

Cricket Challenges

Inspired by *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*

By Jo Watson Hackl
Winner of the Southern Book Prize

Are you ready for a Cricket Challenge?

If Jo is visiting your school, select a challenge, provide an email address or twitter handle, and she'll send the challenge to your school.

Outdoor Challenges

1. For a week, spend at least 10 minutes a day outside and keep a nature journal. Your challenges:
 - ❖ Day one- find at least one insect and look up its name. Bonus points if you draw it.
 - ❖ Day two- find a leaf on the ground and identify the tree that it is from. Bonus points if you make a rubbing of the leaf (see below).
 - ❖ Day three- find one bird and research its name. Bonus points if you identify its diet and habitat. Double bonus points if you draw it.
 - ❖ Day four- find one mammal and look up its name. Bonus points if you discover whether it lives alone or in a group.
 - ❖ Day five- find a nut or seed. Bonus points if you identify the tree or plant that produced it.
 - ❖ Day six- listen for bird calls. Identify at least one bird whose call you heard. Bonus points if you research whether or not the bird migrates.
 - ❖ Day seven- sniff the air. See if you can identify a plant by the smell of its leaves or flowers. Bonus points if you draw the plant.
2. Find a wood sorrel patch with ripe seed head cones. Warm the cone gently between your fingers and watch what happens. Bonus points if you write a short paragraph about what you saw and felt.
3. Look like a rabbit. Find a grassy place to sit outside and study your surroundings. What do you see that you didn't notice before? How many different types of plants and animals call that spot home? Bonus points if you make a list.

4. Look for animal tracks. Identify at least one animal by its track. Does the track give you clues as to how heavy the animal is? Bonus points if you draw the tracks.
5. Collect at least 6 different types of leaves from your school playground and identify them. Bonus points if you make leaf rubbings of them (see below).
6. Make a leaf rubbing! Pick your favorite leaf and spread it out on a sheet of paper. Cover it with another sheet of paper. Using a crayon or the side of a pencil point, rub lightly across the top sheet. Watch as the shape of your leaf appears. Bonus points if you research whether your leaf is a simple or compound leaf.
7. Search outside for interesting foliage. Every day for a week, bring in some of the greenery to decorate your study area. Bonus points if you identify it.
8. Start your day outside! For at least five minutes every morning, go outside and do ten jumping jacks. Bonus points if you write about whether it made a difference in your day.
9. Wind down with the sun. This week watch at least three sunsets. Bonus points if you draw one.
10. Work as a class to research bird feeders and bird food. What kind of birds would you like to attract outside your classroom? Work together to raise money for a feeder and food. Place the bird feeder outside your classroom window, fill it with the best food for your area, and watch what happens. Bonus points if you identify the birds that come to the feeder.

Indoor Challenges

1. As a class, research a plant that you'd like to have in your classroom as a pet. Make a list of qualities you'd like in your class plant. Do you want your plant to be big or small, require a lot of care or just a little, and have flowers or not? Research the light that is available in your classroom. Pick a plant that you think will work well in this setting. Research the light and soil conditions from the place where the plant grows in the wild. Is your classroom a good fit? Why or why not? What care will it need? Work together to raise money to buy the plant, pot, soil and other supplies to care for your plant. Transfer the plant to its new pot and add soil and water. Pick the right spot in the classroom for it. Vote as a class to name your plant. As soon as you put the new plant in its pot, measure it. How tall is your class plant? Take turns watering the new plant. Once a week, measure your plant. Has it grown taller? What other changes do you see? Make a chart

showing the changes in the plant each week. Bonus points if you calculate the rate of growth. Does the changing light from the window affect the plant's rate of growth?

2. Pick a time of day. Every day for two weeks, measure where the top of the light from the classroom window falls in the room at that time. Mark off the area with masking tape. How does the placement change? Bonus points if you create a chart recording the changes.
3. In the book, Cricket lives in a treehouse. Make a model of what you think Cricket's treehouse looks like. How long and wide are its walls? Bonus points if you calculate its square footage.
4. If you were going to try to survive on your own in a treehouse in Electric City, Mississippi, what time of year would you like to go? Why? What would you need? Make a packing list. Bonus points if you design your perfect tree house.
5. Use a shoebox to design your own secret room. What would you put in it and why? Bonus points if you include a window with an opening so that light can shine through.
6. The book includes a term you might not have heard of--- a "doogaloo." Before you get to chapter 6 in the book, draw a picture of what you think a doogaloo looks like. Bonus points if you are close or correct in your guess. Now that you know what a doogaloo is, design one for your town using things found in nature.
7. If you were to rescue a cricket, what would you name it? Why? Research the things that you'd need to take care of your cricket and how cricket chirps can be used to tell temperature. Bonus points if you write a short story about how you rescued the cricket, why you named it what you did, and how you cared for it.
8. Pick one page out of *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* and write down seven words from that page that you find interesting. Write a poem that includes those seven words. Bonus points if you include at least one rhyme.
9. Make a map of what you think the ghost town of Electric City looks like. If you were going to live in a ghost town, what would you like to find there? Bonus points if you add them to the map.

10. Are there any ghost towns in your state? Research one ghost town. What was the town like when it had its largest population? What is it like today? Bonus points if you draw a “before” and “after” picture of the ghost town.
11. Draw a picture of what you think Percy looks like. If you could read to Percy, what would you like to read to him? Bonus points if you write about why you chose the passage you did.
12. If you had to choose an insect friend to take along with you on an outdoor adventure, what kind of insect would it be? Why did you choose that insect? Bonus points if you draw a picture of your insect friend.
13. Memorize a stanza of a poem by your favorite poet. Bonus points if you recite it to the class.
14. If you had a treasure box that you’re going to hide for safekeeping, what would you put in it? Make a list of all the things that you would include. Bonus points if you write a short paragraph explaining why you chose what you did.
15. Write a short paragraph describing the treehouse and the items inside it from a raccoon’s point of view. Bonus points if you describe what the raccoon would think of Charlene.
16. Pick one subject you’re studying in school and work in groups to use some of the facts that you’re learning to make your own clue trail. Bonus points if you challenge another group to solve it.