

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears. Verna Aardema
Dial Books (1975). A Caldecott Medal winner.

A "little lie" becomes a rumor that leads to panic, which results in accidental death and has shattering consequences for the whole earth. The animals in this jungle parable are called to a meeting, where each has a turn to explain his or her actions. By the end, it becomes clear that no one meant harm, and further violence is averted because the animals have the opportunity to hear different perspectives. But the mosquito who began the whole chain of events, hides from the meeting and never presents his case. His guilty conscience leads to his own punishment.

This story is a Cumulative tale (contains repetitive actions that build to a climax) and a "Why" tale (explains why an animal (insect) has a certain behavior (buzzing)).

- Discuss cause and effect (recap progression of the animals to show build-up of the story line).
- How is repetition/pattern used in the story?
- Was there violence in this story?
- What was its cause?
- Where does the blame lie for the death of the baby eaglet?
- Why did the iguana become so angry?
- How did the situation get resolved?
- Why did the mosquito stay away from the meeting?
- What was moral of this story? (misunderstanding rumors and gossip)
- What are some situations where rumor leads to conflict?
- Would a meeting like the one in the story help avoid violence?
- Has anyone here ever had a misunderstanding with someone? How was it resolved?

Discussion topics for *before* reading:

- Define onomatopoeia. Is there one in the title? What others do you know? Try inventing some for actions that occur in the story (e.g. a big lizard bobbing its head).
- What sound does a mosquito make? What do mosquitoes do and why don't people like them? What do you do when you see or hear a mosquito?
- Look at the pictures on the cover. Where does the story take place?
- What do you think the mosquito is saying to the man?
- What does it mean to cause something? What is an effect? Can you do something that causes an effect that you can't do anything about?
- Ask the students what an iguana is and explain if they do not know.

Discussion topics for *during/after* reading:

- As you read, have the students repeat the word that describes how each animal walks.
- Why does the iguana refuse to listen to the mosquito? What does the iguana do?
- What happens because the iguana refuses to listen to the mosquito? What happens when the python thinks the iguana is mad at him? What happens when the rabbit runs away? Etc.
- How does King Lion resolve the issue of the night? What would you have done?
- Why does the mosquito buzz in everyone's ears? What answer does the mosquito receive for its question

in the end?

- Which animal is your favorite? What is the moral of the story?

Craft ideas:

- Make the sun using paper plates and yellow paper. Trace each student's hand on yellow paper seven times and have students cut out. Paste or staple outlines behind a paper plate so they look like the sun's rays. Then color the plate and draw a face. Bring ahead option: paper plates and googly eyes.
- Make an owl out of either three paper plates or three circles. Bring ahead option: paper plates, feathers, glue, and googly eyes.
- Make flashcards depicting animals from the story and labeled with their names on top and the sounds they make on the back. You can also play the card game Memory using the flashcards.

Make animal masks.

Special activities:

- Set up a domino chain and show the students what happens when the first one tips the second and so forth. Bring ahead option: dominoes.
- Act out the various ways each animal walks and walk around the room playing Freeze.

Game: Telephone

Talk about how different the original whisper was from the last one. Discuss what can happen when a message gets mixed up. How does this relate to the story?

Author Biography

Verna Norberg Aardema Vugteveen, who writes under the name of Verna Aardema, was born in New Era, Michigan on June 6, 1911. **Verna began writing at the age of eleven when her mother, who had recognized Verna's talent, would encourage Verna to take long walks down to the swamp where she could think and write. Being one of nine children, Verna appreciated this opportunity to write as well as to get out of some chores.**

When Verna was an adult, and had a child of her own, her daughter refused to eat without being told a story, and so Verna began to create stories. Later, Verna turned these stories into children's books. Because Verna read a lot about Africa many of her stories are based on African folktales.