



Inquire to Learn!

There are many ways in which *The Strongest Mouse/ From Small to Big* can be used as a base for Inquiry Learning. This is just one suggestion.

Session 1

Using the Big Book, share-read *The Strongest Mouse*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of mice and elephants, arrogance/pride, and coincidences.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion

Mice and Elephants: *Would you say that a mouse is a strong animal? Why/why not? Would you say that an elephant is a strong animal? Why/why not?* Discuss that everything is comparative, so the strongest mouse in the world would not be as strong as a weak elephant. Explain that is why it is important that competitions take place between people of a similar size or a similar skill level e.g., different weight grades for rugby, age limits for competitive groups. Many children will have prior knowledge of this concept, so encourage them to share their experiences and examples.

Arrogance/Pride: *Is it OK to feel proud of being good at something?* Lead a discussion on how it is OK to feel proud of one's own achievements, but that it is not OK to put down other people's efforts or to be boastful. Ensure that the children understand the difference between feeling good about themselves for a job well done and being boastful, arrogant, or hurtful to others.

Coincidences: Explore the concept of coincidence by starting with its definition, *coincidence: a situation in which events happen at the same time in a way that is not planned or expected* e.g., two

children wearing the same hoodie to school on a certain day. As a class, brainstorm other examples of coincidence.

Text and Illustration Based Inquiry Questions

Cover: Look at the cover of *The Strongest Mouse* and ask, *What do you notice about the mouse who is lifting the branch?* (He is much bigger than the other mice.) *What do you think the other mice are thinking and feeling?* (They are excited and impressed with the strength of the mouse.) *Look at the branch the mouse is lifting. Is this a big branch, or just big for a mouse to be lifting?* Lead the children to understand that the branch is about twice the size of the mouse, so it is big compared to the mouse but it is not big compared to other animals. Discuss again the issue of comparativity and ensure that the children understand that the branch the mouse is lifting is really just a twig.

Title Page: *What is the mouse doing? (Showing off his muscles.) How do you think the mouse is feeling?* (Proud)

P. 2: Revisit the sentence *Panya was proud of being fast and strong*. Ensure that the children understand that it is OK for Panya to be proud of the things he is good at. Invite the children to share things that they are good at, or feedback to the students yourself about things that individuals are good at.

The Strongest Mouse/From Small to Big

Teacher's Notes continued

P. 5: Reread the first two paragraphs and discuss the proverb "Pride goes before a fall." Explain that the proverb means that if you are too conceited or self-important, something will happen to make you look foolish. Discuss how this relates to Panya and his boasting.

P. 6: Revisit the text "I don't know who Elephant is. But I do know that she can't be stronger than me!" Ask, *Can Panya know that Elephant can't be stronger than him if he doesn't know who Elephant is?* Compare this to not knowing whether one will like a certain food if one has not tried it.

P. 7: *Mother Mouse warns Panya to take an umbrella because a big storm is coming, but Panya doesn't listen. Why doesn't he listen?* (Because Panya is too full of self-importance.) *Why do you think Mother Mouse lets Panya go in search of Elephant when she knows that Elephant is definitely stronger than the strongest mouse?* (Because sometimes people, and mice, must be allowed to learn from their own mistakes.)

PP. 8–9, 10–11, 12–13: Revisit the connections between Panya stomping his foot and the appearance of thunder, Panya waving his arms and the appearance of lightning, and Panya stomping his foot and the rain cloud covering the sun. Ensure that the children understand that these are examples of things happening by coincidence. Explain that Panya's self-belief is further strengthened by the animals' belief that Panya caused those things to happen.

PP. 14–15: Revisit the text on P. 14 and look at the illustration of Elephant of P. 15. Ask, *Do you think Elephant is being cruel to Panya or just teasing him? Why do you think that?* Revisit the text on P. 15. *Was it a great flood of water or did it just seem like a great flood to a little mouse?* Explore the concept again that everything is comparative.

P. 16: Reread the text and ask, *Was Panya correct in thinking that Elephant was washed away by the rain? Panya did not learn the lesson that arrogance or too much self-importance is foolish, but he did learn one lesson. Can anyone tell me what it is?* (To listen to his mother – Panya wished he had brought an umbrella!)

Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Share-read *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson and compare and contrast it to *The Strongest Mouse*. *What is the main difference between the mice in the two stories?* (The mouse in *The Gruffalo* is wise and deliberately tricks the other animals whereas the mouse in *The Strongest Mouse* is foolish, but is aided by coincidence.)

Brainstorm other stories that have mice as main characters e.g., Aesop's folk tale *The Lion and the Mouse*, *Stuart Little*, Beatrix Potter stories such as *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, *The Tale of Mrs Tittlemouse*, *Tiberius the Titirangi Mouse*, *Town Mouse and Country Mouse*, and Mickey Mouse stories.

Challenge the children to write their own stories with a mouse as a main character.

Make simple finger or glove puppets of the characters from *The Strongest Mouse* and, working in groups, have the children retell the story as a puppet show.

Research and share other folk tales from East Africa.

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Teacher's Notes continued

Session 2

Using the Big Book, share-read *From Small to Big*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of Africa, habitats, African animals, and poetry.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion and Inquiry

Swahili Greeting: *There are many languages spoken in East Africa, but Swahili is the most common. Does anyone know how to greet someone in Swahili? People say Hujambo, which means hello.*

Location of East Africa/Geography: Look at the map on P. 1 of *From Small to Big* and note the location of East Africa within Africa. Introduce the word *continent* and define it as *one of Earth's seven major areas of land*. Compare this map to a globe or world map and locate the continent of Africa and the area of East Africa on it. Discuss the location of Africa in relation to New Zealand. If any of the children come from East Africa or have visited there, invite them to share their experiences.

Habitats: Revisit the second paragraph on P. 1 of *From Small to Big* and note the word *habitat*. Define *habitat* as *the place where a plant or animal lives in nature, its natural home*. Ensure that the children understand that deserts, grasslands, rainforests, mountains, and lakes are all habitats. Revisit P. 8 and note that grasslands in Africa are called the savannah.

African Animals: Using *From Small to Big* as a reference as well as the childrens' prior knowledge, brainstorm a list of African animals. Examples from the text include: elephants, ostriches, zebras, lizards, mice, lions, hyenas, giraffes, zebras, rhinos, buffalo, and hippos. Challenge the children to add other African animals to the list, such as gorillas, chimpanzees, leopards, and cheetahs. Invite the children to share any experiences they may have of these animals. Refer back to P. 2 of *From Small to Big* and explain that this method of displaying information is called a picture graph.

Poetry: Discuss with the children that there are many different kinds of poetry and that some poems rhyme and others do not. Revisit "The Elephant Poem" on PP. 6–7 of *From Small to Big* and identify the rhyming words: *guys/lies, eat/feet, young/tongue, cheat/neat, folks/jokes, today/grey, nice/mice, can't/elephant*. If appropriate for your children, explain that this poem is written in rhyming couplets, or in groups of two lines that rhyme and complete one thought. Discuss the design of this spread and note that the designer has chosen to display the poem inside an elephant shape.

Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Challenge the students to write a glossary for *From Small to Big*. They could use the words previously defined as a starting point (*continent: one of Earth's seven major areas of land; habitat: the place where a plant or an animal lives in nature, its natural home*) and add other words and their definitions that are new or challenging to them. Suggestions are: *coast, cultures, deserts, grasslands, rainforests, predators, savannah*.

Research to find out more about a natural feature of East Africa, such as Mount Kilimanjaro, Lake Victoria, or the Serengeti Plain. Write 5 facts about your chosen natural feature.

Choose an African animal other than the elephant or spiny mouse and learn more about it. Use the reports on P. 3 and PP. 4–5 of *From Small to Big* as a model and write a report on your chosen animal or draw a picture. It may even be possible to visit African animals at a zoo or watch YouTube videos on African animals. N.B. Please view the videos prior to showing them to the children to ensure that they are suitable viewing material.

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Teacher's Notes continued

Write a poem about an African animal other than an elephant. Be a designer and choose a design to best display your poem. Email your poems to **info@cleanslatepress.com** with your first name, age, and school and the best poems will be posted on the Clean Slate Press facebook page.

Using P. 8 of **From Small to Big** as a model, choose one of the following African habitats: desert, rainforest, mountain, lake and write a report or a photo essay on it. Remember to include the kinds of animals that live in this habitat.

Make a picture graph of ocean animals, comparing their sizes. Use the picture graph of African animals on P. 2 of **From Small to Big** as a model.