

A cooperative reading activity: Tolstoy

Teaching tips

Leo Tolstoy, the well-known Russian writer, worked as a teacher for a time and during this period of his life he wrote stories for his students.

Today, we will use one of these stories entitled "Shark" for a cooperative reading activity.

The pre-class preparation for cooperative reading is simple: you divide a text up into five parts, re-order the parts, and set the conclusion aside for later use.

The first stage involves dividing the class into four groups. One way of doing this is to have student count off: one, two, three, four. Students then form new groups from their numbers: The "ones" form one group, the "twos" form another, the "threes" form another, and "fours" form another. The number in each group will depend on the number of students in the class.

Then distributing one of the parts to each group, giving each student a copy. They do the task laid down in Instruction 1 of the Student Worksheet.

Since the members of each group know their own part of the story — but nothing else, new groups need to be formed out of the four original groups. You need to make sure that the new groups are formed in such a way that all four parts of the story are present in each new group.

Have the students count off in each of the four original groups: one, two, three, four, five, six, and so on. Students then form new groups from their new numbers. The "ones" form one group, the "twos" form another group, and so on.

Most groups will have four members, but if there may be groups that have three. Members of groups with only three members should join another group.

The new groups then perform the task specified in Instruction 2 of the Student Worksheet. Remember that they should not use the copy of their part of the story to do this activity.

Finally, distribute the actual ending and have the students read it.

Note that the contribution of each student is vital to the reconstruction of the total story. So as a consequence each student's contribution is valuable. Thus, the stronger students are motivated to try to get the details of the story out of even the weakest of their members.

Student Worksheet

Instruction 1 (to the members of each group)

In a few minutes, each of you will be put into another group. In your new group, you will probably be the only one who has read your part of the story. You will not be allowed to use your piece of paper in the next group.

Read your part of the story and then discuss it with the other members of your group. Be prepared to tell the story to others outside your group:

- a. tell what happened
- b. tell who the main characters are
- c. tell about the situation and setting

Instruction 2 (to the members of the new groups)

1. You may not use your written copy of the story any longer.

2. Discuss the story together until you think you understand it.
3. Then, make up an ending to the story and write it out.
4. Be prepared to read your ending to the class.

"Shark" By Leo Tolstoy

Translated by Ela Piatkowska Thurgood

Our ship was anchored off the coast of Africa. The early part of the day was beautiful, with a fresh wind blowing in from the sea, but towards evening the wind direction changed: a hot breeze coming straight off the Sahara made it extremely hot and humid.

Just before sunset, the captain came out on deck and called out, "Time for a swim!"

Within minutes, the sailors had jumped into the water, lowered the canvas sail, put it into the water, and made it into a swimming pool.

There were two young boys on the ship with us. The boys both jumped into the water right away, but it was too crowded for them in the canvas sail, and they decided to swim in the open sea, playing and chasing after each other.

Like two young boys testing their strength and endurance, they began to swim to the barrel that was over the anchor. One of the boys was in the lead at first, but then he started to fall behind.

The father of the boy, an old artilleryman, stood on the deck, delighted with his son. When his son started to fall behind, his father shouted to him, "Don't quit! Try harder!"

Suddenly somebody shouted from the deck, "Shark!"

And all of us saw the shark fin, moving through the water. The shark was swimming straight toward the boys.

"Back! Back! Get back! Shark!", shouted the artilleryman.

But the boys did not hear him. They kept on swimming, laughing and shouting even more loudly and happily than before.

The artilleryman, as white as a sheet, was standing motionless, just staring at the children.

The sailors lowered the boat, jumped into it, and rowed towards the boys as fast as they could, but they were still far from the shark, and the shark was already only a few meters away from the boys.

At first the boys did not hear what the people were shouting to them, so they did not know the shark was there, but then one of them looked back and saw it. The other boy heard his terrified scream, and the two boys swam as fast as they could in different directions.

This scream seemed to wake up the artilleryman. From where he had been standing, he rushed toward the cannons. He turned the barrel of the cannon, and, laying down on it, he aimed it and lit the wick.

Everyone, everyone on the ship anxiously waited, not moving at all.

A shot was heard, and we all saw the artilleryman fall down beside the cannon and cover his face with his hands. We couldn't see what had happened with the shark and the boys, because the smoke was too thick.

But as the smoke cleared, you could hear our quiet murmur grow louder and louder until, in the end, it was a roar of happiness. The old artilleryman uncovered his face and looked out at the sea.

The shark was floating on the waves, dead, its yellow belly up.

In a few minutes the boat reached the boys and brought them back to the ship.

Vocabulary

Each of the six words below has the same meaning as either one word (1) or two words (2) in each of the six sentences below. Read each of the sentences carefully. When you find the word or words that match, write the new word on the line and underline the matching word(s) in the sentence. There six answers, but only five blanks; cross out the answer that is not needed.

nervously continued annoyed yelled frightened returned

1. yelled Just before sunset, the captain came out on deck and called out, "Time for a swim!" (2 words)
2. _____ The boys kept on swimming, laughing and playing even more loudly and happily than before. (2 words)
3. _____ The other boy heard his terrified scream, and the two boys swam as fast as they could in different directions. (1 word)
4. _____ Everyone, everyone on the ship anxiously waited, not moving at all. (1 word)

5. _____ In a few minutes the boat reached the boys and brought them back to the ship. (2 words)

Writing assignment

Write out the story to tell to a younger brother or sister. You can write it with the ending that your group made up or with Tolstoy's ending. Try to keep your story under 150 words.