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## Otters, Snails and Tadpole Tails

Written by Eric Ode, Illustrated by Ruth Harper

- 1) **Classifying Critters** – Use selected poems as an opportunity to group animals. This can be done little by little, one or two poems each day.
  - Create a large, empty chart listing animal groups, leaving space under each to add animals' names or their pictures
  - Read a poem or have a student read to the class
  - As a class, discuss characteristics of the animal
  - Decide in which group the animal belongs
  - Add the animal's name or picture to that group
  - Alternately, kids can each have a set of labeled boxes and draw animals inside them.
  - Other possible groups:
    - Older students  
AMPHIBIANS      MAMMALS      LIZARDS  
BIRDS              INVERTEBRATES      FISH  
or ANIMALS THAT GO THROUGH METAMORPHOSIS  
or INSECTS      NOT INSECTS
    - Younger students  
MAMMALS      NOT MAMMALS  
or BIRDS      NOT BIRDS  
or ANIMALS THAT FLY      ANIMALS THAT DON'T FLY  
or ANIMALS THAT SWIM      ANIMALS THAT DON'T SWIM
- 2) **Discovering Analogies** – Creating original analogies (as compared to relying on common clichés) can be a challenge for even older students. Rather than defining terms like simile and metaphor and then attempting to find or create examples, it can be more effective when students organically discover new analogies on their own.
  - Set out discovery stations with items ripe for analogy – a whisk broom, a potato, a pine cone...
  - Divide the students into groups, one group for each station. Groups with 3 or 4 students each work well. Students should have their writing notebooks with them.
  - Ask the students to respond to these two questions:
    - What does this object look like?
    - What does it remind you of?
  - As the students write and play with ideas, share student examples that lead toward simile and metaphor. Discuss why, for example, the pliers remind the student of an alligator or why the paint brush reminds the student of a skirt.
  - Rotate stations as you see fit.
  - From time to time, interrupt the stations to share published poem examples that make use of simile and metaphor. What did the poet compare this creature or plant or object to? Possible example poems from *Otters, Snails and Tadpole Tails* include:



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"Fiddlehead"

"The Heron"

"Dragonfly"

"The Garter Snake"

"The Turtle"

"Salmon"

- 3) **Playing with Line Break** – Line break is very important in helping us understand how the poet would like the poem to be read. Unlike sentences in prose writing, line breaks in poetry are at the discretion of the poet. How long does she want this line to be? How does he want the poem to look on paper? Where does she want the reader to naturally pause?
- After the students have had some exposure to various poems, define line break – where the poet has chosen to end the line of a poem and begin a new line.
  - On the board, write out the poem "Dragonfly" as one long sentence.
  - Take some time to discuss what the sentence is saying – the comparison of the dragonfly nymph to a knight in armor and the adult dragonfly to an actual dragon. (The students might need some background in understanding the metamorphosis of the dragonfly.)
  - Let the students rewrite the sentence as a poem, deciding where they want breaks to fall. Compare ideas.
  - Share with the students "Dragonfly" as it was published, emphasizing that these breaks were simply where the poet chose to place them. How do those breaks help us read and interpret the poem?
- 4) **Creating New Poems** – After the students have had the opportunity to read and listen to and discuss poems from *Otters, Snails and Tadpole Tails* and similar collections, and after older students have had the opportunity to discover analogous language and play with line break, give them the opportunity to create their own poems. Maybe they'd like to write other wetland poems, or maybe they'd prefer to write about a different ecosystem.
- Rhyme is only a poetic tool. If a poem doesn't want to be written with rhyme, there are plenty of other tools waiting to be used instead. What poetic tools are used in "Dragonfly"? "The Heron"?
  - Many of our favorite poems surprise us at the end, maybe giving us a chuckle, or perhaps causing us to look at something familiar in a new and different way. Poems like "The Turtle," "Salmon," and "The Garter Snake," for instance, use metaphor to give their endings a surprise.
- 5) **Life Cycle Studies** – Pick from dragonfly, frog, heron, salamander, bat, turtle, beaver, garter snake, duck, raccoon, salmon, shrew, or any others you like.
- List life development stages, foods, predators, colors, habitat, how many babies or eggs.
  - Draw & color their favorite creature and life stage.
- 6) **River Otter Study**
- List characteristics: size, stages, foods, litter size, predators, habitat, etc.
  - *Did you know, they toss and hold rocks for hours, play with sticks, roll around ("get in knots"), and love to slide down muddy or snowy banks?! Draw them doing something funny.*