Playing Down Under With *The Big Ball of String*

*By Kara Murphy*

**Introduction**

A new book with a familiar title, *The Big Ball of String* by Ross Mueller (Allen & Unwin, 2007), follows George as he unravels (then rolls up again) a mystery in his life. As you read the book each day together, teach your child a little about playing in the city in this fun account of an Australian boy and his big ball of string.

**Resources**

For this study you will need:

*The Big Ball of String* by Ross Mueller (Allen & Unwin, 2007)

A notebook for your child

An atlas or globe

*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* and others by Laura Joffe Numeroff

**Materials**

Ball of yarn or string
Day 1

Read The Big Ball of String aloud

Read “Big”

Character

Indoor behavior: Like many mothers, George’s mother does not want him to play sports inside because “he might break something important.” Sometimes children do not understand the need for indoor rules. Helping your child understand Mother’s rule may help him understand the rules at your house as well.

Art

String Ball: This is one story that demands to be performed. Act out the story with green yarn, especially if your child is having trouble understanding where George’s ball goes. Practice drawing big balls of string with green crayon. A counter-clockwise motion is good preparation for later letter formation.

Vocabulary to Watch for:
- Mum
- Milk Bar
- Postbox

Day 2

Read The Big Ball of String aloud

Read “Big”

Sports

Soccer: Soccer is probably the most popular game in the world. Why might this be so? With so little equipment needed, it is accessible to everyone. When we were on a short-term mission trip to Brazil during the 1994 World Cup, young boys would pool all their socks together, tying them into knots until they had a soccer ball of sorts to play with! Talk about the worldwide popularity of the sport.

Language

City Living: Does George live in the city or the country? How can we tell? Use context clues and pictures clues to support your answer.

Social Studies

Going to the Park: Do you live near a park? The park where George plays is just around the corner from his home. What do you notice about the park? Where is all the playground equipment? Often parks are nestled in cities to give city-dwellers the opportunity to enjoy some time in nature without being far from home. Talk about the benefit of playing outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine, and especially playing where nothing important can be broken!
Day 3

Read The Big Ball of String aloud

Read “Big”

Milk Bar: A milk bar is a corner store where people may purchase many general-purpose items, such as milk and dairy products, bread, sweets and candy bars, newspapers, hot snacks, and canned food. Instruct your child to find the words in all capital letters in three different places. Introduce any new sounds. These context words are helpful to teach unfamiliar sounds to your child. Show him what milk bar looks like written in lowercase letters. Compare these with the words in the illustrations. This casual letter teaching encourages learning in the context of stories. The more you can relate what your child is learning in this way, the better and more enjoyable learning will be for these young ones.

Australia: While Australians and Americans both speak English, we use many words differently. In this story, the words Mum (Mom), milk bar (convenience or corner store), and postbox (mailbox) give us a hint that the author may be from another country. Find Australia on a world map. Show the great distance it is from where your child lives. Casually mention that Australia is unique because it is both a country and a continent. Point out the seven continents—Africa, Asia, Australia, Antarctica, Europe, North America, and South America. Show your child any familiar countries on each continent. This lays a foundation for future geography studies.

Day 4

Read The Big Ball of String aloud

Read “Big”

Fire Station: What would these early years be without a discussion of the fire station? Shiny red trucks, ear-piercing sirens, and men who regularly risk their lives for others capture the imagination of children as nothing else can. Point out the picture of the fire truck, prepared to leave at a moment’s notice. Perhaps you can schedule a field trip.

Magpies: Find the many magpies that appear throughout the book. See how many you can count. Draw a magpie using an illustration.

Cats as Pets: George’s pet cat welcomes him home and goes back to the park with him. Discuss the importance of pets as companions. Which pets make the best companions? (If you are unsure, you may want to do our Week of Lessons on Not Norman.)
Day 5

Read The Big Ball of String aloud

Read “Big”

Art

Multiple Illustrations: The illustrations show movement by putting several images of George on each page: playing soccer with the ball, kicking the ball of string, running around, and going home. Young children may be confused by what seems to be many Georges. Explain this artistic technique to your child.

How does this compare to the way cartoons used to be made? Create a simple flip book and see how it works.

Literature

Circular Stories: This book is a classic example of a circular story. At the end of the book, George is back where he started. Another popular example of this clever type of book is If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (Laura Geringer, 1985) and others by Laura Joffe Numeroff. If you haven’t read any of these delightful stories, check them out from the library and see if your child understands the pattern. Perhaps he would like to try telling a circular story to you. Use the template given to brainstorm several events. Write down his story for him.

Poetry

Share this poem with your child each day.

Big

By Dorothy Aldis

Now I can catch and throw a ball
And spell
Cat. Dog.
And Pig,
I have finished being small
And started
Being Big.

Often after multiple readings a child will memorize a poem such as this.

This Week of Lessons was based on “Lessons for Little Ones” Homeschooling Today magazine, September/October 2007 issue
www.HomeschoolToday.com
Circular Stories

From The Big Ball of String