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Activity Guide

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In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall

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ABOUT THE STORY

This collection of poems by African poets celebrates the many facets of fatherhood. From strength to softness, all the sides of fathering are explored in loving words and art created from materials ranging from salvaged floorboards to seashells to real fish dipped in paint.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Javaka Steptoe lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is the son of the late Caldecott-winning children's book author/illustrator John Steptoe. Javaka Steptoe received a degree in fine art from Copper union and teaches art to children. *In Daddy's Arms I am Tall* is his first book.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children to describe their earliest memories of their fathers or another important man in their lives. Then explain that the book they will read is a collection of poems about many different kinds of fathers.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

1. "In the poem 'In Daddy's Arms,' how does the narrator feel in her father's arms?"
2. "In 'Her Daddy's Hands,' how can the father's hands be hard and soft at the same time?" (*Analyze*)
3. "Why does the narrator in 'The Farmer' say that the father's backbone is 'forged of African iron and red Georgia clay?'" (*Analyze*)
4. "How does the father in 'Promises' feel about his son?" (*Infer*)
5. "What does the narrator in 'Seeds' mean when he says that he ate his father's words?" (*Analyze*)

Vocabulary

Write these words and sentences on the chalkboard. Have children copy the sentences, completing them with words from the chalkboard. Then ask volunteers to define each word.

called fragmented forged occasions vivid

1. The sunset painted the sky with _____ colors.
2. The blacksmith _____ the iron into tools for planting.
3. The carpenter's hands were _____ from long years working.
4. He could not think straight; his thoughts were _____.
5. We only use the best dishes on special _____.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Family Tree

The poems in the book are about family connections, not just fathers. Have children make a family tree of their own families, as far as they can. They can research the family tree at home by asking relatives for details. Encourage those with blended families to include all branches of their families. Display the family trees around the classroom.

Language Arts: Dad Poems

Ask children to write their own poems about fathers. The poems can be about their father, another male relative, or the father they would like to be or would like to have. Collect the poems in a class book of Dad Poems.

Art: Pictures of Fathers

Javaka Steptoe uses all sorts of materials to create his illustrations of fathers. Encourage children to use various materials to create collages of fathers or about fathers in general. They can use pictures or words from magazines and newspapers, objects such as buttons and cloth, and any other items they want in their collages. Display the finished collages in the classroom.

Language Arts: Fatherly Adjectives

Some of the adjectives used to describe fathers in the poems include big, strong, hard, soft, stern, and silly. Ask children to suggest another activity to describe fathers. Write their suggestions on the chalkboard. Discuss with children what these adjectives tell them about father-their variety, their roles, and the way they interact with children.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

More Poems about Fathers

Using the keywords poems about fathers, children can search the Internet to find fathers; children can search the Internet to find other poetry about fathers. Have them choose one poem they especially like, print it out or copy it down, and read it to the class.