Title/Author: *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg

Suggested Time to Spend: 4 Days (Recommendation: two sessions per day, at least 20 minutes per day)

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

Lesson Objective:

Students will listen to an illustrated picture book read aloud and use literacy skills (reading, writing, discussing, and listening) to understand the central message in 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/Focusing Question

Seasons have significant changes. Who is the stranger? How is he connected to the changing of the seasons?

Synopsis

A stranger recuperates at the Bailey farm after Farmer Bailey hits him with his truck. He has lost his memory and exhibits odd behavior that has a mysterious relation to the weather. Chris Van Allsburg interweaves reality and fantasy to create a mystery about the identity of the stranger who impacts seasonal change. The identity is revealed through subtle clues throughout the entire text.

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.*

The Lesson – Questions, Activities, and Tasks

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| **Questions/Activities/Vocabulary/Tasks** | **Expected Outcome or Response (for each)** |
| FIRST READING:  Bring the students together so that they are able to listen and see illustrations. 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. This will give them some context and sense of completion before they dive into examining the parts of the book more carefully. |
| SECOND READING:  *(As you read this time, you are going to focus on close reading and text dependent questions that focus on the environmental and setting changes that happen in the story. Re-read entire story, pausing at certain points for questions/discussion.)*  *(During this reading, you can pull in information from other books in a seasons text set. The Reasons for Seasons by Gail Gibbons is a book that could accompany this text. Informational books will provide knowledge for students to draw upon when analyzing what is happening to the weather/seasons/setting in The Stranger.)*  Pg. 1 and 2  What time of year is it? How do you know?  *Reading pgs. 1-3 of The Reasons for Seasons will give the students context and knowledge about the four seasons. You may want to read those pages here or before the 2nd reading of The Stranger.*  Pg. 3 and 4  *Terror* may be a vocabulary word that you choose to explain and/or discuss at this point. You may choose to provide the word in context different from the story context.  Pg. 13 and 14  What are Mr. Bailey and the stranger doing?  Read pages 16-20 in The Reasons for Seasons. These pages explain what happens during autumn. Pg. 19 discusses harvest season and farmers gathering their crops. This is a place where you can connect the informational text to what Mr. Bailey and the stranger are doing in the fields.  Pg. 15 and 16  The stranger is *hypnotized* by the geese. What clue in the story might help us understand what *hypnotized* means?  (Students will need more guidance on this word; ask them to act out the stranger’s actions of being hypnotized)  What are the geese doing? Why? (Informational books can provide students with needed additional information.)  Re-read page. 18 in The Reasons for Seasons. This page explains that birds migrate to warmer climates. This will help the students answer the above question.  Pg.19-22  Why does Farmer Bailey feel that the weather has been “peculiar”?  What is the stranger beginning to notice?  (post thoughts on chart paper or board)  From reading this text as well as The Reasons for Seasons, ask students to draw a picture of what *autumn* on the Bailey farm looks like as compared to the farms around them. The illustration from pg. 21-22 can help guide them. Have them write a description of how autumn is different from summer. If needed, read pages 11-15 in The Reason for Seasons which describes summer. This could give the students information about summer so that they can write what differences occur between summer and autumn.  Pg. 23 and 24  Give students a cut out leaf that is green on one side and bright red/orange on the other (they may color each side). Have the students act out the stranger’s actions on this page.  In partners (or as a group), discuss what the changing of the leaf means or symbolizes.  Pg. 25 and 26  What changes are happening on the Bailey farm?  Pg. 27 and 28  How is the change of season (summer to fall) at the Bailey farm different from other farms?  *Etched* and *frost* are important words in the story. Students may need the experience of seeing frost.  <http://www.weatherwizkids.com/experiments-frost.htm>  <http://www.science-sparks.com/2011/11/29/ice-experiments-making-frost/>  (Create frost and demonstrate what “etched in frost” would look like.)  **Retell/Review of 2nd reading:**  Using the illustrations from the story, students retell how the pictures are related to the text. The teacher holds up or shows one illustration and asks “What part of the story goes with this picture?” (Teacher may choose to hold up illustrations in order or randomly.) Students discuss with a partner or small group and then share out their thinking. If illustrations are shown randomly, teacher may have students form a line according to the story sequence, each holding an illustration. | Students can answer this using text evidence and/or illustrations. The text evidence is, “when summer turned to fall.” Students could also point out the colors of the grass and leaves in the illustration and connect it to the change of summer to fall.  Students may act out the word *terror* or a teacher may simply give the definition (great amount of fear).  Students can gather from the text (“went into the fields that day”, “gave him a pitchfork…learned to use it well”) and the illustration that Mr. Bailey and the stranger are getting hay from the fields.  “The stranger could not take his eyes off the birds.”  *Hypnotized* – in a trance; not moving or speaking  The students sit perfectly still, staring at the geese (maybe drawn on the board) without speaking.  The geese are flying south like they do every fall. Birds fly south for the winter to look for food and warmer weather (discussion from informational books).  Farmer Bailey says that the weather has been peculiar because summer has not changed to fall/autumn yet. “Not long ago it seemed that autumn was just around the corner. But now it still felt like summer, as if the seasons wouldn’t change.”  The stranger notices   * “pumpkins grow larger than ever” * “leaves on the trees were as green as they’d been three weeks ago” * “saw a puzzling sight. The trees in the distance were bright red and orange. But the tress to the south, like those round the Baileys, were nothing but shades of green.” * The trees around the Baileys seemed “drab and ugly” to the stranger and he thought that it would be much better if all the trees could be bright red and orange.   Students hold leaves with the green side facing them. They blow on the leaf, twisting it to the other side as they blow. This symbolizes a change from summer to fall.  Students should understand (from The Reasons for Seasons and The Stranger) that when summer turns to fall, the leaves on the trees change from green to bright colors. In this discussion, students may also recognize that the stranger caused this leaf to change and connect him to the changing of the seasons/weather.  The stranger changes back into his old clothes and leaves the farm. “The air had turned cold, and the leaves on the trees were no longer green.” The illustration shows that the trees are changing colors (something that happens in the fall).  Their trees stay green for a week after the trees to the north have turned colors. Overnight, they change their color to the brightest around. The words “See you next fall” are etched in frost. |
| THIRD READING:  *(This reading concentrates on the clues surrounding the mystery stranger. The focusing question is: What clues help us figure out who the stranger is and how he is connected to the seasons? Re-read the entire book, pausing along the way to gather/discuss the clues. Organize the clues on a chart. Example chart is provided.)*  Pg. 1 and 2  (Begin a chart for clues to solve the mystery)  From what we know about summer turning to fall, what clue did the author give us about who the stranger may be? How is he connected to the seasons?  Pg. 5 and 6  The word *hermit* is used here to describe the stranger. Ask the students to use evidence in the text to explain what hermit might mean. They may also draw a picture of a hermit based on the author’s description and character dialogue.  Pg. 7 and 8  Discuss *mercury* and thermometers (measures temperature). Explain that mercury used to be used (instead of red liquid) to measure temperature. Show the students pictures of a mercury thermometer. Bring red-liquid thermometer for students to see, if possible. Demonstrate inserting the thermometer in ice water and then in hot water to show the students what happens when a thermometer is exposed to extreme temperatures.  Explain what happens when the doctor comes to see the stranger.  Since we know what a thermometer does, why might the mercury have gone to the bottom?  What does this [broken thermometer] tell us about the stranger and how is he connected to the seasons?  Pg. 9 and 10  The author gives us many clues about the stranger’s identity on this page. What clues could be used to help us understand the stranger’s identity?  Mrs. Bailey felt a draft and shivered as the stranger blew on his soup. What does draft mean?  Pg. 11 and 12  How is the relationship between the stranger and the rabbits unusual? What does it tell us about the stranger and nature?  Pg. 13 and 14  What differences are there between Mr. Bailey and the stranger as they work in the field?  Why might the stranger not sweat?  Why doesn’t he tire?  Pg. 15 and 16  What clue did the author give about the stranger’s identity on this page? Why would the geese flying south captivate his attention?  Pg. 21 and 22  Is the stranger starting to get his memory back and remember who he is? How do you know? Is he beginning to realize that he has a job to do? What from the story helps you answer that? *Refer back to chart from 2nd reading about what the stranger is beginning to notice.*    At this point in the story, the author is beginning to give the readers evidence that the stranger is gradually getting his memory back and is realizing that he is there for a reason (to bring in fall).  Pg. 23 and 24  How is the stranger feeling on this page? Why?  Pg. 25 and 26  Draw a picture, add caption, and/or write a description of what happens to the leaves on the Bailey farm.  Pg. 27 and 28  Who left the message etched in frost? How do you know? | A cool breeze blew across Mr. Bailey’s face right before we hit the stranger with his truck. That cool breeze could represent the stranger AND fall coming in. Students may make the connection that the stranger is fall.  “odd rough leather clothing”  “sort of fellow who lives in the woods alone”  “the stranger didn’t seem to understand the questions Mr. Bailey asked”  “I don’t think,” whispered Mrs. Bailey, “he knows how to talk.”  (*hermit* – a person who lives away from others)  The doctor checked him out and said that the stranger had lost his memory but should remember who he is in a few days. When he takes the stranger’s temperature, the mercury stays at the bottom. The doctor says that his thermometer is broken.  The students may agree with the doctor and think that it is broken. If so, follow-up question could be: What would make the thermometer break? By providing information about thermometers, the students should/may discuss that the stranger’s temperature may be very low, which on a thermometer means cold. Guiding question to get them to think deeper may include: What might be inside of him?  These may be guiding questions for the above conversation. Students may discuss that he is not a real person and begin/continue to give ideas of who the stranger is. They may make the connection between the cool fall weather and the cold temperature of the stranger.  “seemed confused about buttonholes and buttons”  “the steam that rose from the hot food fascinated him”  When he blew on his soup, Mrs. Bailey shivered as she felt a draft. The students may connect the draft to the stranger.  Cool breeze. Students will use the context clues.  It is unusual because the rabbits hop towards him and let him pick them up. Wild rabbits run away from humans and do not usually let them (us) touch them. It shows that the rabbits feel comfortable around him, as if he is familiar to them.  Mr. Bailey has to stop and rest but the stranger does not tire or sweat.  This will call for students to infer from this page and previous events in the story. Students may discuss that his temperature is low, which means he would not get hot.  Students may build upon the conversation and idea that the stranger is not a real person, citing other evidence from the story such his low temperature as a support for their answer.  The stranger became hypnotized when he saw the geese flying south in the V formation. The stranger feels connected to the birds in nature.  Discussion and answers at this point in the story should yield an understanding that slowly the stranger is beginning to remember. Students may realize this but if not, ask the guiding questions to help them understand this pivotal section of the story. They may cite him being hypnotized by the geese flying south or his feelings on pages 21 and 22 as he looked out to the north. They also may begin to discuss that the stranger has the job of bringing in the fall season. The rest of the book reveals this, so students may continue this conversation through the end of the story, as more clues are read/heard and thought about.  The stranger is confused and upset. He feels as though something is wrong. When he blows on the green leaf, it turns a bright color. He realizes that he remembers who he is and what his job is.  Students should draw a picture of green leaves on the trees and then one that shows the bright colored leaves. Their description should include the changing of the leaves as soon as the stranger leaves Bailey farm. They should be making a connection between the stranger and the weather/season. The illustration on pg. 26 will help guide this.  The stranger left the message. Students can draw upon any of the clues provided by the author. The students may point out that the message implies that he comes back each year, like fall does. |

FINAL DAY WITH THE BOOK - Culminating Task

*Note: This culminating task may take more than one day to complete and/or could be chunked into smaller work sessions.*

* Begin the culminating activity with a review of the clues chart together as a whole group. (Leave up for all students to refer to). Then, have students work with a partner to discuss the questions (Who is the stranger? How is he connected to the changing of the season?). This will give them time to share their thinking and collaborate with a peer before working individually on the task. Before writing begins, give students a graphic organizer (see below) to plan their thinking/writing. This sheet can be used to guide their writing assignment.

*Who is the stranger? How is he connected to the changing of the seasons? Use textual evidence to support your answer.* Students will write a response using pictures and words to support their answer.

* Students may need to refer back to the text and/or clue chart to support their writing.
* Knowledge from the informational texts will help students make connections between the actions/feelings of the stranger to the changes (or non-changes) that are occurring in the setting of the story.

Sample response

I think that the stranger in the story is nature *[students might also think that the stranger is Jack Frost, Father Nature, autumn, fall, etc.]* because of all his connections to the changing of the seasons. When summer turns to fall, the leaves begin to change, the air turns cool, and birds fly south for the winter. All of these things are affected by the stranger being at the Bailey’s farm. Farmer Bailey feels a cool breeze on his face right before he hit the stranger. Fall was coming before the stranger came to the farm but stopped while he is there. When the doctor came to take his temperature, the thermometer’s mercury went all the way to the bottom. A thermometer measures temperature so the stranger’s temperature was very low. Later, the stranger saw geese flying in a V and became very hypnotized by it. He starts to notice other things in nature also. The trees on the Bailey farm are green while the other trees are turning bright colors. This is because the stranger is on the Bailey farm and it could not change from summer to fall. When he blows on a leaf, it turns from green to a bright color. As soon as he leaves the farm, the trees on the farm turn bright colors and fall comes. Now, fall comes a week later to the Bailey farm and the words “See you next fall” are etched into frost on the window. All of these clues tell me that the stranger had an effect on the changing of the seasons. Because he causes these strange things to happen, he must be nature.

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 - jammed – push suddenly with force  Page 3 - terror – great amount of fear  Page 5 - parlor – living room; room where people gather  Page 9 - fascinated – very interested in  Page 9 - draft – cool breeze in a house  Page 19 - peculiar – unusual  Page 21 - drab – plain or dull; not bright | Page 5 - hermit – a person who lives away from others  Page 7 - mercury – a silver liquid that used to be used in thermometers  Page 15 - hypnotized – in a trance; not moving or speaking  Page 19 - autumn – fall; season between summer and winter  Page 27 - etched – carved out  Page 27 - frost – a thin layer of ice that forms in cold weather |

Fun Extension Activities for this book and other useful Resources

* This YouTube video was created directly from the story. Students will be able to see the story “in action”. Most of it follows very closely. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7NSj--t_UQ>
* <http://www.chrisvanallsburg.com/stranger.html> (Chris Van Allsburg’s website) Here you can find resources for the book, as well a synopsis and an author interview. <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/vanallsburg>
* The stranger is quite different than the Baileys, yet they took him in and cared for him. The issue of him being a stranger to the family may arise. Discuss (write about) why it’s important to be kind to people who are different from us.
* Teachers may also choose to take the “mysterious” approach to the text and have students become clue detectives to solve the mystery of the stranger. “How does the author show you that the stranger is mysterious?”

Note to Teacher

* Not all of the vocabulary was addressed in this lesson. Teachers should use their professional judgment of what words can be learned in context, which need further explanation/activities, and when students need to be told the definition.
* Below is a sample of the clues chart that students discuss and add to throughout the second reading. Adding illustrations to the left-hand column can enhance student learning. These illustrations add so much understanding and depth to the story! Just one was added below to show an example of how it could be set up. Students talk with each other and with the teacher about which clues need to be added to the chart. This chart should be referred to and used frequently especially during the culminating activity.

**What clues help us figure out who the stranger is and how he is connected to the seasons?**

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| Page number(s) | Clues/Textual Evidence | What does this show you? Thoughts? |
| Pages 1 and 2 | “A cool breeze blew across his [Farmer Bailey] face though the truck’s open window.” This happened right before Farmer Bailey hit the stranger with his truck. | *(This column will depend on student comments/discussion/thoughts. Possible student responses and/or thinking are charted below.)*  The cool breeze that Farmer Bailey felt right before he hit the stranger could mean that he [the stranger] is nature (or fall) and he was doing his job (bringing in fall weather; being a part of nature) before he was disrupted. This disruption could be why the seasons stopped changing on the Bailey’s farm. (Students may make the connection between the cool breeze and fall weather.) \*Note in the illustration how the trees/grass look like they are beginning to change colors. |
| Pages 5 and 6 | “…dressed in odd rough leather clothing.”  “must be some sort of hermit…sort of fellow who lives alone in the woods.”  “The stranger didn’t seem to understand the questions Mr. Bailey asked him.” | A hermit is someone who lives away from someone and doesn’t really know how to interact with people. This description shows us that the stranger isn’t really acting (or dressed) like a person. He doesn’t talk or seem to understand the Baileys. This may tell the students that he isn’t used to being around people. |
| Pages 7 and 8 | When the doctor came to check the stranger, he believed that his thermometer was broken because of the mercury went all the way to the bottom. | We know that thermometers measure temperature. The stranger’s temperature is very low which tells us that the stranger is cool (like fall weather!). Also, students may note that this isn’t what happens to a real person. |
| Pages 9 and 10 | The stranger is confused about buttons and buttonholes. The steam coming from the food fascinated him. When he blows on his soup, Mrs. Bailey feels a draft. | The stranger is fascinated with things that most people do not really notice. \*Note the look on the stranger’s face in the illustration – confused, surprised, unsure. The draft that Mrs. Bailey feels may be the stranger blowing on the soup. We know from the previous page that his body temperature is low and would produce a cool breeze such as a draft. |
| Pages 11 and 12 | Wild rabbits hopped up to the stranger and let him touch them. When they left, they looked back at him, as if he were going to follow them. | We know that wild rabbits do not usually let people touch them and pick them up. These rabbits were very comfortable around the stranger, as if he were part of nature like they are. \*Note the stranger looks happy and at ease holding them in the illustration. |
| Pages 13 and 14 | While Mr. Bailey had to stop and rest as they worked, the stranger didn’t tire or sweat. | We sweat when we get hot. The stranger must not be hot which may be because of his low body temperature. Maybe he does not get tired because he is not really a person. |
| Pages 15 and 16 | The stranger seems to be hypnotized by the geese flying south in the V formation. | Geese are a part of nature and fly south for the winter. The stranger stares at them hypnotized because he feels like they are familiar to him or maybe because he feels connected to them. |
| Pages 17 and 18 | The stranger seems happy but still has no memory and isn’t speaking. | Even after a long time at the farm, the stranger still can’t remember who he is. |
| Pages 21-24 | The stranger begins to notice puzzling things, such bright colored trees while the trees by the Bailey Farm stay green. The stranger feels that something is wrong. When the stranger blows on the leaf, it turns from green to a bright color. | \*Note: the illustrations are very powerful on these pages!  The stranger is beginning to get his memory back! The sight of the bright colored trees helps him realize that he is connected to nature and the changes that are (should be) happening. The stranger realizes after blowing on the leaf that he is the reason fall has not come to the Bailey’s farm yet. (Refer to his facial expression in illustration) |
| Pages 25-26 | The trees on the Bailey Farm turn bright colors as soon as the stranger leaves. | The stranger is the reason that the leaves finally change. While he was on the farm, the fall weather did not/could not come. He is connected to the changing of the season. \*Note the illustration. |
| Pages 27-28 | Every year the trees on Bailey Farm stay green a week longer than surrounding trees. “And etched in frost on the farmhouse windows are the words that simply say, “See you next fall.”” | The stranger comes back each summer to change the season to fall. This tells me that he is fall/nature! |

Student planning guide for culminating activity (Feel free to edit as needed for your students!)

**Who is the stranger? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| **Evidence from the story.** | **What does the evidence tell you about the stranger?** |
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**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.

640L

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.

This is a very complex dimension of this text. The theme is subtle and is revealed over the entirety of the text. The author uses clues to lead the students to understanding who the stranger is and how he is connected to the changing of the seasons. The use of reality and fantasy in this text can be a challenge to students.

The main character is complex. “The stranger could not take his eyes off the birds. He stared at them like a man who’d been hypnotized.”

The story is chronologically sequenced over a period of time, from summer to fall. The author pauses the story and events after uneven time increments.

The language structure is mostly familiar with

simple sentences. The language used to describe the

main character requires the student to make inferences in order to discover the man’s identity. Vocabulary is mostly familiar with some unfamiliar words that need to be taught.

This story demands higher order thinking in order to make sophisticated inferences. The students have the challenge of piecing together a mystery by recognizing clues in 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?*

* + The complexity of the main character’s identity will be a challenge because of the inferences

throughout the text to draw conclusions about who the stranger is. Support using repeated

readings, visuals, and rich, sequenced questions.

* + Unraveling a subtle theme in a text can be challenging for students. Support using read-alouds, class discussions, text dependent questions and a graphic organization to track the evidence of the theme.

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

This text will help students build knowledge about seasonal changes. Students use textual evidence

to make inferences that reveal the mystery of the stranger.

1. **Grade level**

What grade does this book best belong in?

* This text could be read independently at the 4-5 grade band.
* This text could be a read aloud lesson for grade 2.