Title/Author: The Boxcar Children

Suggested Time to Spend: 8 Days (Recommendation: two sessions per day, at least 20 minutes per day)

Common Core grade-level ELA/Literacy Standards: RL.K.1, RL.K.2, RL.K.3, RL.K.4, RL.K.10; W.K.1, W.K.8; SL.K.1, SL.K.2, SL.K.3, SL.K.4, SL.K.6; L.K.1, L.K.2, L.K.4

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to identify the central message of the story, a positive view on life and finding the best in a situation will help a person to overcome obstacles and challenges that they will face, as well as describe how characters respond to challenges.

Teacher Instructions

**Before the Lesson**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis below. **Please do not read this to the students**. This is a description to help you prepare to teach the book and be clear about what you want your children to take away from the work.

Big Ideas/Key Understandings/Focusing Question

A positive view on life and finding the best in a situation will help a person to overcome obstacles and challenges that they will face.

Synopsis

The Boxcar Children is about four orphaned children living on their own. They set out to find a safe place to live and overcome challenges. The children have to use common, everyday items in creative ways to satisfy their needs. They face issues like: how to keep their milk cold with no refrigeration, how to clean dishes with no soap, and how to stay safe with no adults to protect them. The children’s attitudes as they face the challenges provide strong examples of work ethic, ingenuity, moral choices, and family devotion.

1. Go to the last page of the lesson and review “What Makes This Read-Aloud Complex.” This was created for you as part of the lesson and will give you guidance about what the lesson writers saw as the sources of complexity or key access points for this book. You will of course evaluate text complexity with your own students in mind, and make adjustments to the lesson pacing and even the suggested activities and questions.
2. Read the entire book, adding your own insights to the understandings identified. Also note the stopping points for the text-inspired questions and activities. *Hint: you may want to copy the questions vocabulary words and activities over onto sticky notes so they can be stuck to the right pages for each day’s questions and vocabulary work.*
3. Consider pairing this series of lessons on *The Boxcar Children* with a text set to increase student knowledge and familiarity with the topic. A custom text set can be found[here](https://achievethecore.org/page/2825/the-boxcar-children-with-companion-text-set)[.](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B66A6Ds77LpiU3dIZVFxMFFkLUk) *Note: This is particularly supportive of ELL students.*

*Note to teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs): Read Aloud Project Lessons are designed for children who cannot read yet for themselves. They are highly interactive and have many scaffolds built into the brief daily lessons to support reading comprehension. Because of this, they are filled with scaffolds that are appropriate for English Language Learners who, by definition, are developing language and learning to read (English). This read aloud text includes complex features which offer many opportunities for learning, but at the same time includes supports and structures to make the text accessible to even the youngest students.*

*This lesson includes features that align to best practices for supporting English Language Learners. Some of the supports you may see built into this, and /or other Read Aloud Project lessons, assist non-native speakers in the following ways:*

* *These lessons include embedded vocabulary scaffolds that help students acquire new vocabulary in the context of reading. They feature multi-modal ways of learning new words, including prompts for where to use visual representations, the inclusion of student-friendly definitions, built-in opportunities to use newly acquired vocabulary through discussion or activities, and featured academic vocabulary for deeper study.*
* *These lessons also include embedded scaffolds to help students make meaning of the text itself. It calls out opportunities for paired or small group discussion, includes recommendations for ways in which visuals, videos, and/or graphic organizers could aid in understanding, provides a mix of questions (both factual and inferential) to guide students gradually toward deeper understanding, and offers recommendations for supplementary texts to build background knowledge supporting the content in the anchor text.*
* *These lessons feature embedded supports to aid students in developing their overall language and communication skills by featuring scaffolds such as sentence frames for discussion and written work (more guidance available* [here](https://achievethecore.org/page/3159/ell-supports-for-writing-and-discussion)*) as well as writing opportunities (and the inclusion of graphic organizers to scaffold the writing process). These supports help students develop and use newly acquired vocabulary and text-based content knowledge.*

The Lesson – Questions, Activities, and Tasks

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| --- | --- |
| **Questions/Activities/Vocabulary/Tasks** | **Expected Outcome or Response (for each)** |
| **FIRST READING: Chapter 1**  Read aloud each chapter with minimal interruptions. Stop to provide word meanings or clarify only when you know the majority of your students will be confused. | The goal here is for students to enjoy the book, both writing and pictures, and to experience it as a whole. This will give them some context and sense of completion before they dive into examining the parts of the book more carefully. |
| **Chapter 1**  Why did the children stop in front of a bakery at night? (page 7)  Henry states, “maybe they will let us stay here.” What information does this statement tell us about the kids? (pages 8-9)  Polite means having good manners. What are some ways the children are polite? (page 10-11)  Why would the Baker’s wife want to send Benny to the children’s home and not the other three children? (page 12) | The children stopped in front of the bakery because they were hungry and they saw something that looked good.  This statement tells the reader that the children do not have a place to live and are looking for a place to live.  They say please and thank you. They offer to work for the baker if they can stay the night.  Benny is too little to do work around the bakery. She just wants to keep kids that can be workers. |
| **Chapter 2**  Resourceful means that a person can find many ways to do something using things in ways that they may not normally be used.  How are the children showing they are resourceful?  Activity: Create a Class Chart Titled, “Being Resourceful” with the Words: Challenge, Solution, and Modern Day Solution. Throughout the story, have the students track the challenges the children face, the solution they come up with, and what might be a modern solution.  Why did the Baker and his wife decide to go to Greenfield instead of Silver City?  Jessie says, that road to the woods “is far away from people. You can tell that by the grass in the road.” How does the grass in the road tell her that people do not go down that road? (page 25) | The children hid in haystacks. The children used their hands as a cup to drink the water.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Challenge | Solution | Modern Day Solution | | Didn’t have a cup | Used their hands to drink | Cups or mugs | |  |  |  | |  |  |  |   The Baker and his wife decided to go to Greenfield because they believed that Silver City would be too far for the children to travel.  The grass looks normal; it does not look like people have traveled on it. In order for people to have traveled the path, people would have cut the grass or the grass would be short from people walking on it. This helps us to understand that the road is not used very much. |
| **Chapter 3**  Why did the author describe the morning as, “It seemed like night, for it was very dark?” (page 28)  What is Benny afraid of? (page 31)  What does it say about Jessie as a big sister when she tells the children “Now, children, what do you think we are going to do? What do you think I saw over in the woods? I saw some blueberries!”? (page 33) | The author was trying to make the setting scarier and build suspense.  He is afraid the train engine will come back and move the boxcar.  It shows that Jessie is trying to take her siblings mind off of the scary situation and try and find something fun for them to do. This shows her character as being protective, caring and responsible for her family. |
| **Chapter 4**  What can we tell about the children based on how the treat the dog they find? (page 35-36)  Resourceful means that a person can find many ways to do something using things in ways that they may not normally be used.  How is Jessie being resourceful? (page 40)  What does it say about Jessie that she shared her food with the dog? (page 41)  How are the children resourceful? (page 41) | The children show kindness to the dog and they will help an animal when it is hurt. It shows they are compassionate.  She uses pine needles to make a table and the laundry bag as a tablecloth. (add to chart)  She is thoughtful and caring because she feeds him bread and milk out of her hand.  They made beds out of pine straw and divided the boxcar into a living/dining room and a bedroom. (add to chart) |
| **Chapter 5**  How were the children resourceful with the brook? (page 46)  How would you describe Jessie? Use specific evidence from the text that gives you that understanding.    What does “make the best of things,” mean? How does Jessie “make the best of things?” (pages 47-48)  Why was Benny so careful with his pink cup? (page 52) | They used the brook as a refrigerator to keep the milk cold. (add to chart)  Jessie could be described as thoughtful, caring, resourceful, and mature. She uses other people’s trash for items they need in the house. She takes care of the her brothers and sisters as well as the dog  “Make the best of things” means that you use what you have to the best of your ability. Jessie uses broken dishes and cups and calls them treasures.  He thought it was a treasure, just like how Jessie described them. |
| **Chapter 6**  How would you describe Henry? Use evidence from the text to support your answer and explain why. (pages 58-59)  What does it say about Henry’s character that he saved the cookie and did not eat it? (pages 60-61)  To “value” something means that it is important to you. What do the children value? (pages 60-61)  How was Jessie resourceful? (page 63) | Henry is thoughtful because he brings food back for his siblings and a bone for Watch. He is hard working because he asks the man if he can cut his grass for him.  Henry is a very good big brother and he always thinks of his siblings first. He knew that the cookie would bring them all joy.  The children value family, hard work, and helping each other. (Answers will vary, but students should give specific textual evidence to support why they think the children value a particular thing.)  She created a broom from a large stick and pine needles. (add to chart) |
| **Chapter 7**  Why did Henry sleep with the hammer under his pillow? (page 69)  Why do the children name the dog “Watch?” (page 70)  Why did Henry want the bent nails? How was this being resourceful? (page 77) | Henry slept with the hammer under his pillow because they kept hearing strange noises and were afraid. He wanted to keep everyone safe.  The dog keeps the children safe and “watches” out for them.  He was able to use them to build a wheelbarrow to move the stones for the pool. (add to chart) |
| **Chapter 8**  Why did Henry use the stick to measure the water in the pool? How was this resourceful? (page 84)  Why were the logs placed between the two trees to make the swimming pool? (page 85)  Explain what the kids used to make a dinner bell. (page 88)  What does it say about Benny’s character that he is so excited he found the eggs? (page 91-92) | To make sure it was not too deep for Benny to swim in. It was resourceful because he looked on the stick to see where the watermark was to tell how deep it was. (Add to chart)  They were used to make the pool and stop the water from flowing.  A tin cup tied to a string (add to chart)  Benny is always the “little brother,” who cannot contribute much. He was the one who found the eggs and he is proud that he could help his brothers and sisters. |
| **Chapter 9**  Why did the children look down the clothesline and shut the door of the car before they left? (page 94-95)  Why did the children go 2 by 2 to Dr. Moore’s, instead of all walking together? (page 94) | The children were making sure everything was in order and they could tell if anything changed when they came back. They did it to be safe and know if anyone came in.  They were afraid that someone would notice them if they stood out to people as a larger group of 4, instead of 2. |
| **Chapter 10**  Why did Dr. Moore enter Henry in the race? (page 103)  How could a burnt tip of a stick be used for a pencil? How is this an example of being resourceful? (page 112)  What does Benny’s reaction to Watch pointing to the word tell about Benny’s character? (pages 113-114) How is this similar to his brother, Henry? | Dr. Moore wanted to give Henry the opportunity to meet his grandfather.  The ash from the tip of the stick will smear on the paper. Just like the lead of a pencil. (add to chart)  Benny is competitive and wants to do well. He does not want Watch to “beat him.”  Henry was very competitive in the race and wanted to win, just as if Benny did not want Watch to read before him. |
| **Chapter 11**  What was the purpose of the two older children putting “cold” water on Violet’s head when she became sick? How was this an example of being resourceful? (page 121)  What can we tell about the Doctor’s character that he would not go to bed? (pages 124-125) | They were trying to lower her fever. (Add to chart)  He is very concerned about Violet. He is hard working and worries about his patients. |
| **Chapter 12**  What does Dr. Moore’s refusal of the $5000 show about his character? (page 129)  Why is Henry having a hard time believing that Mr. Henry is his grandfather? (pages 133-135)  Why did Jessie’s face turn red when Benny said to Mr. Henry, “I thought you were so old, and cross. Jessie said so.” (pages 135-136) | Dr. Moore did not help the children for a reward. He helped them out of the kindness of his heart. He is a good man who likes to help people.  Henry had always believed his grandfather was old and mean. Mr. Henry was so nice that Henry had a difficult time believing they were the same man.  Jessie was embarrassed that Benny would say something to Mr. Henry that might hurt his feelings or he might think is rude. She realized that she was wrong. |
| **Chapter 13**  What lesson can be learned from the children having to return Watch to the lady? (page 147-151)  Do you think Watch should be returned to the lady? Why or why not? | Even though you find something, it does not mean that it is automatically yours. You should always try to find the owner.  Students’ answers will vary. Ask students to partner share their responses. |

FINAL DAY WITH THE BOOK - Culminating Task

Students will choose one resource from the class created chart that they feel represents the MOST resourceful thing the children in the story used. Students will write their opinion about why they feel it is the best resource using inventive spelling. Students will also draw a picture and dictate the resource. Students may then present their picture to the class and explain why they thought it was the most resourceful item.

Proficient Answer should include:

* Text based drawing and sentence
* Words spelled phonetically
* A capital letter to start sentence
* Punctuation to end sentence
* A drawing that matches written description
* Sentence beginning with an opinion statement (Ex. I feel the \_\_\_\_is the most resourceful because\_\_\_.)

Vocabulary

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| --- | --- |
| **These words merit less time and attention**  (They are concrete and easy to explain, or describe events/  processes/ideas/concepts/experiences that are familiar to your students) | **These words merit more time and attention**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, and/or are a part  of a large family of words with related meanings. These words are likely to describe events, ideas, processes or experiences that most of your student will be unfamiliar with) |
| Chapter 1 – Page 8-Violet –a girls’ name or small purple flower  Chapter 1 – Page 13 – cake of soap – bar of soap  Chapter 1 – Page 14 – laundry – clothes to be cleaned  Chapter 3 – Page 28-Boxcar-train car used to carry goods  Chapter 5 – Page 51-Pitcher-a large container used to hold water, milk, or some type of drink  Chapter 7 – Page 69-Queer-Different or Strange  Chapter 8 – Page 85-Dam-something used to block the water to make the water stop  Chapter 8 – Page 85-Stockings-socks  Chapter 9 – Page 98-dumpling-small pie  Chapter 10 – Page 102-free for all—everyone can join  Chapter 13 – Page 152-garage-place where cars are kept  Chapter 13 – Page 153-fountain-an art piece that sprays water | Chapter 1 - Page 8-9 - cross – angry or upset  Chapter 2 – Page 24 - fountain – drinking water  Chapter 3 – Page 29-stump-bottom of a tree  Chapter 4 – Page 39-watch-to look out for  Chapter 4 – Page 47-dump- a dirty place or a place where trash is put  Chapter 12 – Page 136—“face was red”-embarrassed  Chapter 13 – Page 146-sniffiled-smelled  Chapter 13 – Page 147-frightened-scared  Chapter 13 – Page 153-delight-happiness |

Extension learning activities for this book and other useful resources

* Teacher will create a class “junk yard.” Students will search through the junk yard to collect everyday items and combine and use them in a resourceful way to solve a challenge similar to the children in the story. Students will present their solution to the class. *Note: This is particularly supportive of English Language Learners.*Examples of possible text based challenges are listed below:
* Example Challenges:
  + You have no utensils to eat with.
  + You have no bed to sleep on.
  + You have no container to drink from.
  + You have nothing to clean the house with.
  + You have nothing to wash dishes with.
* Example Solutions:
  + Students may create a broom from a stick and pine needles
  + Students may create a bed from old pillow cases and newspapers
  + Students may create a cup from an old tin can
* The novel is filled with dialogue. Provide a couple of copies to the students and asking them to read some pages in a reader’s theater format.
* Activity: Grow a cucumber in a bottle (plant a cucumber seed in a bottle and watch it grow over time) (page 130-131)

Note to Teacher

Below is a possible sample answer chart. Each teacher and class of students may find different answer to put in as they work through the book.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Challenge** | **Solution** | **Modern Day Solution** |
| Didn’t have a cup | Used their hands to drink | Cups or mugs |
| Didn’t have a table to eat on | Pine needles | Table |
| Didn’t have anything to cover the table | Laundry Bag | Table cloth |
| A bed to sleep on | Pinestraw | Bed |
| Keeping their milk cold | Used the brook | Refrigerator |
| Needed to serve soup | Used a stick and a cup tied together | Ladle |
| Needed to move rocks | Used discarded wheels and bent nails to make a cart | Wheelbarrow |
| Something to call everyone to dinner | Cup on a string | A dinner bell |
| A Place to Swim | Created a dam in the brook using logs | Swimming Pool |
| Needed something to write with | Burned the end of a stick | Pencil |
| Needed to lower Violet’s Fever | Used Cold water to bring down her temperature | Medicine |

**What Makes This Read-Aloud Complex?**

1. **Quantitative Measure**

Go to <http://www.lexile.com/> and enter the title of your read-aloud in the Quick Book Search in the upper right of home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.

Most of the texts that we read aloud in K-2 should be in the 2-3 or 4-5 band, more complex than the students can read themselves.

2-3 band 420-820L

4-5 band 740-1010L

490

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Qualitative Features**

Consider the four dimensions of text complexity below. For each dimension\*, note specific examples from the text that make it more or less complex.

Overcoming Obstacles

Being Resourceful

Needs vs. Wants

Dialogue throughout, chapter settings, straightforward structure otherwise

Different time period based colloquialisms

Understanding of what a boxcar looks like

Understanding of gender roles in the past

Historical Time Period

**Meaning/Purpose**

**Structure**

**Language**

**Knowledge Demands**

\*For more information on the qualitative dimensions of text complexity, visit <http://www.achievethecore.org/content/upload/Companion_to_Qualitative_Scale_Features_Explained.pdf>

1. **Reader and Task Considerations**

What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

* The historical time period and students’ ability to make connections will be a challenge. To support this it will be important to provide a historical context for the time period through picture books, videos or photos prior to the reading of The Boxcar children.

How will this text help my students build knowledge about the world?

* + Helps build an understanding of Needs vs. Wants
  + Teaches lessons on a hard work ethic, making moral decisions, and being creative and resourceful

1. **Grade level**

What grade does this book best belong in? This book should be read aloud to Kindergarteners.

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