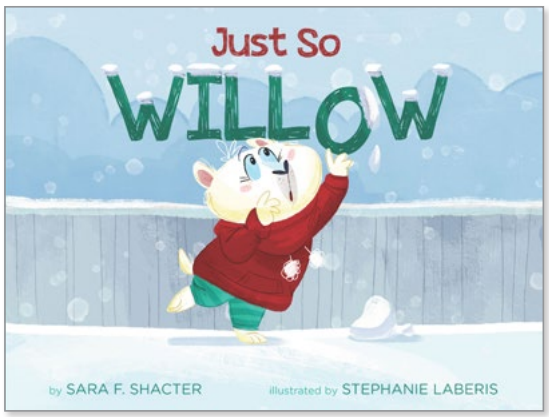
A TEACHER'S GUIDE *for*

Just So WILLOW



Thank you for sharing Willow with your students! Please enjoy the following activities.

STERLING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

(skills addressed: using evidence/giving details, predicting, making inferences, utilizing context, expressing opinions, answering/asking questions)

1. Direct students' attention to the front cover of the book:
   - What season of the year is it? How do you know?
   - What do you think Willow is doing? How do you think she's feeling?
2. Read the sentence on the back cover and have students examine the picture:
   - What do you see?
   - The title of the book is *Just So Willow*. What do you think "just so" means?
3. Based on the front and back covers, what do you think might happen in the book? There are no right or wrong answers, just good guesses!

POST-READING QUESTIONS

(skills addressed: using evidence/giving details, reassessing/rereading, utilizing context, making inferences, understanding character, answering questions)

1. Now what do you think "just so" means?
2. Has Willow changed in the story? Is she still "just so"? Use words and pictures from the book to explain your answer.
3. What piece of advice would you give Willow?
4. How do we know this is a make-believe story and not a true story? (fiction/nonfiction)
5. What "wondering" questions do you have now that we've read the book? Some of your questions we'll be able to answer and some will just be fun to wonder about!

Here are some 'wondering' questions from actual kindergartners and first-graders:

- *Why does a polar bear need to wear a coat if she has fur?*
- *How old is Willow?*
- *Why did she want the snow to be perfect?*
- *How could she get to school if she never wanted to mess up the snow?*
- *Why are there all sorts of different animals at the house next door and not just one type of animal?*

FOR JOURNALING

(skills addressed: making personal connections, storytelling, generalizing ideas, understanding point of view)

- Divide your paper in half: on one side, draw a picture of good times to be neat; on the other side, draw a picture of good times to be messy.
- Tell a story about a time when you were very neat or very messy!
- How does snow make you feel?
- What do you like doing when it snows?
- Pick a time in *Just So Willow* when Willow feels happy/mad/sad/lonely/scared/frustrated/worried—have you ever felt that way? When?
- Willow worries about "ruining" the snow. Have you ever worried about ruining something, or making a mistake?

NEAT AND TIDY ARTIC ANIMAL FACTS

(share these fun facts with your students—if you choose to do the subsequent activity, you might want to skip Dall sheep below)

If Willow were a real polar bear, she'd live in the Arctic. So would all of her friends. For real Arctic animals, sometimes it's important to be neat and tidy!

Dirt on a polar bear's white coat can keep the sun's warmth from reaching the bear's skin. So polar bears wash regularly by swimming, rolling in the snow, or licking off the dirt. Clean, white coats also help polar bears hide in the snow so they can sneak up on their meals.

But white coats aren't just for predators—many smaller animals, like snowshoe hares, baby ringed seals, and ermine, use their white coats to hide from bigger animals who want to eat them!

Two excellent eaters are wolverines and arctic foxes. They're scavengers—they keep the Arctic environment clean by eating other animals' leftovers. Wolverines, with their sharp teeth and powerful jaws, can even eat bones.

Sometimes being neat and tidy means staying organized. Collard lemmings and puffins build special bathroom areas in their burrows, so their homes aren't filled with poop!

Dall sheep are organized too. When they walk from one mountain to the next, they do it single file. There is no passing or cutting. If a sheep tries, it might get blocked by another sheep, or butted by its powerful horns.

It can be challenging to walk through the deep snow, wet mud, and squishy swamps of the Arctic. Lynx, caribou (reindeer), and moose have wide paws or hooves that keep them from sinking. So they stay high and dry.

All of Willow's friends in the book are Arctic animals. Here's a key, so you can learn who's who:

Fur Seal **Arctic Hare** **Siberian Husky** * **Ermine** **Puffin**

And Willow's teacher is a **walrus**!

* *Though huskies don't roam wild in the Arctic, the breed developed there. You can share these facts with your students:*

"The Siberian Husky . . . was developed to work in packs, pulling light loads at moderate speeds over vast frozen expanses."
—American Kennel Club

"Siberian Husky: breed of working dog raised in Siberia by the Chukchi people, who valued it as a sled dog, companion, and guard. It was brought to Alaska in 1909 for sled-dog races and soon became established as a consistent winner." *—Encyclopedia Britannica*

ANIMALS AND HUMANS—HOW DIFFERENT ARE WE?

(skills addressed: making connections, understanding animal behavior, evaluating content presented in diverse media/formats)

Show your students the photos included at the end of this guide and ask what each animal is doing. Once you've determined the answer as a class, ask how that is similar to human behavior.

Key:
Cat—washing paws/hands
Woodpecker—storing food
Birds—taking a bath
Dall Sheep—walking single file

GRAPH YOUR OPINIONS

(skills addressed: collecting, organizing and interpreting data; comparing, communicating information, graphing)

In this activity, your students will make a personal connection to *Just So Willow* while filling in a table and constructing a bar graph.

Materials:

Table based on your selected question *(see sample below)*
Skittles *(or something of a similar size)*
Post-it notes
Writing utensils

1. Ask your students a question related to *Just So Willow* that you feel will be engaging. The question should have two possible answers. Some ideas:

   - Would you like to visit the frozen Arctic one day?
   - Do you think you're more of a neat person or a messy person?
   - What's better, sledding or snowball fights?

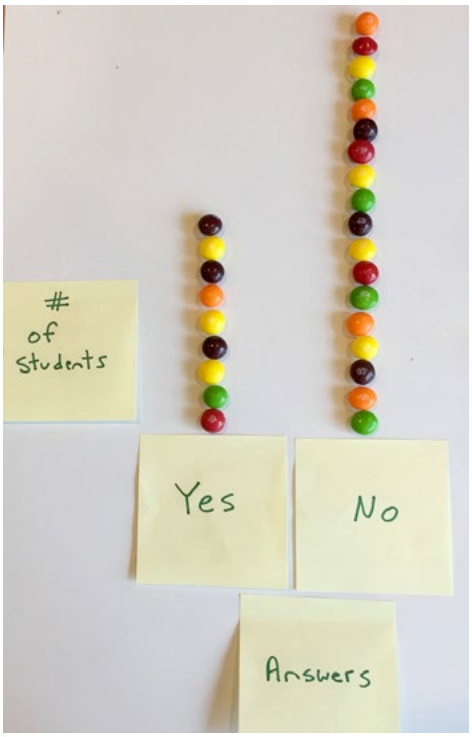
2. Help students count the number of classmates who reply with each answer and fill out a simple table, like this one:

Do you want to visit the Arctic?

	# of Students
Yes	9
No	18

3. Give each student (or pairs of students) the same number of Skittles as there are students in the class. On their desks, have them make two vertical lines of Skittles to represent the classroom's votes, each line with the proper number of Skittles.

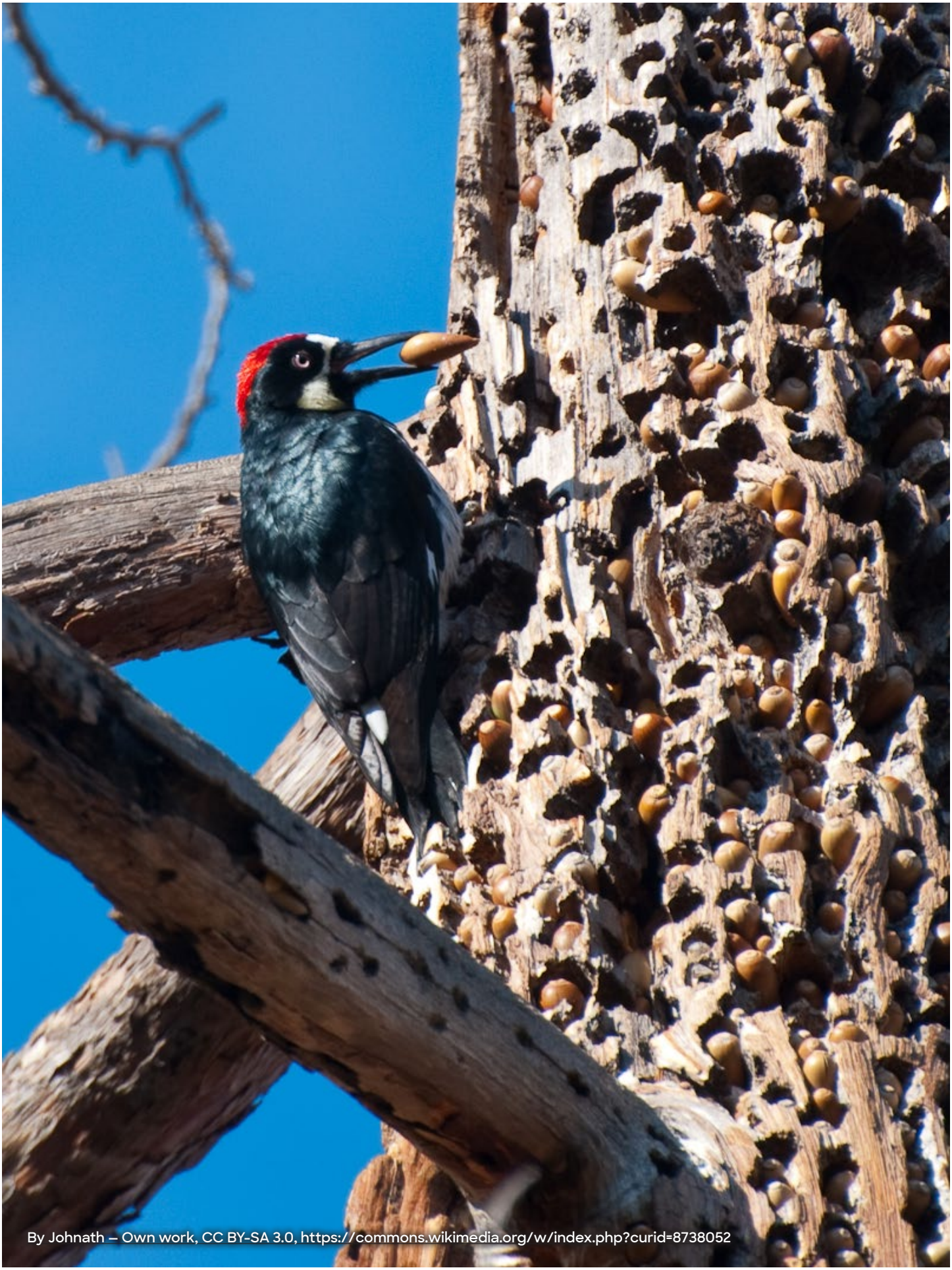
4. Give each student (or pair) 4 post-it notes. Help them brainstorm what they might need to label. Then write those words on the board for them to copy. Once they place their post-it notes appropriately, their graphs will look like this:



Outdoor Alternative: If you have outdoor space with a large black-top/concrete area, the kids themselves can take the place of the Skittles! Have them lie down in two vertical lines, reflecting their answers to your question. Outline them with chalk (forming the two bars) and label the chart appropriately.

Many thanks for the invaluable feedback provided by teachers **Meggie Wehmer**, **Tracy Demitropolous**, **Thessaly Bowker**, and **Laurie Annis** of Alexander Graham Bell School in Chicago, Illinois.

Water photo created by paymphotography - www.freepik.com



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