 2” out from the edge of the plate. Attach the bear to the end of the strip using a brass paper fastener. Cut a brown, rounded paper mountain shape out of construction paper and glue it over the other side of the plate. Then copy the animals at the end of this article and cut them out. Swing the strip at the back of the plate to move the bear up and over the mountain.

Animals Game

Animals of the northeastern woods and animals of the southwestern desert.
Use the pictures at the end of this program to make animals for the flannel or magnetic board that live in the northeastern woods and in the southwestern desert and high desert.

Play a game with the children using this prop and singing the following to the tune of “The Bear Went Over the Mountain.”
The bear went over the mountain.
The bear went over the mountain.
The bear went over the mountain
And this is what he said.

Ask the children what sound a bear would make. Change the bear on the strip to a different animal and sing the song using the name of the new animal.

“From sea to shining sea”
Discussion question: What does “from sea to shining sea” mean?
Explain that another word for “sea” is “ocean.” Have a globe and a map of the United States on hand. Show that the Atlantic Ocean is on one side of our country and the Pacific Ocean is on the other. The United States is so big, it goes from the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Pacific Ocean. That is very large!

Animals Game

Animals of the northeastern woods and animals of the southwestern desert.
Use the pictures at the end of this program to make animals for the flannel or magnetic board that live in the northeastern woods and in the southwestern desert and high desert.

Place a cut-out of the United States in the center of the board. Hand the animals out to the children and have them help you place the animals on the side of the country where they would be found. Talk about the very different climate on each side of the country and what about each animal makes it suited to live in its particular habitat. Some animals thrive in both environments.
Quick and Patriotic Crafts

**Patriotic Flying Disc**

**Materials**
- Paper plates
- Markers (red and blue)
- Star stickers
- Hula hoops

**Procedure**
1. Decorate the bottom of a heavy-duty white paper plate with red and blue markers and stickers stars.
2. Sail the plate like a frisbee.
3. Hang hula hoops up outside for the children to use for target practice.

**Patriotic Comet Ball**

**Materials**
- Thin craft ribbon, 40" long (red, white, blue and gold)
- Aluminum Foil
- Scissors

**Procedure**
1. Cut 40-inch streamers of thin craft ribbon in red, white, blue and gold.
2. Take a square of heavy-duty aluminum foil and squeeze the foil together in the center.
3. Tie the four ribbons around the center in a knot with the ends all hanging down.
4. Squeeze the foil into a small ball with the streamers hanging down from the bottom.
5. Throw the comet ball and watch the tail stream out behind it.

**Treat to Eat**

Serve a tasty whole grain cereal snack in individual plastic bags.

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Little Cloud Flannel Patterns

Little Cloud

Big Cloud

Raindrops

Hat

Mass of Clouds
Little Cloud Flannel Patterns

Plane

Shark

Sheep

Rabbit
Little Cloud Flannel Patterns

Clown

Round Tree

Pine Tree

Down Below
Song/Prop Patterns
Song/Prop Patterns
Animal Games: Northeastern Woods Animals
Animal Games: Northeastern Woods Animals
Animal Games: Southwestern Desert Animals
Animal Games: Southwestern Desert Animals