

Thesaurus Rex

by Laya Steinberg
Illustrated by Debbie Harter

- Children's Round Table 2X 2 Reading List selection-2004
Top 20 books recommended for children age 2 to grade
- Junior Library Guild List-2003
- Houghton Mifflin Pre-K Educational Series Big Book

Teacher's Guide



About the book:

Author Laya Steinberg joins forces with award winning illustrator Debbie Harter with the irresistible story of Thesaurus Rex, a playful young dinosaur who has a way with words. Children will delight in following the lively character as he bounces, jumps, springs and flies through the colorful pages, all the while introducing them to the wide world of synonyms. Even the most active young audiences will sit still to watch Thesaurus Rex turn vocabulary building into a fun-filled adventure.

Author interview:

Q. What inspired this playful story?

A. I was writing another story and consulted an old Webster's Thesaurus I had found at a yard sale. As I read the synonyms out loud it occurred to me that the wonderful sounds of alliteration and rhyme such as "slither, slid, slide and glide" would make a wonderful children's book. Thus Thesaurus Rex was born.

Q. What is your favorite thing about writing? What is your least favorite?

A. My favorite thing about writing is asking myself the question "What if?" and then letting my imagination explore the possibilities of a new story idea or concept, like "What if we could turn into any animal we wished?" My least favorite thing about writing is spelling. When I was a child I was taught a new experimental learn-to-read program that made learning spelling difficult. I still rely heavily on my computer spell checker.

Q. What advice would you give to young authors?

A. Read, read, read. Write as much or as little as you have time for but write everyday as a habit, like brushing your teeth. Trust that in time your own voice will show through in your work, and that everything you write is valuable both as a source of ideas for the future and as a learning experience.

Q. Is the thesaurus your favorite writing tool? What other tools do you use regularly?

A. My imagination is my favorite writing tool. It's like planting a garden with the knowledge that tiny seeds will grow into beautiful and varied flowers. Using a thesaurus is like putting fertilizer on my garden. It helps the story grow and become stronger. I also use revision as an essential tool. That's when I go back and reread what I've written and try to improve the language and vocabulary to make my writing the best it can be. The thesaurus comes in handy then also. Reading your writing out loud helps you to hear when a sentence is awkward or doesn't sound right.

Q. What can your fans look forward to next?

A. I have many projects in the works, from a picture book about seeds to a couple of middle-grade and young adult novels.

Pre-reading activity:

Without showing the children the books ask: Raise your hand if you ever heard the word "rex" before? How do we learn words we don't know?

Activity:

Make a list of ten items found in the room. Then, with a partner, try to brainstorm ten other words which begin with the same letter or sound.

Questions to consider:

1. What is Thesaurus Rex doing during his day? Which part would you like to join him on?
2. Did you know there were so many synonyms for common words? Why do you think there are so many words for something? Do these words mean the exact same thing or are they just similar?
3. Can you find the words that rhyme? Which pair is your favorite?
4. Do you know what a thesaurus is? Why do you think a writer might use one?
5. Describe Thesaurus Rex. What kind of friend do you think he would be? Why?
6. Did you learn any new words? Which ones? How do you know what a word means without looking it up in a dictionary?
7. Which picture is your favorite? Why? What shapes do you see in it?
8. It says that Thesaurus Rex "Chomp! He likes his dinner raw." What does this mean? Do you like to eat your dinner raw? Do you prefer any raw foods? Which ones?
9. Would you want to baby-sit Thesaurus Rex? Why or why not? What would you do together?
10. How many times does Thesaurus Rex appear in the book? How many eyes? How many feet are in the story? How many bathtubs?

Language Arts:

Verbs are the actions in a sentence. They are what people or animals DO during each day. Make a list of at least ten verbs that you'll be doing this week. Then, with a partner, try to think of other verbs that might go with the ones you have.

For example:

Sleep

What other verbs go with sleep?

dream, roll over, wake up, stretch, yawn.

Illustrate the words you've listed. This makes an excellent bulletin board with the caption: VERBS: It's what you DO!

Fill out the following chart about your word knowledge from the book. Write sentences on the back for at least five of the words you know!

Words:	I can say this word:	I can tell what it means:	I can use it in a sentence (yes/no)
Extending			
Swill			
Foraging			
Rollick			
Slither			
Mire			
Squeal			
Scour			
Gnaw			
Springs			
Bundled			

Math:

Graph the answers to question # 10 from the discussion guide.

Music:

Sing the following song together:

Read, read, read some books
new ones every day
learn new words, like synonym
then go out and play!

Write, write, write new words
something fresh and new
just like Thesaurus Rex
a synonym or two!

Art

Materials:

Two paper plates; Brad; colored pencils or crayons; thesaurus/synonym finder

Create a synonym wheel to replace common words in your writing (like nice, good, fun, bad, gross).

Cut out a pie shape from one of the paper plates. Then, stack the plates so the one with the piece missing is on top. Choose a common word that gets overused in your writing (like the word: said) and put on the top plate in large bold letters. Then, trace pie shape until the bottom plate looks like it been cut and ready to eat! In each pie, add a synonym and an illustration. These plates can be displayed around the room and kids can access them for an instant thesaurus!

Drama

Phonemic Awareness Slam!

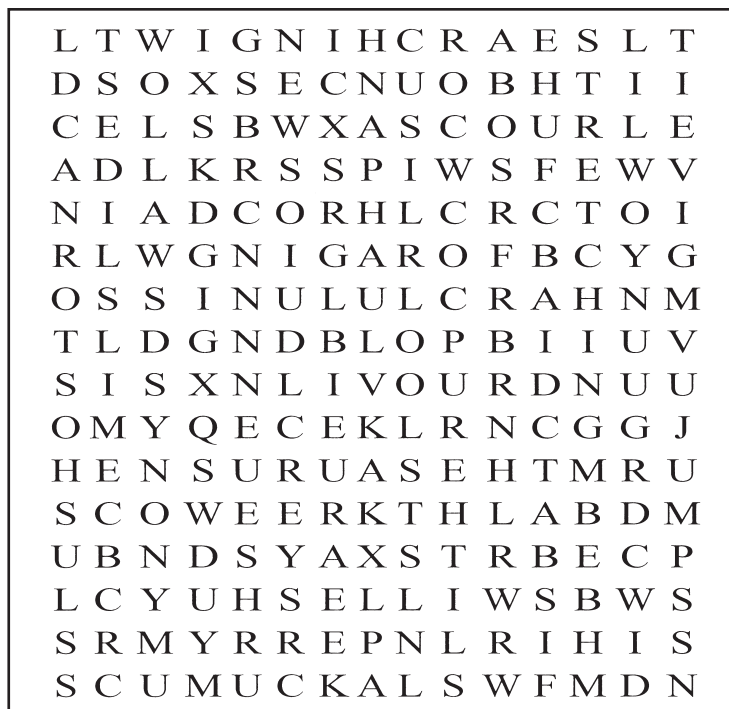
Divide the class into two equal groups. Then, similar to a spelling match, have students come up to the front. Present each pair with a word. Kids volley words that begin, end or have the same vowel sound as the one presented back and forth until someone can't think of a new one. Winners advance to the next round.

Word Family Charades

Put all the following words on individual cards and have the children play charades to guess the words from the book:

stretching, reaching, extending, bending, mending, sip, swallow, swill, searching, poking, romp, skid, slide, stuck, shout, scrub, munch, bounces, tucked, bundled.

Take-home Fun: Word Search



thesaurus
rex
frolic
rollick
frisk
exploring
searching
foraging
slither
skid
slide
slime
slush
muck
howl
yowl
squeal

scour
scrub
munch
nibble
crunch
bounces
jumps
springs
bundled
covered
extending
stretching
synonym
vocabulary
swallow
swill
dinosaur

This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of the book *Sketches from a Spy Tree*.
Visit her website to find over a hundred guides to children's literature. <http://www.tracievaughnzimmer.com>
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