

# Near One Cattail: Turtles, Logs and Leaping Frogs\*

**Super Activities,  
Fantastic Ideas  
and Lots of Info.**



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# Near One Cattail: Turtles, Logs and Leaping Frogs

**Anthony D. Fredericks**

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## **Summary:**

This wonderfully illustrated book introduces young readers to the wonders of a wetlands environment. Using an engaging rhyming pattern - "The marshy land with a layer of ooze/Was explored by a girl in high-topped shoes" - readers journey with the heroine as she discovers an incredible variety of wildlife in this dynamic community. Frogs with big bulging eyes, sunbathing turtles, zip-zipping dragonflies, paddling beetles and brown-feathered ducks "swim, soar or crawl/In this sog-soggy home that protects one and all." The emphasis is on the plants and animals that make this ecosystem such an incredible place to investigate and discover.

## **Critical Thinking Questions:**

1. Which of the animals did you find most interesting?
2. Which of the animals would you like to learn more about?
3. What would you like to discover in a wetlands environment?
4. How are all the animals able to live together?
5. What did you enjoy most about the book?
6. If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?

## **Background Information:**

When you think about words like "swamp" or "marsh" you might imagine a damp, squishy area filled with dark water, plenty of mosquitoes, long drooping vines, an alligator or two, and lots of scary surprises. Well, you'd be partially right. Marshes and swamps are two of the many different kinds of wetlands found throughout the United States. Other types include bogs, estuaries, and prairie potholes. The name given to a particular type of wetland is dependent on where it is located and what lives in that particular ecosystem.

Wetlands are magnificent and diverse environments. They are home to an incredible variety of plant and animal life - some of it found nowhere else on the planet. Scientists have estimated that more than 5,000 different kinds of plants and trees can be found in wetlands and that nearly 1/3 of all the animal species in the world inhabit wetland areas.

Wetlands are defined as a mingling of water and land. The water may be standing (as in a shallow pond or quiet marsh) or it may be slowly flowing (e.g. The Everglades or along the seacoast). The water may be only a few inches deep or may be up to several feet in depth. Wetlands occur along the shores of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, coastal regions and other low-lying areas. Most of the wetlands in the United States are located in the Southeast, the Gulf Coast, the Northeastern coastal states, and selected areas in the upper Midwest. Smaller numbers of wetlands are found in western states. It is estimated that there are currently 95 million acres of wetlands in this country (NOTE: When the

early settlers arrived in this country there were approximately 200 million acres of wetlands.).

Although most people think that wetlands are nothing more than swampy areas crawling with snakes and crocodiles and buzzing with swarms of mosquitoes, these ecosystems are extremely important in the delicate balance of nature. If it were not for wetlands, many plants and animals (including humans) would not be able to survive.

- Wetlands are like enormous sponges. They trap and hold water for long periods of time. This water is then available for plants, animals, and humans to use.
- Wetlands are major breeding grounds for several different kinds of animals. Many species need the seclusion and safety of these areas in order to reproduce and raise their young.
- Wetlands control excessive flooding. The spongy thick vegetation of wetland areas absorbs rainwater or the excess flow of rivers and helps retard its flow.
- Wetlands are water purification areas, too. Wetland vegetation can filter and absorb wastes, pollution, and contamination from streams and rivers thus ensuring a clean supply of water for living organisms.
- Wetlands protect and shelter a wide variety of wildlife. These sanctuaries ensure the protection of many species - some which can live nowhere else on the planet. When wetlands are filled in or destroyed, these creatures may become extinct.
- Wetlands provide rich feeding grounds for many organisms. Their diversity of life ensures that many animals are able to survive.

Wetlands feature a magnificent variety of plant and animal life. Animals may range in size from the heavyweight alligator of southern swamps to the tiniest gnat in a northern bog. Plants may range in size from a towering cypress tree (up to 150') in the Everglades to the microscopic one-celled diatoms that live in the prairie potholes of the Midwest. Big and small, plentiful and rare - the variety of life in the wetlands is truly amazing. And it's all waiting to be discovered!

Wetlands are known by several different names depending on where they are located, what lives in them, and the amount of water in that particular area. Names such as marsh, swamp, prairie pothole, slough, bayou, fen, bog, muskeg, estuary, and quagmire are often used to describe various types of wetlands. However, in the United States, there are six primary types of wetland ecosystems. Each one of these is an amazing habitat filled with a remarkable assortment of plants and animals.

### ***Saltwater Marshes***

Saltwater marshes can be found along every coastline of the United States - the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, and Alaskan coasts. They occur whenever saltwater (from the ocean) stands in shallow areas (often called tidal flats) along the coast or mixes with fresh water at the mouths of rivers and streams. Plants and animals that live in these regions must be able to live in salty water and also endure the changing tides. Large saltwater marshes are located in Virginia's Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Texas's

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and South Carolina's Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge.

### ***Freshwater Marshes***

Freshwater marshes are often located along the shores of rivers and streams or in the shallows of ponds and lakes. The water in these areas comes from underground springs, streams or rivers that flow into them, rainfall, or runoff from melting snow. In dry periods of the year (e.g. the end of summer) shallow marshes may dry up completely; during the wet season these wetlands may have water up to seven feet deep. Since most freshwater marshes are located inland, some of the largest ones can be found in North Dakota's Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, Utah's Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, and Montana's Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

### ***Swamps***

Swamps can be found along rivers, streams, and lakes. By definition, a swamp is simply a marsh with lots of trees. Most swamps have standing or slow moving water for most of the year. During the dry months, however, the water level in some swamps may drop below ground level. Swamps are known as "transitional environments" since they frequently occur between large expanses of open water and higher, drier ground. Many scientists believe that, besides tropical rain forests, swamps are the most biologically diverse environments in the world. Some of the better known swamps in the United States include the Everglades, Big Cypress Swamp, and Okefenokee Swamp in Florida, the Atchafalaya Swamp in Louisiana, and The Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia.

### ***Bogs***

Bogs commonly occur in northern regions of the country. They are formed in deep, bowl-like depressions in the earth left by receding glaciers during the last ice age. These depressions fill with water, but since there is no way for the standing water to drain it becomes very stagnant. Plants, mostly mosses, grow near and over this water. As they die they fall to the bottom of the bog creating (over many thousands of years) layers of decaying material (known as peat). The bog fills up with solid mats of peat and the water becomes highly acidic. The water has low levels of oxygen and, as a result, very few animals live in bogs. Approximately 1% of the earth's surface is covered by bogs. In the United States, the largest bogs can be found throughout the Northeastern States (Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Maine in particular), Alaska, and the Great Lakes region. Canada has the largest concentration of bogs of any country in the world.

### ***Estuaries***

Estuaries can be found along seacoasts. These are places where freshwater from streams and rivers empties into the ocean and mixes with saltwater. Similar in some respects to saltwater marshes they frequently occur along long expanses of beaches or behind barrier islands (long narrow bands of sand - slightly above sea level - just offshore many southern states). The grasses and wide variety of vegetation that grows in these areas prevent beach erosion while offering a safe haven for a wide variety of sea life

including manatees, crabs, shrimp, salmon, and many shellfish. An estuary may be classified as a saltwater marsh, but a saltwater marsh cannot be an estuary since a saltwater marsh is standing salt water and does not have a steady supply of freshwater emptying into it (from a river, for example). Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and San Francisco Bay in California are two of the most well-known estuaries.

### ***Prairie Potholes***

Prairie potholes are found primarily in the north-central United States and south-central Canada. They were formed many thousands of years ago when receding glaciers scraped out large expansive depressions in the earth. Filled with fresh water (from rains, runoffs, melting snow, and floods) they may be as small as one or two feet across or as large as several football fields. These shallow, often temporary, marsh-like ponds are important to the various flocks of migrating birds that travel across them every year - serving as important "rest stops." More than 50% of all the ducks in North America use the prairie potholes of the Midwest for food, rest, and breeding purposes. North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota have thousands of prairie potholes within their borders.

Wetlands offer a surprising variety of life - thousands of species of plants and animals make this special ecosystem their home. Wetlands can be found in every state ranging in size from tiny potholes in the Midwest to enormous swamps in the Southeast. They are also a crucial link to other ecosystems - providing food and shelter to wildlife that roam through several different habitats as well as nourishment to plant life in other environments. Forests, woodlands, prairies, and meadows all need the sustenance that wetlands offer - ensuring the survival of a diversity of species.

### **Activities & Projects:**

1. Encourage students to write a fictitious letter to the girl in the story. What would they like to say to her? What would they like to know about her adventures in the wetland ecosystem profiled in the book? What else would they like to know about her?
2. Invite each student in the class to select one of the animals illustrated in this book. Encourage each child to conduct necessary research (i.e. library, Internet) on his or her identified species. Then, invite each student to write a series of diary entries told from the perspective of the creature. For example, "A Day in the Life of a Frog," or "My life as a Dragonfly."
3. Provide students with an assortment of magazines that contain pictures of wetland creatures (e.g. *National Geographic*, *Ranger Rick*, *National Wildlife*). Encourage them to bring in old magazines from home. Invite students to make a class collage of a wetlands environment by pasting pictures of different critters on a large sheet of newsprint (to be displayed in the classroom).
4. Invite students to read one or more of the other books in this series. These include ***Under One Rock: Bugs, Slugs and Other Ughs*** (2001), ***In One Tidepool: Crabs, Snails and Salty Tails*** (2002), and ***Around One Cactus: Owls,***

- Bats and Leaping Rats* (2003). How are the books similar? How are the books different?
5. Invite students to contact several of the following groups and ask for information on the work they do and the types of printed information they have available for students: **Ducks Unlimited** (One Waterfowl Way, Memphis, TN 38120; [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org)), **Izaak Walton League of America** (707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878; [www.iwla.org](http://www.iwla.org)), **National Wildlife Federation** (11100 Wildlife Center Drive, Reston, VA 20190; [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)), **Wetlands International - North America** (c/o USFWS, Div. of International Affairs, 4401 North Fairfax Dr., Room 730-ARLSQ, Arlington, VA 22203-1622).
  6. Invite a biologist, zoologist or naturalist from a local college or university to speak to your students about wetland animals and the special environment(s) in which they live. How does the information shared by the expert compare with the information in the book?
  7. Invite students to create posters or advertisements to attract other students to this book. What information, data or illustrations should be included? Students may wish to hang their creations throughout the school or in the school library.
  8. Talk with students about some of the “Fantastic Facts” included in the “Field Notes” section of the book. Which ones did they find most amazing? Invite students to assemble their own collection of “Wetlands Fantastic Facts” based upon outside readings or research.
  9. Invite students to look through the classified section of the local newspaper. Based on examples in the newspaper, challenge students to create an original classified advertisement based on information in the book. For example:

FOR RENT: Lily pad. Sometimes wet, sometimes dry. Lots of neighbors. Lots of plants. Waterfront property with great view. Reasonable rates. Available immediately. Call Freddy Frog at 123-4567 any time after bird migration.

10. Invite students to research and gather some examples of nature art. If possible, show students a selection of paintings that represent things in nature. Obtain books of prints (ask the art teacher) with artwork created by nature artists (for example: Frederic Church, Claude Monet). Are there any artists or paintings that would be representative of a wetlands environment?
11. Invite students to compare the illustrations in this book with photographs in non-fiction books about wetlands. What similarities do they notice? What were some of the things the artist had to consider in drawing the pictures for this book?
12. Invite students to create a wordless picture book using important events from this book. This activity can be done in small groups with each group displaying its completed book on the bulletin board. What challenges are there in creating a wordless version of this story? What are some of the things an artist must think

- about in creating a wordless picture book as opposed to a text-driven picture book?
13. Involve students in a readers theatre adaptation of this book. Readers theatre is an oral adaptation of a piece of literature read in a dramatic style. Students use prepared scripts (no memorization is necessary) to present their own adaptation of a book. For more information consult *Tadpole Tales and Other Totally Terrific Treats for Readers Theatre* by Anthony D. Fredericks (Westport, CT: Teacher Ideas Press, 1997). [In preparing *Near One Cattail* as a readers theatre script students may wish to give the various animals speaking parts.]
  14. Be sure to check out the following web site:  
<http://www.cln.org/themes/wetlands.html>. Here, students and teachers will find a multitude of curricular resources (information, content, etc.) to help them learn about all about wetlands. In addition, there are lots of links to instructional materials (e.g. lesson plans) which will help you provide instruction in this theme. In a word, this site is SUPER!
  15. Provide students with blank maps of North America. After appropriate research, invite them to color in the places in the United States and Canada where wetlands would be found. If more appropriate, consider providing youngsters with a blank map of your state and invite them to locate regional wetland areas.
  16. Invite students to put together a “Wetlands Newspaper” that presents interesting facts and observations about wetland creatures. Invite students to use the same sections as the local newspaper (e.g. Sports – how fast some wetland animals can move; Fashion – what are the latest “colors” all the fashionable critters are wearing; Food and Health – the different diets of wetland creatures). Students can use a word processing program to assemble the newspaper and then print it for distribution to other classrooms.
  17. Invite students to log onto the wildlife page of the National Wildlife Federation: <http://www.nwf.org/wildlife/>. Students may wish to locate various animals profiled in *Near One Cattail* and learn additional information about them through this all-inclusive site. This site is also appropriate for research on selected wetland and/or endangered animal species.
  18. Cut off the fingers from several pairs of inexpensive work gloves. Invite students to use a variety of art materials (crayons, yarn, felt-tip pens, sequins, etc.) to turn each “finger” into a puppet representing one of the creatures in the book. Students can use these puppets as part of a finger play during a retelling of the story.
  19. The book begins with a letter from “Your Big-Eyed Buddy” – the frog. Invite students to create other possible introductory letters for the book using one or more of the other featured animals as narrator(s). Provide opportunities for students to share these letters with each other.
  20. Invite a group of students to brainstorm what a wetlands ecosystem would be like if there were no creatures living in it. For example, imagine no more ruddy ducks, no more frogs, no more water snakes. Invite students to discuss the implication of a creature-less wetland.

21. Discuss with students the similarities and/or differences between the community of animals in a wetlands environment and the community in which they live. Invite students to create an oversize Venn diagram which illustrates those comparisons.
22. Invite students to each select one of the animals mentioned in the book. Invite each child to demonstrate the movement of that animal in a designated area. For example, a ruddy duck paddles slowly across the surface of a pond, a water snake slithers back and forth through the water. Provide opportunities for students to describe their movements and why they may be unique for each animal.
23. Create an ecology club. Interested students can initiate school and community projects aimed at improving the local environment (see *No Sweat Science: Nature Experiments* by Anthony D. Fredericks [New York, NY: Sterling Publishing, 2005, for ideas). Invite local senior citizens to join the club and help out with the projects.
24. Check out the following web site: <http://www.naturesmusic.com>. They have a wide selection of recorded nature sounds from around the world and from various ecosystems. You may wish to obtain one or more CD's and play them for your students (either while reading *Near One Cattail* aloud or as a post-reading activity).
25. Invite students to develop charts and graphs that record the number of species of each of the animals described in the book. Which species has the greatest number of members around the world? Which has the fewest number of members? Based on the numbers alone, which species has the greatest likelihood of being placed on an "endangered species" list?
26. Invite youngsters to create "Wanted" posters for some of the animals in the book. What information should be included on each poster? What are some of the "vital statistics" that students would want to share with others via their posters? If possible, obtain one or more "Wanted" posters from your local post office and use them as models for your students' posters.
27. Invite students to complete the following list using animals from the book. Encourage them to research other wetlands creatures and add them to this list or an over-sized wall chart posted in the classroom:

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Two Adjectives</u>
Frogs	bulging, _____
Turtles	sunbathing, _____
Dragonfly	zip-zipping, _____
Ducks	brown-feathered, _____
Muskrat	furry, _____
Beetle	paddling, _____
Snake	curled, _____
28. Invite students to create a large wall chart divided into several sections: Mammals, Birds, Fish, Amphibians, Reptiles, and Insects. Ask them to place each of the creatures featured in the book into its appropriate category on the chart. Then, ask students to select other animals that might be discovered in a

- wetlands environment and add them to the chart as well. Plan time to discuss the various species found in a “typical” wetland ecosystem. Which species or classification seems to predominate?
29. Here are some other wetlands books for kids that you may wish to share with your students: *Squishy, Misty, Damp & Muddy* by Molly Cone, *Wading into Wetlands* by the National Wildlife Federation, *Leapfrogging Through Wetlands* by Margaret Anderson et al, *America’s Wetlands* by Frank Staub, and *One Small Square: Swamp* by Donald Silver.
  30. Here are three excellent videos (all VHS) about wetlands that you may wish to obtain for your classroom or library (all are available from Amazon.com): *Wetlands, Marshes and Swamps* (1996), *Conserving America: The Wetlands* (1994), and *Wild Wetlands (Animal Safari, Vol. 7)* (2000).
  31. Obtain a copy of *Sawgrass Poems* by Frank Asch (Harcourt, 1996). Share some of the poetry with your students. Afterwards, invite students to create their own “wetlands poetry.” Each completed poem can be posted on an oversized cutout of a cattail.
  32. Invite students to discuss the similarities between human dwellings and animal homes. What are some of the things that determine where an animal lives? Are those conditions or features similar to the considerations of humans in selecting a living site? Do animals, particularly wetland animals, have more options for living spaces than humans?
  33. Invite students to collect objects from home that might serve as metaphors for a wetlands environment. For example: **Sponge** – wetlands absorb the runoff from streams and rivers; **Coffee Filter** – wetlands filter impurities out of the water; **Pillow** – wetlands provide a resting place for migratory birds; **Picture of a Baby Cradle** – wetlands provide a sheltering place for many types of baby animals. Invite students to create a classroom “museum display” table that features selected items along with a descriptive metaphor for each one.
  34. Students may enjoy creating their own “Wetlands Dictionary.” Invite them to form small groups – with each group responsible for gathering words and definitions for several letters of the alphabet. For example: **A** = Amazing environment, animals; **B** = bog, bugs, backswimmers; **C** = critters, cattail; **D** = damp, dragonfly, ducks; **E** = emerge, endangered; **F** = feathers, fen, flower.
  35. Invite an employee of a local garden center or nursery to visit the classroom and discuss various types of water plants sold there. What are some planting techniques? How should water plants be cared for? Why are some water plants hardier than others? Invite students to gather responses to these questions (as well as their own) into an informative brochure or PowerPoint presentation.

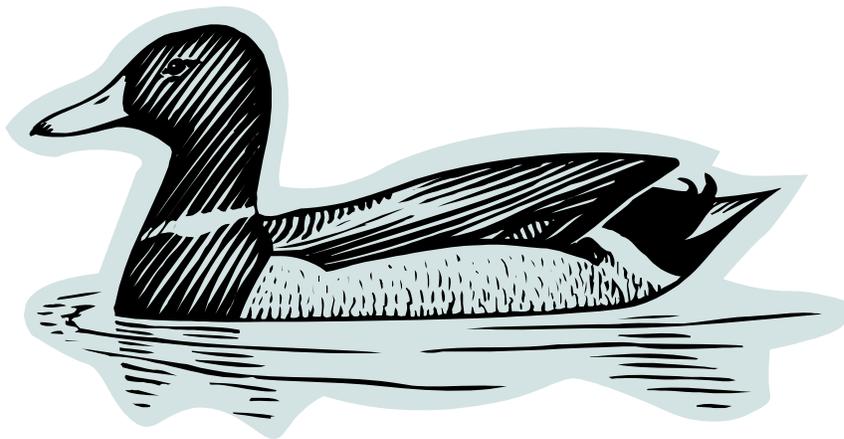


## Guided Reading Lesson #1

### *Near One Cattail: Turtles, Logs and Leaping Frogs*

<b>Setting the Stage</b>	Before passing out copies of the book to the members of a guided reading group, read the letter from the frog (1 <sup>st</sup> page) to the students. Afterward, invite students to make some predictions about what they might find in a wetlands environment. What kinds of plants? What kinds of animals? Ask them to make a prediction about this particular wetland. What will happen? What will be discovered? Take a few minutes to discuss and share all predictions.
<b>Before Reading</b>	Invite students to participate in a K-W-L activity. Ask students to talk about what they already know about wetlands. Write this information in the <b>K</b> section of a K-W-L chart. Encourage students to categorize the information they have volunteered. Students may wish to create a semantic web of this data. Invite students to make predictions about the types of information the book will contain. Write these predictions on the chalkboard or large sheet of newsprint. Ask students to generate their own questions about the book. These can be discussed and recorded in the <b>W</b> – What we want to find out – section of the chart.
<b>During Reading</b>	Invite students to read the book and record any answers to their questions. Students may wish to do this individually or in pairs.
<b>After Reading</b>	Upon completion of the book, provide students with an opportunity to discuss the information learned and how that data relates to their prior knowledge. Talk about questions posed for which no information was found in the book. Help students discover other sources for satisfying their inquiries.
<b>Literature Extensions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Invite each student to select an animal from the book to study. Students can pretend that they are writing a newspaper birth announcement for the birth of their chosen animal. They will need to do some research to gather the appropriate information. Provide the birth announcement section of the daily newspaper for students to use as a model for writing their pieces. Decorate a bulletin board to look like a section of a newspaper and post the animal birth announcements. Students may wish to include illustrations of the new babies.</li></ol>

2. Invite each student to imagine that she/he is one of the animals in the story. Encourage students to each create a poster that says "Save Our Home." Students can include a full-color illustration of each of their selected creatures and write a convincing ad for saving wetlands environments.
3. Invite students to log on to the following web site: <http://mbgnet.mobot.org/fresh/>. This site has lots of information about freshwater wetlands. After viewing the site ask students to discuss (or create a written chart) of the similarities and/or differences between freshwater wetlands (as depicted on the web site) and the wetland environment portrayed in the book.
4. Invite students to imagine that they are a single wetland. Encourage them to write a life story told from the perspective of the wetland. What happens to the wetland during the course of a year? During a decade? During a century? How is the wetland's life similar to or different from other ecosystems (e.g. desert, tundra, rainforest, savanna)?
5. Invite students to rewrite part of the story from the perspective of one of the animals. For example, how would the beetle view the actions of the other creatures? How would the ruddy duck view the other creatures?



## Guided Reading Lesson #2

### *Near One Cattail: Turtles, Logs and Leaping Frogs*

<b>Setting the Stage</b>	Before distributing copies of the book to the members of a guided reading group, share the title with students. Invite students to make predictions about the story. What will it be about? Who will be in it? Then, show the group the cover illustration. Once again, invite them to make predictions based solely on what they see on the cover. Encourage students to record each of their predictions on a sheet of newsprint (for later reference).
<b>Before Reading</b>	Engage students in a “What-If” activity. Ask each student to imagine that she/he was going to take a trip to a wetlands area. What would she/he wear? What would she/he look for at the site? How long would she/he stay there? You may wish to “stir the pot” a little by asking some of the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What if you had a wetlands area in your back yard?</li><li>• What if you had to spend 24 hours in a wetlands environment?</li><li>• What if you were a wetlands creature?</li><li>• What if there were no more wetlands in this country?</li><li>• What if you were the girl on the cover – what would you do?</li></ul>
<b>During Reading</b>	Provide a copy of the book for each student. Ask students to read the book silently on their own.
<b>After Reading</b>	Encourage students to talk about some of the “What-If” questions they posed before reading the book and some of the responses generated by those questions. How did their discussions match with the information in the book? Did they learn something in the book that would have added something to their pre-reading discussions? How was the information in the book similar to or different from the information they knew before reading the book?
<b>Literature Extensions</b>	Invite students to select one or more of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Invite students to create their own imaginative stories about an adventure they had one day in a wetlands environment. What creatures did they see? What plants did they encounter? What did they observe and what did they learn? Later, students may wish to develop their stories into a skit or readers theatre production.</li></ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Invite students to create a guidebook to the flora and fauna found in a wetlands area (one within a reasonable distance from the school). Encourage students to do the appropriate research (contacting experts, books, Internet, etc.) in assembling their data. Ask students to prepare the guidebook for young visitors to the wetlands area.</li><li>3. Invite students to prepare an advertisement or commercial promoting the book to friends or students in another class. What type of information should be included to “sell” the book to others? Should the advertisement/commercial be humorous or serious?</li><li>4. Encourage students to create their own sequel to the book. How might the story continue? What other critters would the girl observe? What would she do after she left the wetlands area?</li><li>5. Invite students to imagine that they live next to a wetlands area and are writing to a friend to convince her or him to visit for several days. What features or attractions should be mentioned in the letter? Afterwards, invite students to imagine they are in an urban environment and writing to a friend who lives near a wetlands area – inviting that person for a visit.</li></ol>
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