

JOSEPH HAD A LITTLE OVERCOAT

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by Simms Taback
(Viking/Penguin)

Themes: Folktales, Growth and Change, Humor, Music

Grade Level: PreK–4

Running Time: 10 minutes

SUMMARY

It starts as a shabby overcoat full of holes, and so it becomes a jacket, and when that jacket got worn and full of holes, it becomes a vest. As the tale continues, the overcoat shrinks to nothing, but Joseph figures out how to make something out of that. Based on a Yiddish folk song, and illustrated with the bright colors and patterns of eastern European folk art, this is a charming story that's literally full of holes. An unusual feature of the program is the video version of the holes in the original book pages. Viewers see through the holes into the next scene and back into the preceding scenes. The tale vividly recreates Joseph, his farm, his animals, his neighbors and the daily life of his village. The music and English words of the original folk song are included.

OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and listen to a story based on a folk song.
- Children will guess what will happen next in a story.
- Children will group and classify objects in a

scientific manner.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Show students the cover of the book or video, and ask them to discuss the title and art. Discuss the visual clues about Joseph—he is poor and he lived in the country, near farm animals. Ask children what they think will happen to Joseph's overcoat, and to pay close attention to the story to see if their predictions come true.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

With the aid of the class, retell the story backwards. Then ask what Joseph had left of the overcoat before he had the song (nothing). What was the last little piece of the overcoat he had? (a button) Keep reconstructing the overcoat in this way until you are at the beginning. On a second viewing of the whole tale, the class will want to read along.

Connect the story to science and math by using the art to group and classify. The artist, Simms Taback, has thoughtfully added scenes intended to develop just those skills. Go back over the program screen by screen. Find the screens that show many objects, either ungrouped or in groups. Discuss what makes the objects, people or animals in each group alike and different.

Connect the story to literature, art and music by having children perform the story. To make Joseph's shrinking costume, use three almost

identical old coats from a thrift shop. Collect colorful scarves to make women's aprons, shawls and headcoverings. Encourage children to study the pictures in detail as they plan their costumes. Have children learn the song by replaying the program.

Connect the story to literature and music by asking students to remember and recite other songs, poems and stories in which actions or objects are subtracted from each other. (The ever-present "Ninety-Nine Bottles" is the best known example.)

Connect the story to history and geography by finding the place names on the screen and locating them on a map. Use the fact that the addresses are all in Poland to discuss immigration from eastern Europe. Explain and discuss the visual clues that Joseph is from a Jewish village in Poland.

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