

Five Little Speckled Frogs

A Lesson for Grades K–1

Dana Islas

Featured in *Math Solutions Online Newsletter*, Issue 35

Materials

- The children’s rhyming story *Five Little Speckled Frogs*, by Nikki Smith (Nikki Smith Books, 2006)
- Cubes, 5 per student

Overview of Lesson

In the delightful rhyme *Five Little Speckled Frogs*, five frogs sitting on a log gulp bugs and jump into a pool one by one. The story serves as the lesson’s springboard for helping students represent the characters and the actions taking place.

Students first listen to the story while the teacher reads it aloud, then they act it out during a second reading. After this introductory experience, the teacher reads the story again, and this time students use cubes to represent the actions of the characters. Finally, once students are familiar with using manipulatives (cubes) to represent the story’s actions, they connect the physical models with equations.

By bringing *Five Little Speckled Frogs* into a math lesson, we capitalize on young children’s willingness to act out their favorite rhymes. We also give them the opportunity to use objects as props in a dramatic-play setting. The use of literature as a tool makes representing with manipulatives seem very natural. Key questions like *How many frogs are on the log now?* help students maintain their representation and follow along with the story.

Lesson Outline

Reading the Book: Acting Out the Story

1. Have students sit in the circle area of your classroom. Read *Five Little Speckled Frogs* to them to build their familiarity with the story.
2. In preparation for the math lesson, tell students you will reread the story, and this time, they will act it out.
3. Ask students, “Who are the characters in this book? How many frogs are in the story?”
4. Write the word *frog* on the board five times in a list format.
5. Ask students, “Who would like to be a frog?” Select five students to play frogs. Write each of the five students’ names next to the word *frog*.



6. Ask the five students selected to come toward the front of the circle area and pretend that they are frogs sitting on a log.
7. Tell the students in the audience that you will be the narrator, but you will need them to help you tell the story.
8. Begin the story. “Five little speckled frogs, sitting on a hollow log . . .” When you get to the part that reads, “One jumped into the pool . . . ,” motion for one of the “frogs” to jump into the “pool.” The student should pretend to frog-hop into a pool.
9. Ask students the following key questions:

Key Questions

How many frogs are on the log now?

How many frogs are in the pool now?

10. Continue your role as narrator, reading the rhyme and asking key questions while the audience assists and the frogs on the log jump into the pool.

Reading the Book: Representing with Cubes

1. Place five cubes per student in a basket or container that can be easily passed around.
2. Ask students to sit in a large circle. Tell them that this time you have cubes for them to use in acting out the story. Students will typically be excited for another variation of this favorite rhyme.
3. Ask students the following key questions:

Key Questions

How many frogs are in the story?

How many cubes will you need to act out this story?

4. After students respond, ask them to pass the basket around, each taking five cubes from it and placing the cubes in front of him or her on the floor.
5. Tell students that you will be the narrator again and they will need to help you tell the story. This time, however, as you tell the story, their cubes will be the frogs.



6. Ask students, “Where were the frogs in the beginning of the story?” When students have determined that the frogs were on a log, ask them to line up their cubes on their imaginary logs.
7. Ask students, “What happens in the middle of this story?” After students respond that the frogs jump into a pool, ask, “How could you show this using your cubes?” Give students a minute to practice moving their frogs from their logs into their pools.
8. Begin reading the story. Students move one cube into the pool as you say, “One jumped into the pool, where it was nice and cool.”
9. Each time a frog leaves the log to jump into the water, ask students the following key questions:

Key Questions

How many frogs are on the log now?

How many frogs are in the pool now?

10. Once students are very familiar with cubes as a form of representation, connect the physical model to equations. Tell students, “We can write sentences with words, but we can also write sentences with numbers. I heard you say there are four frogs on the log [*write a 4 on the board*] and there is one frog in the pool [*write + 1 on the board*].” Ask, “How many frogs did we start with?” Record students’ response of five by adding = 5 after the 4 + 1. Repeat this process, soliciting and recording a number sentence after each frog jumps into the pool:

$$4 + 1 = 5$$

$$3 + 2 = 5$$

$$2 + 3 = 5$$

$$1 + 4 = 5$$

Extension

Once students are familiar with the last step of the lesson, some may be ready to record the actions of the story by writing the equations themselves.

Organizational Tips

Giving Everyone a Turn

Act out the story throughout the week to allow all students to have a turn. Keep up the list of students’ names who have had a turn to act as a frog; this is a simple way to track who has had a turn. Students rarely tire of acting out their favorite rhymes, plus the repeated experience gives students practice with the combinations of five.



Explaining Roles

When acting out any story, explain the various roles students play. Students in the audience should watch and listen to the performance, assist the narrator when appropriate, and applaud afterward. Students who are performing should play their parts, speak loudly (if they have speaking parts), have fun, and take a bow at the end. These expectations encourage students to take their roles as performers or audience members seriously. Defining roles also helps students make other connections. For example, the role of audience helps students understand what *audience* means when we are writing or communicating our thinking to others throughout different subject areas of the curriculum.

Formative Assessment

When observing individual students at work in this lesson, consider the following:

- Does the student volunteer to act out the story or does she or he prefer to be an audience member?
- Does the student use his or her cubes to accurately represent the action taking place in the story?
- Can the student record an equation representing the actions taking place in the story?

Helping Students Who Struggle with Using Manipulatives for Representation

Students who are struggling with the idea of representing with manipulatives need more time and experiences. These can be provided one-on-one or in a small group. Using the same story, model the use of the cubes to represent the actions. Make sure you clearly verbalize your actions. Alternatively, ask students who are able to represent the story using cubes to describe what they are doing. Modeling from both you and other students will be helpful to those who struggle.

Other Literature to Use for Representation

Let's Go Visiting, by Sue Williams (Harcourt Brace, 2003)

Mouse Count, by Ellen Stoll Walsh (Harcourt, 2009)

One Gorilla: A Counting Book, by Atsuko Morozumi (Sunburst, 1990)

Splash! by Ann Jonas (Greenwillow Books, 1995)

Ten Little Fish, by Audrey Wood (Blue Sky, 2004)

The nursery rhyme *Ten Little Monkeys* (various book versions)

Find more classroom lessons online at mathsolutions.com.
Visit the "Educator Tools" section and click on "Free Classroom Lessons."

