



Susan Laughs is a short story told in rhyme. The story describes a range of common emotions and activities experienced by a little girl, Susan. She swims with her father, works hard in school, plays with her friends, rides a horse. It is not until the end of the story that we discover that Susan is a wheelchair user. When looking back through the book, we notice that Susan is never unassisted but we do not realise any of this until it is brought to our attention in the final illustration. The story is told with great warmth but without sentimentality and addresses an important issue that is relevant to us all – becoming aware of disability. It focuses on Susan’s abilities rather than on the things by which she is limited and shows that she is like all children, she is good, she is bad, she is strong, she is weak. Susan is an active, feisty little girl whose physical disability is never seen as a handicap.

This story can be used as an excellent classroom tool to facilitate conversations and explore questions and concerns about disability. The book could also be easily tailored to talk specifically about a particular child by simply changing the name as you read the story.

The story is told in simple rhyming couplets using the simple present and can be used to develop vocabulary around everyday activities and emotions. There are only a few

words in this plotless story but it delivers a powerful message and provides a positive image of children with a disability.

Jeanne Willis is an internationally acclaimed author and illustrator of many best-selling books for young readers. She lives in North London with her family of creatures that features two children, a couple of cats and some pet rats.

Susan Laughs was winner of the NASEN Special Educational Needs Book Awards in 2000.

Illustrative style and cultural information

The story is illustrated by the British illustrator, Tony Ross, who uses pastel crayon and pencil to create expressive pictures. There are two words a page so the book relies on the illustrations. The illustrations are lively and thoughtful and help children recognize their own feelings and experiences by identifying with Susan's emotions, feelings and achievements. Children are quickly engaged by the rhythm of the text and the interest created by the illustrations.

On closer inspection the illustrations contain abundant details such as patterned wallpaper and curtains, funny portraits on walls and rural, industrial and seaside landscapes plus home and classroom scenes from England.

For further information about Tony Ross, see <http://magicpencil.britishcouncil.org/artists/ross/>

Background information

This story was used on the story-based holiday classes at the British Council in Paris during the week of 25 – 29 February 2008. This is a 15 hour course where children attend for three hours each afternoon. The story was used with 9 – 10 year-olds, children in the last two years of primary school in France. The class contained children of mixed levels. These courses culminate in a story presentation to parents on the last day of the course. See separate notes regarding story presentations.

Learning/teaching sequence

Aim to finish the before storytelling activities and possibly the first telling of the story in lesson one. Begin and end each subsequent lesson with a retelling of the story.

Aims:

- To learn verbs of action
- To learn adjectives for describing emotions and feelings
- To talk about what you can and can't do
- To listen and respond to instructions
- To listen and understand the general meaning of a story and make predictions
- To identify rhyming words
- To learn and sing a traditional song
- To raise awareness of disability and foster acceptance and tolerance of people who are in some way 'different'.

Materials required and preparation

- A copy of the storybook, *Susan Laughs*, by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, Red Fox, ISBN 0-09-940756-6
- Flashcards of the actions and emotions (Andrew Wright's book 1000+ pictures for teachers to copy published by Longman is very good for help in preparing these). Flashcards produced on Adobe Illustrator are available on the G Drive and in story pack
- Rehearse picture dictation and instructions
- Read the story through and rehearse reading it aloud.
- Pre-prepared 'storybooks' for the book making activity
- Download worksheets from G Drive

Main outcomes

- To make a personalised or class book based on the story, *Susan Laughs*
- To act out the story at the end of course presentation to parents

Before reading the story

Show children the cover of the story book and point to Susan, saying *This is Susan*. Say, *Tell me about Susan*. For example, *She's happy*. Show children the back cover and ask, *Who's this?* to elicit father. Allow children to make any other comments they may have about Susan, her father, her cat, the setting, etc. Tell children you are going to read them the story of Susan, *Susan Laughs*, and explain that they are going to make their own book based on the story about themselves or a friend.

Tell children that you are first going to introduce or revise some vocabulary, verbs for actions and adjectives for emotions and feelings. There are 32 vocabulary items altogether, some of which the children may know. However, this represents a large amount of vocabulary to introduce in one session and you will need to decide how best to do this depending on your time available and the level and interest of your students. You may, for example, decide to present/introduce some of the vocabulary through the storytelling as the illustrations will support understanding. The worksheets are designed to allow children to consolidate the vocabulary and build up their own personal record of the verbs and adjectives.

Introducing the action verbs

Using flashcards or mime or a combination of both, introduce the action verbs. As there are a total of 20 verbs, introduce or revise them in the following categories to make the learning manageable and help children make meaningful connections between the words and to aid memory and recall.

Sports and hobbies: *dance, paint, ride, row, sing, swim, trot*

In the park: *fly, hide, spin, splash, swing, throw, wave*

Emotions and feelings: *fear, feel, grin, hear, hug, laugh*

Hold up a flashcard of the action and/or mime and elicit verb. If children do not know the word, say it aloud and get children to repeat. Put the flashcards on the board one by one, revising each before you introduce another verb.

Susan says

Check children's understanding by playing *Simon says* or *Susan says* if you prefer. For example, *Susan says laugh! Susan says swim! Susan says wave!* Children perform the corresponding action. If you say, *Laugh!* and a child performs the action, they are out. Depending on the level of the class, you could invite one of the pupils to act as, caller.

Distribute Worksheets A, and get children to label the pictures by copying the words from the board/worksheet.

Introducing adjectives for emotions

Now introduce adjectives for describing emotions. *happy, sad, shy, angry, proud* using the same procedures as above. Distribute Worksheet B, picture dictation. Call out the emotions following the script below and children draw the corresponding expression on Susan's face. Children then label each picture by copying the descriptions.

Picture dictation script

Picture 1. *Susan's happy!*

Picture 2. *Susan's angry!*

Picture 3. *Susan's proud!*

Picture 4. *Susan's sad!*

Picture 5. *Susan's shy!*

Introducing adjectives

Finish by introducing the remaining adjectives, *good, bad, right, wrong, weak and strong and loud*. Hold up a flashcard and introduce the adjectives in pairs of opposites. *Susan's good. What's the opposite? Susan's bad*, etc. Follow the procedures as above and distribute Worksheet C.

Reading the story

Now read the story aloud to the class, *Susan laughs, Susan ...* Point to the illustration of Susan and invite children to predict *sings*. Ensure that children are pronouncing the third person 's'. Continue in this way encouraging children to predict the verbs and adjectives as much as possible. On the last spread with Susan in her wheelchair give children time to reflect on this illustration.

Post-story discussion

Ask children to say if they were surprised to discover that Susan uses a wheelchair. Ask them to say why. Ask if they know any other people with a disability? For example, in their school or family? What things are they good at? What do they find difficult? Ask

children, *What are you good at? What do you find difficult? What things do you need help with?*

Song

Finish the lesson with a traditional song, *If you're happy*

In this version of the song, the words from the story have been incorporated.

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (clap, clap) children clap hands twice
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (clap, clap)
If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it,
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (clap, clap)

If you're happy and you know it, sing a song (la, la) children sing la twice

If you're happy and you know it, dance around (children do a dance movement)

If you're happy and you know it, laugh out loud (ha, ha) children laugh ha twice

If you're happy and you know it, wave your hand (children mime)

Next lesson

Recapping the story

Showing children the cover of the storybook, recap by asking them to tell you some of the things Susan can do: *What can Susan do? Susan can sing, Susan can swing, Susan can dance, Susan can paint, Susan can row, etc.* Next ask the children questions: *Can you sing? Can you swing? Can you dance? Etc.* Depending on the level of your class, use this activity as an opportunity to revise other actions, eg *play the piano, ski, play the guitar, etc.* Drill questions and answers.

Class survey – Find someone who can ...

Distribute Worksheet D and ask children to complete the survey by asking their classmates the questions and writing down their names.

Bring class together and collate findings from the class survey, *Who can ride a bike?* and record findings on the board. Children then complete part 2 of their worksheet and record the results of the survey, for example, *6 children in my class can play the guitar.*

Classroom Olympics – action game

Divide the class into three or four teams depending on the number of pupils in your class. Give each team a colour. In this game the teacher asks simple 'can you' questions and pupils compete to be the first to carry out the action. One pupil from each team should come to the front of the class. Demonstrate by asking the first question, *Can you wave your hand?* Ask the class who was first, second, etc? Now repeat with by asking the following questions. Different pupils should compete each time a new question is asked. Award points for first, second and third places. Select one pupil to be the scorer and keep score on the board. When you have asked all the questions add up the total number of points.

Can you wave your hand?
 Can you draw a cat?
 Can you sing an English song?
 Can you say the opposite of happy?
 Can you add up two plus one plus two plus four?
 Can you name the capital of England?
 Can you write 'Susan swims'?
 Can you say where the Mona Lisa is?
 Can you write a verb beginning with 's'?
 Can you write an adjective beginning with 's'?

Add other questions if appropriate.

Rhyming words

Read the story again and focus children's attention on the rhyming words. For example, *Susan laughs, Susan sings, Susan flies, Susan swings*. Pause and ask children to tell you which words rhyme, eg *sings/swings*. Continue reading story and ask children to put up their hands each time they hear words that rhyme. *Bad/sad, rides/hides, loud/proud, spins/grins, wrong/strong, rows/throws, fears/hears*.

Thinking about disability

Show children the last illustration of Susan in her wheelchair and read the end of the story again, *That is Susan through and through – just like me, just like you*. Ask children to say all the things that are the same about Susan as other children using *Susan can ...* For example, *Susan can paint, Susan can dance, Susan can go to school, Susan can do maths, etc*

Now ask children to think about all the things they can do and things they need help with

Things I can do	Things I need help with

Now ask children to think about some other disabilities that their friends or other people they know may have, eg,

Friends who can't hear
 Friends who can't see
 Friends who can't walk
 Friends who can't learn as fast as others
 Friends who can't concentrate

Ask children to say what can help their friends.

Eg, hearing aid, sign language, glasses, wheelchair, helper, etc.

Book making activity

To make a personalised or class book based on the story

Tell children they are going to make a book based on *Susan Laughs*. The book can either be their own personalised story about their own activities and emotions or it can be a class book based on someone the children know or an imaginary character.

Read *Susan Laughs* again and ask pupils to think about what they would like to include in their books as you read. Also focus children's attention on layout, ie the position of the illustrations and the text.

Individual books

Depending on your time available, either pre-prepare blank storybooks for pupils or plan for the bookmaking as an in-class activity. If the latter, pupils would be involved in listening to and following out instructions.

Ask pupils to draft their story and be ready to help with vocabulary etc. Once pupils are happy with their story and you have checked it for accuracy, ask them to copy their text into their storybook. Pupils then produce their final version. Stories can be illustrated at home or in collaboration with the art teacher.

Display children's books for each other to share.

Class book

The class will need to decide on the character for their story. Elicit the story from the pupils and invite individual pupils to come to the board and write the text. Help and guide as necessary. Distribute sheets of paper and allocate different parts of the story to different pupils who will copy the text. Collate the pages and staple together and read the story to the class.

Story presentation

Start working on the presentation around day three, ie Wednesday. In our presentation, the children stood together in pairs with arms linked to convey the idea of being helped by someone. In the story, although we do not initially realise this, Susan is always being assisted by someone. With children linked together in pairs, they use their free arms to make actions as appropriate. In turns, each pair says aloud a part of the story (a rhyming couplet) until it is completed. In class, children elected a child who would play Susan. We made wheels to put on an ordinary chair that we brought on behind the lined up children and, at the end of the story, the elected child sat down on the chair as the ending of the story was read aloud which had a powerful impact. Selected children then presented their books and the presentation finished with the song, *If you're happy*

Additional materials

Stepping Stones 3, Unit 11, The Five Senses – see additional worksheets
Sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell

In particular, Activity Book page 32 introduction to the senses.

Page 33/37 – looking at pictures

Page 35 emotions/feelings

Page 38 – hearing/sound code

Page 39 – sign language

Page 41 touch – feely bag (see below)

Feely bag or box

Play this game to teach or revise adjectives. You need a cardboard box with a hole cut out for pupils to put their hands in, or a bag. Ask children to close their eyes or use a blindfold but don't use this if they feel uncomfortable. When they put their hand in the box they have to describe what they feel.

Here are some ideas for the feely bag/box and the adjectives that can be elicited. An effective way to help children learn the adjectives is by comparing objects and learning opposites, e.g., rough, smooth; long, short, etc.

- A pencil with a sharp point at one end and a rubber at the other: sharp, short, thin, smooth
- An orange: round, rough, big, large
- An apple: round, smooth, hard
- A ping pong ball: round, light, round, smooth, small
- A tennis ball: round, soft
- Sand paper: rough, light
- A piece of string: thin, long, wiggly
- A piece of wood: hard
- A piece of cotton wool: soft, light

Project: Our senses

Make a poster for the classroom listing all the things in the school that children can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. You could also do this activity by focussing on some of the illustrations in the storybook, ie Susan swims, Susan rides and Susan spins pages.

Our senses at school

see	hear	touch	taste	smell

Famous people collage – general knowledge

See separate worksheet.

Make a collage of famous people with disabilities. For example,

Helen Keller

Beethoven

Franklin Roosevelt

Stephen Hawking

Gail Ellis

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