

SNOWFLAKE BENTLEY

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by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, ill. by Mary Azarian

Themes: Nature, Photography/Art, Science, Weather, Biography

Grade Level: 1-5

Running Time: 20 minutes

SUMMARY

This Caldecott Medal winning book poetically reveals the life of the photographer and farmer, Wilson Bentley. From the time he was a small boy, Willie was fascinated by snowflakes. This was fortunate since he lived in an area of Vermont called the “Snowbelt,” which receives up to 120 inches of snowfall per year. Educated at home, Willie spent many hours through many winters studying individual snowflakes. He identified their universal hexagonal shape and drew hundreds of pictures. At the age of seventeen, his parents bought him a special camera that worked with a microscope, and Willie began to photograph the snowflakes that he was so passionate about. Throughout his life, Wilson Bentley refined his photography, capturing the images of thousands of snowflakes, no two alike. At the age of sixty-six, a book of his work was published. This book brought the beauty and wonder of the Vermont snow to people all over the world.

OBJECTIVES

- Children will learn about the life and work of Wilson Bentley.
- Children will examine the qualities and properties of snowflakes.
- Children will learn about research and scientific investigation.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Talk with children about snow. Guiding questions:

Grades 1-3

- What is snow?
- What places on earth get snow? What places don't?
- What season(s) does snow come in? Why?
- What shape are snowflakes?

Grades 4-5

- How do snowflakes form?
- Why are no two snowflakes alike?
- What are some unique properties of snow? (Define “property.”)

Talk with children about biographies. Guiding questions:

- What kind of information is found in a biography?
- Why are biographies written?

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Explore Wilson Bentley's book, **Snow Crystals**. Children can:

- Learn why no two snowflakes are alike.
- Write haiku poetry about the photographs.
- Trace the photographs with a lead pencil and display the drawings in the window.

Discuss microscopic photography. Collect photographs that reveal nature at a microscopic level. Some ideas are: pictures of cells or molecules, close-up pictures of plants or flowers, and pictures of insects. Talk with children about what they can see in these types of pictures that aren't visible to the naked eye. Children can write about one new thing they learned from seeing a familiar part of nature from a microscopic perspective. Children can create a collage of microscopic photographs and label the pictures.

Children can explore very small things under a microscope. Challenge them to draw an enlarged picture of what they see. Alternately, children can write riddles called, “What Am I?” that describe the details of a chosen object. Other children can then examine the objects under a microscope and try to guess which one was described.

Discuss geometrical and symmetrical shapes found in nature. Start with a hexagon, the most universal shape of a snowflake. What other things in nature can come in this shape? What other shapes are found in nature? Take a “nature walk” with the children around the school yard or in a park or nature preserve. Ask them to write down or draw the different shapes that they see. Later, discuss what children found and display their drawings or make a “Nature's Shapes” journal.

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