

Read Across America Activities

Activities to celebrate “Read Across America” all year long.

Activities to Use with Any Book

Visiting the Setting

Invite readers to create a visitors’ guide to the book’s setting. Before they begin, discuss the setting’s geography, climate, culture, economy, history, landmarks, attractions, and other unique features. Encourage readers to research elements about which they are curious. Next, identify points of interest and significant places within the story. Readers can use this information to create their visitor’s guide with detailed descriptions and interesting facts about each location. For bonus points, invite readers to illustrate their visitors’ guides with artwork and photos.

Charting the Course

Invite readers to create a map based on the book’s setting that highlights the impact that the setting has on the book’s main character(s). Which locations are important? Why? What landmarks or features define these locations? How has the history of the setting shaped the main character(s)? Readers can use symbols, labels, and colors to create a map key to represent different elements.

Creating News

Challenge readers to create a “hometown newspaper” from the perspective of leaders in a community that serves as a significant setting in the book. What would the community’s slogan be? Challenge readers to write at least three articles describing the story’s action and include illustrations of significant events in the book. Invite readers to consider where the main character(s) fit in the overall societal structure of that community. Would the main character(s) agree or disagree with the newspaper’s version of events? If the answer is “no,” challenge readers to write a “letter to the editor” providing the perspective of the main character(s).

Creating a Character Scrapbook

Ask readers to choose their favorite character from the story and create a scrapbook for that character describing their daily life and story adventures. The scrapbook can include drawings, quotes, receipts, tickets, and other items that the character would have encountered along their journey. For bonus points, invite readers to write a reflection about the things they have in common

with the character they chose, and to create a list of three things from the main character's culture about which they would like to learn more.

Sell It!

Invite readers to create a persuasive sales pitch for the book. To begin, readers can identify themes, characters, and plot elements to highlight. Invite readers to brainstorm ideas and plan their pitch, being sure to include features they think will most appeal to other readers. Readers can then present their pitch to an audience in any form they choose, including an article, podcast, or video.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Go on a nature scavenger hunt. Invite readers to search for at least five items from the natural world of their Read Across America ("RAA") book selection. Readers can search until they find all the items or for an allotted amount of time. When they're finished, invite readers to share their items. For bonus points, use non-fiction resources to look up at least three interesting facts about each item.

Create a Nature Journal from the Point of View of the Main Character(s) in their RAA book

Readers can create their own journals using art supplies. When their journals are ready, invite them to research the natural world in which the story is set, including the geography, plant and animal life in the area, and the time(s) of the year in which the action takes place. Readers can use this research as inspiration for the nature journal from the perspective of the book's main character(s). Invite readers to make notes in their journals of the details that would be important to the story's character(s) on each day of the story's action. Each entry should include the time, date, place, natural elements, including flora and fauna, and weather, plus any additional information the reader believes is important. Journals can include a narration about what the character(s) did while outside and drawings of things the character(s) saw, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted. The journal also can include nature-inspired poems, quotes, questions to research later, pressed leaves or flowers, or all of the above. For bonus points, invite readers outside to observe their own natural setting. Are there any elements in the reader's own world that are also found in the natural setting of the book they are reading? If so, list and illustrate them.

Vibing with Verses

Host a poetry slam for your class or group of friends. Invite readers to create their own original poems from the point of view of the book's main character(s). Invite readers to recite their poems in

poetry-slam fashion for the rest of the group. Readers will learn about poetry, performance, and how to be a supportive audience member.

Taste Across America

Invite the readers in your life to pick out at least one food mentioned in the RAA title they are reading. Invite them to create a tasting menu including that food, with additional items inspired by the culture of the book's main character(s). Need ideas? You can check out a sample Southern tasting menu [here](#).

Listen Across America

Divide the readers in your life into groups. Invite each group to research the music of the state and the time period in which a RAA title is set. Invite them to create a playlist featuring artists and songs from that setting and time period. The playlist may be chapter-by-chapter or section-by-section (beginning, middle, and end). Either way, it should reflect the story's action and the mood of the main character(s) in response to what is happening in the story. Need ideas? You can check out a sample playlist [here](#).

Read Across America Activities to Use with *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*

Interpreting Through Illustration

Emily Dickinson is one of the favorite poets of Percy, the poetry-loving dog in *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. Provide readers with a selection of Dickinson's poems. Then have them choose a favorite to analyze and illustrate. Readers can use various art mediums (such as drawing, painting, or collage) to visually interpret the poem. Let them lead the way on what art medium they choose! Once their projects are complete, readers can then explain why they chose that poem and how their artwork represents it.

A New Perspective

As a group, discuss point of view in literature. Together, analyze *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* to discuss how the fact that the novel is written from Cricket's point of view affects the telling of the story. Next, ask readers to choose from a few pre-selected scenes in the book. Invite readers to re-write the scene from the point of view of another character in the scene. At the end, invite readers to share how they approached the task, what they struggled with, and what they learned.

Poetry Has Gone to the Dogs

Percy the dog loves listening to poetry. But what if he wanted to write his own? First, discuss the basics of poetry: stanzas, lines, imagery, similes, etc. Then, readers can explore different poetic forms such as haiku, free verse, and rhyming couplets. Invite readers to create poems written from Percy's point of view. The poems can relate to Percy's experiences, emotions, or observations. At the end, invite each reader to read their poem out loud.

Exploring Conservation

Drawing inspiration from the nature elements in *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*, encourage students to work as a team, participating in a citizen science project related to nature conservation. Projects such as bird counts or butterfly surveys are a great way to spend time in nature and get to know the local ecosystem. To start, students can even write a letter or email to local officials or organizations to learn how they can best get involved.

Natural Neighbors

An ecosystem is a group of living organisms that live in and interact with each other in a specific environment. Explain to readers that Cricket's woods are an ecosystem. There are ecosystems near the school or readers' homes, too. Ask readers to choose an ecosystem, then learn about the native plants and animals that live there. How do they interact with each other? What would happen if a plant or animal were removed from the ecosystem? How would this affect the plants, animals, and people who live nearby? After readers have researched their ecosystems of choice, discuss as a group the similarities and differences between them.

Journal It!

Invite readers to imagine that they are Cricket's friend. They visit her at the treehouse and spend the day with her and Charlene. Instruct readers to write a journal entry describing their visit. Using sensory details and descriptive language, ask them to answer questions such as:

- How would you describe the treehouse? What do you think of the treehouse?
- Is it somewhere you would like to live? Why or why not?
- How would you describe Charlene? Would you like to have her as a companion? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the animals Cricket encounters in the woods?
- What did you, Cricket, and Charlene do together?
- What was your favorite part of the day?

After, you can lead a discussion reflecting on the writing process and thinking about ways readers can journal about their own lives.

Character Scrapbook

Invite readers to choose a character from *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. Then have them create a scrapbook for that character. It can include drawings, quotes, receipts, photos, lists, and other items that the character would have collected along their journey.

Marking the Time

Invite readers to create a timeline of significant events *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. They can plot the Cricket's physical journey along the timeline. They can include key events, encounters with other characters, changes in the setting, and other important plot points.

Smack Dab in the Middle of Annotations

Introduce readers to the idea of annotation and notetaking. Choose a passage from *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* to read aloud to the class. Discuss the book's themes. Then, discuss the answers to the following questions together:

- What is happening in this passage?
- What's the main idea? What part of the passage supports this?
- What point of view is used in this passage?
- What literary devices are used in the passage? These can include metaphors, similes, imagery, and foreshadowing.
- What can you learn about the characters from the text? This can include information about their traits, relationships, and motivations.
- What significant events take place in this passage? How do these events contribute to the plot of the story?
- Is there any part of this passage that relates to the themes of the novel?
- What are your thoughts or reactions as you read through this passage?
- Do you have any questions after reading this passage?

If readers struggle to answer questions, encourage them to review the passage again, underlining or circling words or phrases that provide clues to answer the questions.

Word Detective

Sometimes when readers are enjoying a novel, they come across words that are unfamiliar. Ask readers to read selected passages from *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* and mark any words they do not know or are unsure about. Then ask the readers to write down what they think is the meaning of

the words based on their context within the passage. Readers can then look up the words in a dictionary to compare the actual definition with their original interpretation. Finally, readers can evaluate how well they understood the meaning of the words based on their context and discuss how the actual definitions of the words change the meaning of the passage.