

# Jan Brett

## • Author Extensions •

by | Judith Snyder

Grades  
K–2, 3–5

Jan Brett's books delight both the eye and the ear, and offer many opportunities for children to explore new worlds—first through art, and then through story. Brett is well known for her distinctive illustrations where the level of detail is such that readers are drawn to them again and again, each time finding something new.

Launch your Jan Brett author study with a picture walk. Place several of her books at each table grouping and allow 10–15 minutes for students to study the illustrations. Have each pair of students choose two books and compare and contrast the illustrations. They might note the different types of dress, the climate, characters, etc. Each pair can record its information in a thinking map and share findings with the whole class.

Invite students to read the books and enjoy the pictures over and over.

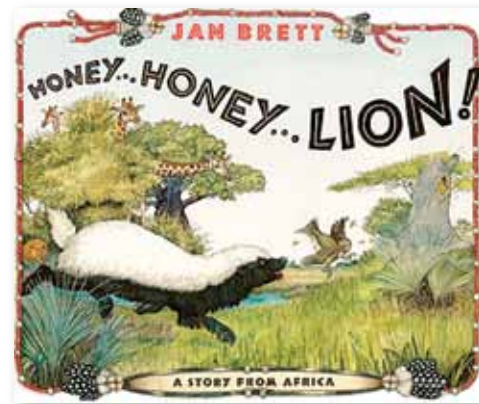
### OVER THE BORDER

Jan Brett's unique use of borders in her illustrations incorporate subplots as well as foreshadowing, and can be used to predict events or gain insight into other characters. For example, in *The Mitten*, the left border shows Nicki's explorations in the forest, while the right border identifies the next animal to enter the main story.

Jan tailors her border designs to the book's setting—pussy willows for *The Easter Egg*, papyrus for *Noah's Ark*, and needlepoint for Scandinavian books. Ask students to identify how the border fits the story's setting. Students may also identify the repeating design elements in the patterns in the borders. [i.e., ABAB, ABC, ABBA]

### VIDEO VIEWS

Videos on Jan Brett's website ([www.janbrett.com](http://www.janbrett.com)) explain her background, share information about her work, and introduce many of her books. Visitors can also learn how to draw animals in Jan Brett's style. Use these rich video resources to aid in teaching research in the following activity.



### ANIMAL RESEARCH

**Skills:** taking notes, identifying key words, citing sources, generating questions

Read *Honey . . . Honey . . . Lion* to the class. Choose the giraffe as a subject for your beginning researchers. Ask students to generate questions about giraffes, and list them for the class on chart paper. Identify and underline key words in each question. Have students write each keyword in the left column of the All about Giraffes two-column note taking reproducible found at [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com).

Show the class Brett's video about how to draw giraffes twice. The first time, allow students to draw along with her as she explains her methods. View it again, and have students listen for answers to their giraffe questions. When students hear an answer to one of the questions, pause the video and model how to write notes in the right column of their worksheets, across from the key word in the left column. For any unanswered questions, have students use nonfiction sources from your library and finish taking notes. List both sources in the provided spaces on the worksheet.

Extend this activity for older students by assigning different animals to small groups to research. Instruct them to create their own two-column note grid, and complete it. Using the notes, have students write a paragraph about what they learned and display it with drawings.



## Author Extensions

### UNMASKED

**Skills:** Speaking and listening, identifying main idea, sequencing

Brett's colored animal masks for characters in *The Umbrella*, *Gingerbread Baby*, *The Hat*, *The Mitten*, and *Town Mouse and Country Mouse* can be found on the activity pages of her website. Print them onto card stock, laminate for durability, and cut them out. Attach them to a strip of tag board and staple the strip into a circle so students can wear the mask as a hat.

Use creative dramatics—and the hats—to explore main idea and story sequence with older students. Divide students into small groups and assign each one of the titles above. Instruct students to identify the main idea in each scene in the book, and then develop dialog to move the scene along. The dialog does not need to be the same as what is written, as long as it advances the plot. (For more information, see “Acting Out—Using Creative Drama in the Library” at [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com).) Give each group the appropriate masks/hats, and have them select their favorite scene to act out in front of the class.

Younger students can also participate in a similar exercise, but using a single title for the entire class. Assign different scenes to each group. Younger children may need more teacher support to guide their practice; as they move through the story, give prompts as needed. Have each group present its scene in order so that the entire book is performed.

*Note: For another dramatic option, look for Reader's Theater scripts for The Hat, The Three Dassies, and The Umbrella on Jan Brett's website.*

### Further Learning: Order Please

Students will find it easy to identify plot sequence in many of Brett's books. Place the character masks on students' heads and ask volunteers from the class to move the characters into the order they appear in the book.

### QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER

**Skills:** Speaking and listening, identifying character traits

Divide the class into small groups. Have each group choose one book, generate questions for its characters, and then formulate character answers. Have one student be the interviewer and the oth-



ers don the appropriate hat (see previous activity) to become the characters. The interview can be written, presented as a round table discussion or done in a television interview format. Or, consider changing the format to “Who Is It?” where characters are questioned but not identified. The audience must place the correct hat on each character.

### POSTCARD POSTS

**Skills:** Identifying main idea and writing a summary

Brett has created postcards that accompany many of her books. After reading one of the books, ask students to write a summary onto an online postcard. Have them print it out or e-mail it to the teacher, friends, or parents. Instead of using the postcards on the website, students might create postcards of the story with their own illustrations.

### BY THE BOOK ACTIVITIES

Summaries of the following Jan Brett's books will assist you with book talks as you introduce her books to students. Let the activities spark your own creativity to make activities for her other books.

#### *On Noah's Ark*

Noah's granddaughter leads the animals to their places in the crowded ark. Though they bump and thump in the crowded space, she keeps the peace, and eventually all fall asleep to the rocking of the boat. When the waters recede, the animals scatter and life starts anew.

#### Activities

1. Identify the animals in the illustrations. Assign one page to each small group to explore. Don't forget to include the animals whose shapes Jan uses for the side pictures. Research to find where these animals live.
2. Read additional versions of Noah's Ark and compare the stories.

*Berlioz the Bear*

The buzz inside Berlioz’s bass won’t stop, but he has no time to investigate, since he’s rushing to get his orchestra to town. When he doesn’t notice a hole in the road, the wagon wheel gets stuck and the mule won’t move. A chicken, cat, dog, plow horse, and ox try to help, but fail. A mad bee zooms out of the bass, stings the mule, and the orchestra arrives in town on time.

Discussion:

1. Read the first page and ask students to predict what the buzz could be. As you continue to read, stop occasionally and ask: What is another way Berlioz could have solved the problem?
2. Identify the names of all the musical instruments in Berlioz’s orchestra. Categorize them, and go to the Dallas Symphony Association web page for kids to listen to the sounds of these instruments ([www.dsokids.com/listen/instrumentlist.aspx](http://www.dsokids.com/listen/instrumentlist.aspx)).

*Annie and the Wild Animals*

When Annie’s cat Taffy disappears, Annie is lonely. She tries to find a new friend by leaving corn cakes for wild animals at the edge of the woods. The moose is too big for a pet, the wildcat too mean, the bear too grumpy. When spring returns, so does Taffy with three cuddly kittens, and Annie is no longer alone.

Activities:

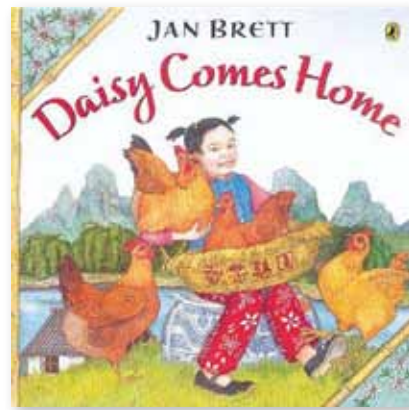
1. List the picture clues that show the change of season from winter to spring.
2. Discuss what makes a good pet and why people like pets.
3. Ask students to write a fictional story about choosing a wild animal for a pet.

*Umbrella*

Little Carlos carries a leaf umbrella into the rainforest to look for animals. Leaving it on the ground, he climbs a tree for a better view. Meanwhile, a toucan, kinkajou, monkey, tapir, and jaguar squeeze into the upturned umbrella, which the monkey then maneuvers into the pond. When a humming bird joins them, they tip over and scatter to the riverbank. Carlos returns, finding only a little frog in the umbrella.

Activities:

1. Use nonfiction books about rainforest animals and plants and give students time to explore the many species that live in this habitat. Students can pretend to be Carlos and choose five animals that they would like to see.
2. Provide art materials and a six-foot piece of butcher paper for students to create a mural of the rainforest. Students can contribute their own drawings, or [www.janbrett.com](http://www.janbrett.com) provides pictures of plants and animals that can be enlarged, colored, cut and pasted to the mural.



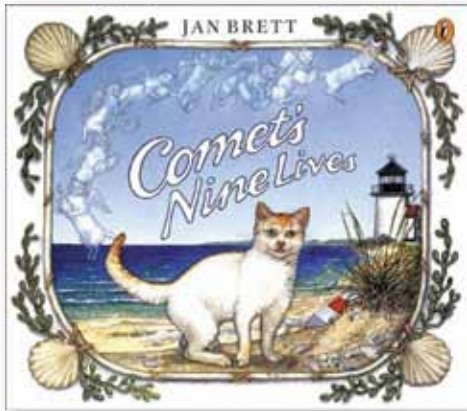
*Daisy Comes Home*

Mei Mei doesn’t know that the other chickens bully Daisy, the hen. Daisy runs away, but finds even greater danger. She evades a dog, a water buffalo, and monkey, but gets caught by a fisherman who tries to sell her in the market. Mei Mei finds Daisy just in time and they both run home. Daisy, empowered by her recent experiences, stands up to the other chickens and finds a happy place to roost.

Activities:

1. Spend time discussing the bullying theme of this story. Ask students to come up with ways that Daisy could have solved her problem before she went on her adventure.
2. Present this book with nonfiction books about China. To develop background information, distribute a variety of books about the Chinese culture to groups of students, and let them search for information gleaned from text, pictures, and captions. Afterwards, let students share their insights as you write their information into a chart.
3. View Jan’s video on her website about writing this book to understand how her travels influenced this story.

## Author Extensions



### *Comet's Nine Lives*

The adventurous cat, Comet, quickly loses eight of his nine lives. He eats a poisonous foxglove flower, has books topple on him, falls into the sea, tumbles from a tree into a tuba, flops into a strawberry shake, flies out of a bike basket, and is hit by a high heel and then a hurricane. In his ninth life, he finds a perfect friend and a safe home in a Nantucket lighthouse.

Activities:

1. Discuss how the setting of a story can affect the plot and the character. As a class, create a new story for Comet by changing the setting. Demonstrate one retelling by sharing the story orally and using ideas from students. Extend the activity by grouping students and assigning each group a new setting for another retelling.
2. Create a seaside center. Include other picture books using the ocean theme and easy non-fiction books depicting seaside life. Add an assortment of shells or pictures for sorting by attributes, and some rope with books explaining knot tying. Students can use the center after book checkout or be sent in small groups to the library from the classroom.

### *Town Mouse Country Mouse*

Two pairs of mice decide to trade places. Experiences alternate between the town and country until both pairs realize there's no place like their own home. A silent side story about the cat and the owl, who also decide to change places, occurs in the borders, giving a twist to the ending.

Activities:

1. Students can write their own story about what happens to the owl and the cat.
2. Ask students to think of someone they might like to trade places with. Discuss some of the

difficulties they might have, and then have them write a story about the experience.

3. *The Prince and the Pauper* has been made into a short movie several times. Obtain a copy to share and after viewing, let students compare and contrast the two stories.

### *The Three Snow Bears*

Aloo-ki loses her dog team on an ice flow and searches for help. Meanwhile, the bears take a walk and go for a swim. Aloo-ki finds the bear's igloo and eats their soup, wears their boots and sleeps on the sleeping bench under the furs. The bears save the dog team and take them home. When the bears scare Aloo-ki awake, she dashes outside where she is greeted by her dogs. Aloo-ki waves a happy thank you to the bears as the dogs pull her away.

Activity:

1. Compare Jan's retelling of folktales to other versions found on library shelves. Let students create thinking maps showing the results. Extend the activity by asking students to choose which versions they liked best, and to write a paragraph with details explaining their reasoning. You can also find versions of these folktales online at the Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts website ([www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html#c](http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html#c)).

Jan Brett's Books	Alternative Titles for Comparison
<i>Berlioz the Bear</i>	<i>The Turnip</i>
<i>Gingerbread Baby</i>	<i>Gingerbread Boy, Johnny Cake, The Pancake</i>
<i>Town Mouse, Country Mouse</i>	<i>Aesop's version of same title</i>
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	<i>The Singing Rose or The Bear Prince</i>
<i>The Three Snow Bears</i>	<i>Goldilocks and the Three Bears</i>

2. After making comparisons, students can write their own version of a folk tale. With the plot structure already in place, students change the characters, setting and time of the story.

## HEDGEHOG BOOKS

### *Hedgie's Surprise*

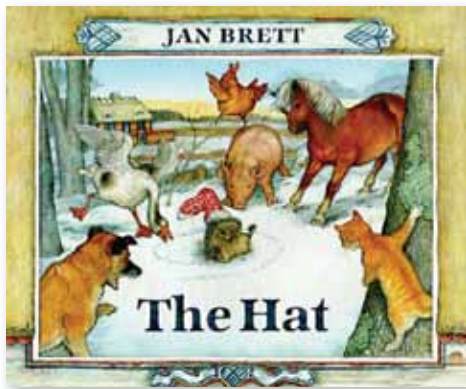
Henny wants to keep her eggs from Tomten so that she can hatch some chicks. Hedgie helps her by substituting an acorn, a strawberry, a mush-



room and a potato for the egg. None of them fills Tomten's tummy, which continues to growl and he threatens to eat Henny instead. But Hedgie has a surprise. Instead of an egg, Tomten grabs a round, prickly hedgehog ball!

### *Hedgie Blasts Off*

Hedgie cleans Star Lab, but he'd rather be an astronaut. The scientists notice the flowers are dying on the planet Mikkop because Big Sparkler is clogged. When the robot in the rocket malfunctions, Hedgie is asked to go. He discovers the problem, devises a solution, and returns as a hero and an astronaut.



### *The Hat*

After Lisa hangs her woolens on the line, a sock falls on Hedgie and gets stuck on his quills. In this cumulative tale, the animals laugh at him, so Hedgie tells them it's a hat that has a practical purpose. The animals go off to find their own hats from Lisa's woolens. Lisa helps get the sock off of Hedgie's quills and tells him that animals don't wear clothes, which he then shares with the other animals that had copied him.

Activities:

1. View Jan Brett's video on hedgehogs and practice drawing.
2. Find out how to care for a pet hedgehog by reading from a non-fiction book or an online article.
3. Have students complete the Real or Fiction activity sheet from [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com) by drawing two activities that a real hedgehog could do, and two fictional activities that Hedgie did in his books.

## TROLL BOOKS

### *Home for Christmas*

Jan Brett's newest book features Rollo, a naughty troll who would rather gallop off into the tundra than do his chores. He finds a new home with owls, where he doesn't need to make his bed. When he gets pushed out of the nest, he moves in with the bears, and plays with the otters, the lynx, and the moose family. In each instance, Rollo begins to long for his old life. Luckily, his travels send him sliding back home, just in time for Christmas—a wiser and more responsible troll than the one who left. As always, Jan's illustrations add depth to the story by showing the reactions of Rollo's family, Swedish cultural traditions, and clues in the borders.

Activities:

1. Trolls aren't typically given sweet dispositions in literature. Often they are gruff, obstinate, and down right mean. Read one or two other stories with trolls as characters and compare and contrast the personalities. Students wishing to expand their knowledge of trolls can research trolls in literature and find information about troll characteristics, family life, magic, etc.
2. When Jan Brett traveled to Sweden to research illustrations for her new book, she fell in love with a moose family. Check her blog and activity pages for her experiences and to discover interesting moose facts.
3. Other Brett troll books:  
*Trouble with Trolls*. Putnam's Sons, 1992.  
*Christmas Trolls*. Putnam's Sons, 1993.  
*Who's That Knocking on Christmas Eve?* Putnam's Sons, 2002.



*Judith Snyder* is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the Jump-start Your Library series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008) and two picture books, *What Do You See?* (2009) and *Stinky Feet* (2010) from *Odyssey Books*. Visit [www.judithsnnyderwrites.com](http://www.judithsnnyderwrites.com) for additional literacy ideas and articles featuring integration of the arts and creative thinking.

