Agatha’s Feather Bed – A “Fowl”Experience!

These lessons were developed by Ana Houseal, middle school teacher, and Kristin Simon, East Central Iowa Council of Governments. The matching card game cards were created by Bev Wagner, Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency, and reprinted with permission. Copyright Center for Energy and Environmental Education, University of Northern Iowa

• Grade level: Upper Elementary, Middle School
• Subject areas: Reading, Science, Social Studies
• Estimated duration:
  Preparation time: 1-2 hours. The teacher will need to read the book, Agatha’s Feather Bed, and become familiar with the materials the class will use. Sorting through recyclables for the recycling game (Session two) will take additional time. If students do research, teachers may devote additional time to identify websites where students are likely to find the information they need.
  *Session one:* 50 minutes. Globe activity, reading the book, Agatha’s Feather Bed, discussion about raw materials and final products, Memory Game.
  *Session two:* 50 minutes. Recycling game – looking at recycling in your community
  *Session three:* 50 minutes. Reread the book, focusing on language. Identify idioms and puns. Explore the meanings of more idioms, especially those related to fowl.

*Each could be done independently, or combined to form a larger lesson.*

• Setting: Classroom or library reading program
• Skills: Identifying world resources, reading for comprehension, making predictions, sorting, identifying idioms
• Vocabulary: Vocabulary found in the Memory Game (http://www.ceee.uni.edu/Portals/0/Documents/Education/Programs/agathas_memory_game.pdf); idioms listed on the Fowl Idiom and Puns Sheet at the end of this lesson plan

Summary
In this delightful story, Agatha explains that “everything comes from something”—wool from sheep, linen from flax, cotton from cotton bolls. Then, in a turn-about, naked geese remind Agatha that “everything comes from something,” and that her new feather bed is made from their feathers. Students explore the following concepts: everything comes from something; preparation for community recycling; and the use of “fowl idioms” in literature.

Objectives
Students will:
  • Develop an understanding that raw materials are turned into familiar products
  • Learn to accurately identify and sort recyclable materials for their own community
  • Develop new language understandings of idioms, especially ones related to the story

Materials:
  • The book, Agatha’s Feather Bed, by Carmen Agra Deedy (It would be helpful to have several copies.)
For the Globe Activity:

- A globe: cut a hole in the globe so that you can pull out samples of natural resources
- Samples of resources, such as bauxite, hematite, oil (in a sample bottle with a tight lid), sand and glass cullet (in sample bottles) a small “model” tree or photo of a tree

For the Recycling Game:

- Examples of locally recyclable materials
- Recycling bins, boxes, or paper grocery bags
- Clean materials – some recyclable, some not
- Signs for bins (cans, plastic, glass, newspaper, magazines, cardboard, bottles for deposit)
and/or on the back (hematite, bauxite, sand, wood, oil) If you laminate them, they can be easily reused for future sessions

For the Memory Game:

- One set of the Memory Game cards, printed on card stock and laminated if possible, for every 3-4 students.
(See http://www.ceee.uni.edu/Portals/0/Documents/Education/Programs/agathas_memory_game.pdf)
If each set is printed on different colored card stock, they will be easier to separate after the games.

For the Drawing Idioms’ Activity:

- Fowl Idioms and Pun Sheet (see last page of this lesson)
- 11 x 17” white paper
- Colored pencils, crayons or other drawing materials

Background

The focus of this series of lessons and activities is the connection between raw materials and products. The globe activity can be extended in many different ways as explained in “Extensions.”

Some discussion may be controversial, based on some of the raw materials and products mentioned in both words and pictures in the book. For example, the drawings in the margins include those of tortoise shells, coral, and ivory tusks--all of which cannot legally be collected. [Retrieved July 19, 2005 at http://www.desertusa.com/june96/du_tort.html, http://www.slumaffe.org/Illegal_use_of_coral.pdf and http://www.bornfree.org.uk/travellers.alert/trade.htm.] In some places, it is not legal to own products made of these materials either.

The Memory Game associated with these lesson plans includes these materials. Please see the Author’s note to the reader on page 29 of Agatha’s Feather Bed, where she broaches this issue. There are other raw materials such as brightly colored feathers (not dyed ones) and animal skins, which could spark controversy. It is a good idea to keep administrators informed when potentially controversial topics will be discussed in classrooms. It is also important to discuss multiple sides to issues. For example, if hunting comes up, a respectful, informed parent who hunts could possibly be invited to the classroom to talk with students.

An idiom is “an accepted phrase, construction, or expression contrary to the usual patterns of the language or having a meaning different from the literal” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, second college edition, 1984, p. 696).
It would be a good idea for the teacher to learn about some of the products to be discussed in the classroom. Many humans are far removed from the raw materials used to create the products used daily; it is not unusual for younger students to be totally unaware where bacon and eggs come from, and that venison (if they have heard of it) is deer meat. The globalization of products, and the outsourcing that manufacturing companies rely on today, can mean that raw materials have traveled a great distance to become final products, and then they are shipped back to this country. See the book, Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things by John C. Ryan and Alan Thein Durning for a look at the chain of production of various items. You may also ask your students to check their clothing and shoes to determine where they were produced.

**Procedure**
The Activities

**Session #1**
**Warm-Up**
Using a globe with an opening in the top, the teacher pulls out raw materials and invites students to make connections between these materials and products that could be made from them.

It is probably easiest to start with paper, since most students, even some of the youngest, are familiar with the fact that paper comes from trees. Be open to the connections that students make. Sometimes the connections do not seem appropriate until you hear their explanations.

After this, discussion might be generated about other materials, and then finally they could be directed to think about the variety of raw materials and products as they listen to the story, *Agatha’s Feather Bed*.

**Tip:** If time or resources do not allow for preparing the globe with a cut-out, teachers may opt to have a globe in the front of the room (without the cut-out), and simply show examples of materials that come from the earth.

**Activity – Reading the book**
Alternatives to reading the book aloud to students include having the students listen to part of it (say the first half of the book - up to the point where Agatha is presented with the dilemma), and then invite students to read the remainder of the book on their own. Before the rest of the book is presented, students could predict what might happen to the geese – How Agatha might be able to solve the problem, whether or not she will be able to in time, and if she doesn’t, what the geese might do to her. This could be done individually (on their own papers or in reading journals) or it could be done as a group.

There are many puns in the book (for example, when the geese report that they were given a “bill”). There might be room to discuss what exactly a goose might spend Agatha’s money on – things in a hotel that might be particularly appealing to a goose, things that might be problematic…. this could be done in a serious vein, or a sillier one.

Older students would benefit from having copies of the book to view pictures only—before reading any of the book. This can be especially effective for low level readers at the middle school level. This technique is called a “Picture Walk.”
Taking it the next step

Students could play a Memory Game (see http://www.csee.uni.edu/Portals/0/Documents/Education/Programs/agathas_memory_game.pdf)

Depending on the age and level of the students, the cards could be reviewed first, and/or the book could be used as a resource.

Assessment

Assessment for this activity could be done in various ways. Three suggestions follow:

1. A matching quiz could easily be developed for students with raw materials on one side, and products on the other.
2. Students could be challenged to identify new pairs of cards for the game, and to document why each pair is appropriate.
3. Older students could read the book to younger students and teach them the concepts from this lesson.

Session #2

Warm-Up

Begin with a discussion of what is recycled locally, and how the materials should be prepared for recycling (i.e., cleaning, sorting as needed, etc.). Consult with local solid waste officials to ensure your information is accurate and up-to-date.

Activity – Playing the Game

Setting up the game:

Have as many bins and signs as you want sorted. Follow your community’s recycling program guidelines (contact your local solid waste officials if necessary). If the recycling program does not require sorting because it is done by a recycling broker, discuss why sorting isn’t required (more people may participate, it may save transportation costs). Approach the game as “The Recycling Center Sorting Game” if the local program doesn’t require consumers to sort.

Set the materials and sort bins as far apart as possible. Give participants a set amount of time (possibly 60 seconds) to sort the materials into the proper bins. For every mistake (cap not off, wrong bin, not recyclable), the team gets one point. The team with the least amount of points wins. Stress that accuracy—not speed—is the point.

Note: Many solid waste agencies employ a solid waste educator, who likely could talk with the class if invited. You may ask if they would be willing to team teach this lesson.

This game may be used at all levels. Younger students may want to play several times. This can be done as a race against the clock or a collection of points, depending on the number of students and number of bins. It could also be done as teams competing against each other, if multiple sets of bins are available. Another version is to use the back sides of the signs and have students sort materials by resources.

Application/Assessment:

1. Students may design posters that publicize the local recycling program and the proper preparation of recycled materials. (Many people do not realize that if an unrecyclable material is put with recyclables, it may have the same result as placing a rotten egg in cookie dough—it could spoil the entire batch.)
2. If there is no recycling program in the area (or if it is limited), students could research why. It would be especially important to find out why it is limited – perhaps there is no nearby source purchasing recycled materials.

Session #3
Warm-up
Begin by displaying several idioms for students to identify. Examples: All knees and elbows, Tightlipped, Over the top, Raining cats and dogs, etc. List as many as possible. Using a T chart, include on one side the idiom, and the other the meaning of the idiom.

Activity – Reading or Rereading the book
Explain that in Agatha’s Feather Bed, the author uses many idioms. As students listen to the story, they should list all of the idioms they are able to identify.

The book should be read aloud, slowly, as many of these are more recognizable when heard than read. (See last page of this lesson.) Consider re-reading the book, especially if the group members identified only one or two.

Application/Assessment
Using the idioms from the earlier list, as well as other fowl idioms, ask each student to select an idiom to illustrate as its literal meaning. These can be posted, and or used in English as a Second Language and English Language Learners classes to help limited English speakers learn some of the funnier aspects of English.

Extensions
1) Write to the author, Carmen Deedy, expressing enjoyment of the story, and passing along other puns and idioms the class identified. 2) Make a book out of the idiom illustrations for ESL, ELL and elementary classes. 3) Play the Memory game with a younger group. Warning: 8th graders will be surprised that 2nd and 3rd graders tend to be VERY skilled at games like this and may easily beat them!

Resources
Solid waste agencies (Check “Landfills,” “County Sanitarian,” or “Recycling Center,” in the phone book, or call the county supervisor’s office to find their contact information. A list of Iowa solid waste agencies also may be found at http://www.iowadnr.com/waste/sw/complplan.html.)
### Fowl Idioms and Pun Sheet

From the book *Agatha’s Feather Bed* by Carmen Agra Deedy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pg#</th>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Other fowl idioms:</th>
<th>Puns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>goose bumps ducked out knocked [her] over with a feather</td>
<td>keep your ducks in a row ruffled feathers like water off a duck’s back goose egg loose as a goose light as a feather duck! chicken! (Fraidy cat?!) You Turkey! hawkish</td>
<td>the Down Town Motel, p. 21 “…tried to give us the bill …. the last thing we need is another bill.” p. 23 Agatha’s favorite catalog: B.B. Lean (a play on L.L. Bean), p. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>feathers….don’t grow on trees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>[her] goose was cooked [we’re not just] a bunch of quacks this could get ugly</td>
<td>[we’re not just] a bunch of quacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>wild goose chase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>took a gander [in the mirror]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>what’s good for the goose is good for the gander [you] keep me in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other fowl idioms:**

- keep your ducks in a row
- ruffled feathers like water off
- a duck’s back goose egg
- loose as a goose light as a feather duck! chicken! (Fraidy cat?!) You Turkey! hawkish

**Puns:**

- the Down Town Motel, p. 21 “…tried to give us the bill …. the last thing we need is another bill.” p. 23 Agatha’s favorite catalog: B.B. Lean (a play on L.L. Bean), p. 10