Title/Author: *Rocks in His Head* by Carol Otis Hurst

Suggested Time to Spend: 5 Days (Recommendation: at least 30 minutes per day)

Common Core grade-level ELA/Literacy Standards: RL.2.1, RL.2.3, RL.2.4, RL.2.7, RL.2.10; W.2.2, W.2.8; SL.2.1, SL.2.2, SL.2.6

Lesson Objective:

Students will use literacy skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) to demonstrate understanding of the central message of the text and how the meaning of a repeated phrase (“you’ve got rocks in your head”) changes from negative to positive throughout the story.

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

Stick to your passion regardless of the obstacles that stand in your way.

Focusing Question

How does the father’s passion for rocks eventually lead him to a successful career?

Synopsis

*Rocks in His Head* is a 2001 children’s picture book by Carol Otis Hurst. The author tells the story of her father’s life and passion for collecting rocks. Although people continually tell the father that he is foolish and he has “rocks in his head,” he continues to collect rocks. Through the Stock Market Crash and Great Depression with his subsequent loss of a business, the father finds refuge in rock collecting. Eventually the father’s passion and knowledge of rocks leads him to a new career as a curator of mineralogy because he has “rocks in his head.”

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 onto sticky notes so they can be stuck to the correct pages for each day’s questions and vocabulary work.*

The Lesson – Questions, Activities, and Tasks

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| **Questions/Activities/Vocabulary/Tasks** | **Expected Outcome or Response (for each)** |
| **FIRST READING:**  Read aloud the entire book 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. Don’t be concerned if students understand very little on this first reading. This will give them some context and sense of completion before they dive into examining the parts of the book more carefully. |
| **SECOND READING:**  There are multiple opportunities to pose questions to students throughout the lessons. Please be sure to include strategies such as, Think-Pair-Share, Buddy Buzz, and/or small group discussion.  **Reread page 1**  Who is telling the story? How do you know?  What does the author mean when she says, “People said he had rocks in his pockets and rocks in his head”?  (Starting at this point, the teacher will begin to chart responses to reveal how the meaning of the phrase “rocks in his head” changes throughout the text. See Resources for a model for the chart.)  How do people feel about the father’s interest in rocks?  **Reread page 2**  What do people think about the boy’s plan to work with rocks? How do you know?  **Reread page 5**  What does the father mean by, “I’ve got rocks in my head, I guess”?  (Teacher will continue to chart responses to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  Look at the illustrations on pages 4 and 5. What do you notice? What does that tell you about the father?  **Reread page 6**  What do the father’s actions on this page tell you about him?  **Reread page 7**  What do the people mean by, “If you think people are going to buy that junk, you’ve got rocks in your head”?  (Teacher will chart responses to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  **Reread page 8 and 9**  What’s keeping the father so busy?  How do you know that the father is still interested in rocks?  How do people feel about the father’s interest in rocks? How do you know?  What does the father mean when he says, “Lots of folks have rocks in their heads.”?  (Teacher will chart responses to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  **Activity – identify who is speaking in dialogue**:  Reference activity sheet #1   1. Place the activity sheet under a document camera and guide students to highlight every other sentence (not line) of the text. 2. Choral read one sentence at a time and notate who is speaking throughout the dialogue on page 9 of the text. 3. Half of the class will chorally read the father’s portion of the dialogue. The other half of the class will read the customer’s portion of the dialogue so that they can clearly see who is speaking. | The author (narrator) is telling the story about her father. The text says, “When he was a boy, my father collected rocks.”  Students may respond with only the first answer (below). Teachers may want to consider probing to get at the second; i.e., “Do you think he really has rocks in his head? Would his brain work if he did?”   1. The boy is always collecting rocks and thinking about rocks (literal). 2. The boy is showing poor judgment by spending so much time looking for rocks (figurative).   People think he’s crazy to spend time looking for rocks.  They don’t think it’s a good idea because playing with rocks would not be a “grown-up” job. Someone tells him, “There’s no money in rocks.” That means he can’t make money working with rocks.    The father is saying that he’s always thinking about rocks and that’s the way he is.  The shelves holding the filling station supplies and car parts look cluttered and unorganized. The shelves holding the rocks are neat and organized. The rocks are also labeled.  This tells us that rocks are very important to the father.  The father is smart and can figure out ways to do things. He taught himself to fix a Model T by taking it apart and putting it back together again. He found some parts he could use for free in junkyards.  The people think that the father is crazy if he thinks anyone will buy items from that pile of Model T parts.  He’s pumping gas, changing tires, and fixing Model T cars.  When customers come to the filling station, he talks about rocks, he has the rocks on his shelves labeled, and he has them in his pocket.  They are interested. They’re asking questions, looking at the rock collection, and trading rocks with the father.  Lots of people are interested in rocks.  See answer sheet in Teacher Resources. |
| **THIRD READING:**  There are multiple opportunities to pose questions to students throughout the lessons. Please be sure to include strategies such as, Think – Pair - Share, Buddy Buzz, small group discussion, and/or other strategies.  **Reread page 10.**  **Stop after the first sentence and explain that when the Stock Market fell, people lost their money and their jobs.**  What does the father mean when he says, “I may have rocks in my head, but I think bad times are coming”?  (Teacher will chart responses to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  **Reread page 11-13.**  Was the father correct in his prediction of bad times coming? How do you know? What’s your evidence?  **Reread page 14-15.**  Take a look at the picture on page 15. What do you notice?  How does this illustration support the text?  Based upon what we have read so far, why do think the family moved into a home that is old and falling apart?  **Reread page 16.**  When the family moved into the house, what was the first thing the father did? What does this tell you about the father?  **Reread page 17.**  What does the mother mean when she says, “If you think those rocks are ever going to do you any good, you’ve got rocks in your head.”? (Teacher reads this with exaggerated expression and sarcasm.)  (Teacher will chart answer to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  Reread the last line on page 17. What is the father’s reaction to the mother’s comment? What does this tell you about him?  **Reread page 18-20.**  What does the father mean when he says, “I guess I’ve got rocks in my head.”?  (Teacher will chart answer to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  After looking around at the hundreds of rocks in the glass cases, why does the lady say, “Only ten?”  Why do the lady and father smile? | The father is saying that he may be crazy, but he knows that something bad is going to happen because people have lost their money and this would affect him, as well.  Yes, the father’s prediction was correct. People couldn’t afford to buy new cars or fix old ones. When business was slow, the father had time to play chess with his customers in the filling station. When business was really slow, and he could leave and have time to go rock hunting. Finally, people stopped coming because they were too busy looking for work.  The house looks run down and in need of repair. The grass looks brown, dry, and uncut. The text says that the house was old and falling apart.  The family moved into the old house because the customers stopped coming to the gas station and the family probably could not have been able to afford a nicer house.  He built wooden shelves for his rocks because his rocks are still so important to him.  She means that he is crazy to think that his interest in rocks will ever be useful to him.  The father’s reaction is to show the mother yet another rock. This tells us that her negative comment didn’t change his passion for rocks.  He means that he is always thinking about rocks. They are his passion. He knows that about himself.  She is surprised because he must have many nice rocks in his collection. (Inference based on dialogue)  They realize they have a passion in common. |
| **FOURTH READING**:  There are multiple opportunities to pose questions to students throughout the lessons. Please be sure to include strategies such as, Think-Pair- Share, Buddy Buzz, small group discussion, and/or other strategies.  **Reread page 22-24**  What does the lady mean when she says, “You *have* got rocks in your head.”?  (Teacher will chart answer to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  Why won’t the board allow Mrs. Johnson to hire the father as a mineralogist?  **Reread page 25-27**  What does Mrs. Johnson mean by, “I told them I need someone with rocks in his head and rocks in his pockets.”?  (Teacher will chart answer to reveal how the meaning of the phrase changes throughout the text.)  What does the father’s response to Mrs. Johnson tell you about the father? | She understands that he is always thinking about rocks.  The father did not go to college.  Mrs. Johnson means that she wanted to hire someone who knows a lot about rocks, could identify a variety of rocks, and had a lot of experience collecting or working with rocks - someone who is passionate about rocks.  The father is still – and always - excited about rocks! |

FINAL DAY WITH THE BOOK - Culminating Task

* After re-reading the story in its entirety, the teacher and students review the completed chart created during the multiple readings.
* The teacher asks the students to discuss in small groups how the meaning of the phrase, “you’ve got rocks in your head,” changes throughout the story.
* Following the discussion, groups share whole group. Note: If groups do not share out that the phrase has several meanings depending on the context of the situation, the teacher should prompt students.
* The teacher poses the question, “How does the father’s passion for rocks eventually lead him to a successful career?” Have students discuss this question with a partner and include evidence from the text to support their answer. If needed, you may provide the following sentence frames as a scaffold. Students **may** use one or the other, or provide their own.

The father’s passion for rocks eventually leads him to a successful career by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I know this because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

The father’s love of rocks affected his life by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I know this because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* Next, have students respond in writing to the question, “How does the father’s passion for rocks eventually lead him to a successful career?” providing evidence from the text to support their answer.

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) |
| Page 1- quarries – a place where large amounts of stone or sand are dug out of the ground  Page 4-cash drawer – a drawer used to hold money at a place of business  Page 5- mineral - a substance that is formed naturally in the earth, such as coal, salt, stone, or gold  Page 6- spare - extra  Page 7- lift – a machine that moves up and down  Page 24 – mineralogist – a person who studies minerals  Page 24-board – a group of people in a company or other organization who makes the rules and important decisions: | **DO NOT PRE-TEACH THESE WORDS IN ADVANCE. THE MEANING WILL BE REVEALED AS THE TEXT IS READ AND TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS ARE ASKED**  Multiple pages – “Rocks in his head.” Depending upon the context, the following definitions may apply: showing poor judgment; crazy; always having rocks on his mind; showing his knowledge about rocks.  Page 2- “There’s no money in rocks.” – you can’t make money working with rocks |

Fun Extension Activities for this book and other useful Resources

Working with Rocks

* Consider inviting a guest speaker to talk about rocks and share a portion of his/her collection.
* Students may bring in their own rock collections.
* Teachers might consider having students examine the drawings and labels of the rocks on p. 7 and p. 11. Teachers could look online for pictures of some of the rocks and have students compare the images with the drawings.

Working with Idioms

Have students work together in groups to make a drawing of an idiom’s literal meaning and then act out its real, or figurative, meaning. Then see if the drawings and skits provide enough information for their classmates to figure out what the idiom really means.

1. Teacher gives each group a list of idioms and the literal meanings of each idiom.
2. Each group will draw a picture or create props needed to act out the idiom they choose.
3. Groups present their idiom to the class and classmates guess the idiom’s figurative meaning and use it in a sentence.

List of idioms:

To be in a pickle – to be in trouble

To beat around the bush – not getting to the point

Hold your horses – slow down

To let the cat out of the bag – to tell a secret

To catch someone red-handed – to catch someone doing something wrong

To cut corners – to take the easy way

To get up on the wrong side of the bed – to wake up grouchy

To cost an arm and a leg – something is too expensive

To have something up your sleeve – you’re sneaky

To see eye to eye – you agree

Note to Teacher

* There are multiple opportunities to pose the text-based questions to students throughout the lessons. Please be sure to include strategies such as, Think - Pair - Share, Buddy Buzz, small group discussion and/or other strategies throughout.
* While this story is categorized as fiction, the notes on the book jacket state that this is a story about the author’s father.
* The story refers to the fall of the Stock Market. This is discussed during the third reading. It is purposely kept brief and in simple terms that second graders will understand.
* It will be helpful to you if you use sticky notes to number the pages. Page 1 will be the first page with text.

“Some people collect stamps. When he was a boy, …”

**TEACHER RESOURCE # 1: T-Chart that will be constructed throughout the readings.**

Phrase from text Meaning

Page 1 - People said he had rocks in his pockets and rocks in his head.

Page 5 - He said, “I’ve got rocks in my head, I guess.”

Page 7 - People said, “If you think people are going to buy that junk, you’ve got rocks in your head.”

Page 9 - “Lots of folks have rocks in their heads,” said my father.

Page 10 - “I may have rocks in my head,” he said, “but I think bad times are coming.”

Page 17 - “If you think those rocks are ever going to do you any good,“ said my mother, “you’ve got rocks in your head.”

Page 20 – “I come here a lot,” he said. “I guess I’ve got rocks in my head.”

Page 22 – “You *have* got rocks in your head,” she said.

Students may respond with two possible answers:

* The boy is always collecting rocks and thinking about rocks.
* The boy is showing poor judgment by spending so much time looking for rocks.

The father is saying that he’s always thinking about rocks.

The people think that the father is crazy if he thinks anyone will buy the junk.

The father means that lots of people are interested in rocks.

The father is saying that he may be crazy, but he knows that something bad is going to happen because people have lost their money and this would affect him as well.

The mother means that he is crazy to think that his interest in rocks will ever be useful to him.

He means that he is thinking about and has an interest in rocks.

Mrs. Johnson means that she wanted to hire someone who knows a lot about rocks, could identify a variety of rocks, and had a lot of experience collecting or working with rocks. She wants to hire someone who is passionate about rocks.

**TEACHER RESOURCE # 2**

*Rocks in His Head* by Carol Otis Hurst (Student Copy)

Page 9

1 “Where did you get this one?” a customer would say,

2 holding up a rock.

3 “Found it in a slag pile in New Hampshire,” he’d

4 say. Or, “Traded for it with a fella from Nevada.

5 Gave him some garnets from Connecticut.”

6 “People in Nevada and Connecticut collect rocks

7 like you do?” people would ask.

8 “Lots of folks have rocks in their heads,” said my

9 father. He’d dig into his pocket and take out a

10 rock. “Take a look at this one.”

**TEACHER RESOURCE # 3**

*Rocks in His Head* by Carol Otis Hurst (Answer Sheet)

Page 9

1 “Where did you get this one?” a customer would say,

2 holding up a rock. (Customer)

3 “Found it in a slag pile in New Hampshire,” he’d

4 say. (Father) Or, “Traded for it with a fella from Nevada. (Father)

5 Gave him some garnets from Connecticut.” (Father)

6 “People in Nevada and Connecticut collect rocks

7 like you do?” people would ask. (People/Customers)

8 “Lots of folks have rocks in their heads,” said my

9 father. (Father) He’d dig into his pocket and take out a

10 rock. (Narrator) “Take a look at this one.” (Father)

**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.

440

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

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.

The central message of the story is, don’t let obstacles stand in your way, or pursuing your passion, regardless of obstacles, may lead to future success. The author alludes to this with the use of a repetitive phase, “you’ve got rocks in your head,” as well as through the father’s attainment of a job as a curator of mineralogy.

This story is told in chronological order from the father’s youth to adulthood. It is classified as a fictional story that takes place in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The illustrations help to support the text.

The figurative meaning of “rocks in your head” is used throughout the story.

The sentence structure on page 9 is confusing to the listener. It is challenging to determine who is speaking during the dialogue which may need clarification.

Students may not be familiar with stock market crash and resulting depression, however they may be able to relate to the “hard times” people face with the loss of job and income.

Inferences will need to be made throughout the story.

**Meaning/Purpose**

**Structure**

**Language**

**Knowledge Demands**

1. **Reader and Task Considerations**

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

Figurative language and inferences throughout the story may be challenging. Activities provided in the

lesson plan will support students’ understanding.

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

It contains the universal message, don’t let obstacles stand in your way. Reading and rereading

portions of the text and analyzing how the meaning of the phrase, “you’ve got rocks in your head”

changes through the story, will lead students to a deeper understanding of figurative language. In

addition, when tied to an informational piece, such as, *Rock Collecting*, students will have an

opportunity to connect to science content and learn more about rocks.

1. **Grade level**

**What grade does this book best belong in? Second Grade**