

EI TEXT STUDY

Amos and Boris

BY WILLIAM STEIG

MAP Grade 3 • Unit 2

UNIT Inspired by the Sea

TYPE Literary Text (Lexile 810L)

OVERVIEW • TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS • ASSESSMENT • FLUENCY

OVERVIEW

RATIONALE

This text was selected because of its superb literary quality. In particular, it exhibits engaging characterization, vivid descriptions of setting, a compelling plot, and an unmistakable theme. The book's purposeful cadence and supporting illustrations enhance all of these qualities. It could be compared to similar tales or fables, such as *The Lion and the Mouse*. Additionally, it presents an opportunity for teachers to pair it with informational texts within an integrated science unit about mammals, oceans, or migration—or within an integrated social studies unit about survival.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Although *Amos and Boris* is an exemplar literary text for the 2–3 grade span, it is a challenging text for readers in the second unit of third grade. You may need to read it aloud with a document camera during the first read with students, then go back and reread with students closely, pausing to discuss the questions. The vocabulary is very challenging, but the story is engaging enough to provide a context for rich comprehension.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

(a) Focus Standards

Students will practice the following standards through the analysis of the text and the completion of the performance assessment:

RI.3.3: Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

W.3.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

W.3.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

(b) Additional Standards

L3.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. Explain the function of **nouns**, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences. Use **abstract nouns** (e.g., *childhood*).

VOCABULARY

Some words from this book may be unfamiliar to students or may be used in a different way than students have seen previously. Possible words for study include:

- breakers
- backwashes
- compass
- sextant
- telescope
- iodine
- mammal

GRAMMAR EXTENSION

Abstract Nouns: Teachers could choose from among the abstract nouns, many of which may be new to third graders, for vocabulary and grammar work. Some of these are used more than once in the book. Students may do exercises-after mini-lessons-in which they:

- Categorize nouns as abstract or concrete; remind students that some things you can touch, such as "boat," and these are concrete nouns. Other nouns describe things you cannot touch, such as "strength" and "wonder."
- Recognize and practice the ways in which some words can be more than one part of speech, depending on their use.
Example: "wonder;" "love;" and "touch"
- Recognize and practice different forms of these words.
Example: navigate/navigation; strong/strength; lonely/loneliness
- Compare and contrast nouns used in association with Amos and Boris

- navigation
- iodine
- tide
- strength
- wonder
- enterprise
- love
- cheer
- warmth
- loneliness
- adventure
- privilege
- relief
- admiration
- delicacy
- daintiness
- radiance
- touch
- voice
- bulk
- grandeur
- power
- purpose
- friendliness
- ambitions
- secrets
- situation
- agony
- pity
- wetness

TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Note to teachers: words in italics are featured in the Vocabulary section above.

- 1 According to page 1, who is Amos, and where does he live?
 - Amos is a mouse who "lived by the ocean:"
- 2 On pages 1 and 2, how does the author convey that Amos was fascinated by the sea?
 - The text says:
 - "He loved the ocean:"
 - "He loved the smell of sea air:"
 - "He loved to hear the surf sounds-the bursting breakers, the backwashes with rolling pebbles:"
 - » *Note to teachers: note that these are sensory details; you may also note the use of alliteration here.*
 - "He thought a lot about the ocean, and he wondered about the faraway places on the other side of the water:"
 - Amos decides to build a boat to explore the "faraway places:"
 - He works day and night on his project: he built the boat during the day and he studied *navigation* at night.

- 3 According to page 3, how does Amos prepare for his journey?
- He loads the boat with supplies: food, water, tools, and "necessities" such as *iodine*, a yo-yo, and playing cards.'
 - » *Note to teachers: You might pause to discuss the meaning of the abstract noun, "necessity" and compare it to the adjective "necessary."*
- 4 Why do you think the Amos includes a yo-yo and playing cards as "necessities"?
- Amos was wise to realize that he might need things to do while sailing.
 - Amos probably enjoys playing games.
- 5 When does Amos decide to set sail, and why?
- Amos waits until there is a calm sea and a high tide.
 - According to the illustration, Amos had to push the boat with all of his strength into the water at the time when the water was closest to shore. He could not have pushed it into the sea without the tide to help him.
- 6 Does Amos enjoy the first part of his trip? Cite details that support your answer.
- Yes.
Amos overcame seasickness and "proved to be a natural sailor, very well suited to the ship:'
He "was enjoying his trip immensely:'
"It was beautiful weather:'
Amos was "full of *wonder*, full of *enterprise*, and full of love for life:'
- 7 What adjectives would you use to describe Amos, based on the first four pages?
- » *Note to teachers: Answers may vary. Below are likely and acceptable responses. This is a good place to talk with students about shades of meaning.*
- He is thoughtful and curious. (page 2)
"He thought a lot about the ocean, and he wondered about the faraway places on the other side of the water:'
 - He is enterprising. (page 2)
Instead of just wondering about "faraway places," he builds a boat and studies navigation so he can go exploring.
 - He is practical. (page 3)
He packs food, fresh water, tools, first aid supplies, and games to occupy him while he travels.
 - He is optimistic, patient, and/or determined. (page 4)
He wisely planned his boat launch.
He used his "savage strength" to push it out to sea.
He worked through his seasickness and kept learning to sail.

8 In pages 7–9, how does the author highlight the ways in which Amos was "full of *wonder*, full of *enterprise*, and full of *love* for life;" as he is described on page 5?

- "He marveled at the sight of some whales spouting luminous *water*:"

The author could have said, "Amos watched whales spouting water," but instead he uses the word "marveled;" which shows that Amos was fascinated by the whales (i.e., full of *wonder*, rather than fear).

He uses the word "luminous" to indicate that the spouting water was a beautiful sight to Amos.

- The author says that Amos was "a little speck of a living thing in the vast living universe; but also that "he felt thoroughly akin to it all:"
 - » *Note to teachers: students may need help understanding what it means to feel "akin" to something. Even this tiny creature felt connected to the universe, and like he was an important part of it.*
- The author says that Amos was "overwhelmed by the beauty and mystery of everything; illustrating his love for life.
- Even after he falls off the boat and loses it forever, the patient and optimistic Amos considers his options calmly, and decides "just to keep afloat, treading water and hoping that something—who knows what?—would turn up to save him:"

9 What actually causes Amos to fall off the boat?

- Amos fell off the boat because he was distracted, "overwhelmed by the beauty and mystery of everything..."

10 How does the author show that Amos remains curious, optimistic, patient, and determined, despite his desperate situation?

- On page 9, Amos carefully considers how to solve his problem.
- On page 10, Amos is able to accept "a bit of cheer and warmth" that the sun gives him, despite his "vast loneliness:"
- On page 10, Amos calmly wonders what it would be like to drown, what heaven would be like, and if there would be other mice there.

11 How is Amos rescued?

- A whale named Boris finds him and agrees to take Amos back to his beach.

12 Why do you think Boris is willing to go "out of his way" to return Amos to his home on the beach? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.

- On page 13, Boris says, "Not only would I not mind... I would consider it a privilege. What other whale in all the world ever had the chance to *get* to know such a strange creature as you!"

13 Looking at pages 13– 19, how would you describe Boris?

- Boris seems a lot like Amos,even though they are physically different.
Like Amos,Boris is ready for an adventure.
Like Amos,Boris is patient. When Amos gets upset about Boris's sounding,Boris decides to warn Amos when he is about to sound.
Like Amos,Boris is curious.
- He is curious about Amos,who is also a mammal,even though he is physicallyverydifferentfrom himself.
- He is "curious about life on land and was sorry he could never experience it:"

14 What lines on page 16 best summarize Boris's attitude toward Amos?

- "Boris admired the *delicacy*,the quivering *daintiness*,the light *touch*, the small voice, the gemlike *radiance* of the mouse:"

15 What lines on page 16 best summarize Amos's attitude toward Boris?

- "Amos admired the *bulk*,the *grandeur*,the *power*, the *purpose*,the rich *voice*, and the abounding *friendliness* of the whale:"

16 Using evidence from pages 17– 19, describe the friendship that develops between Amos and Boris.

- "They became the closest possible friends:"(page 17)
- "They told each other about their lives,their ambitions:"(page 17)
- "They shared their deepest secrets with each other:"(page 17)
- When the time came to say goodbye,they told each other that they wished they could "be friends forever," even though they knew they would probably never see each other again,they said that they would never forget each other.(page 18)
- Amos offers to help Boris,as Boris has helped him.Boris and Amos both knew that little Amos could probably never help Boris,but Boris "knew how willing he was:Boris says,"Little as he is,he's all heart.I love him, and I'll miss him terribly:"(pages 18 and 19)
- » *Note to teachers: you might help students understand the improbability of Amos helping Boris the way Boris had helped him, and what this relationship between them suggests about friendship-how friends are willing to help one another, no matter how difficult it might be to do so.*

17 Describe what happens to Boris many years later during a hurricane, and how his experience is similar to what happened to Amos.

- Both Amos's and Boris's troubles occurred in the sea.
- Boris was "flung ashore by a tidal wave and stranded"on land,where he could not survive,just as Amos had been stranded in the sea,where he could not survive.
- Like Amos,Boris felt scared and alone as he lay on the beach.
- "Just as Amos had once felt;Boris was "sure he would die:"(page 24)
- Amos ultimately rescued Boris, as Boris had rescued him.(page 26- 27)

18 When Boris and Amos say goodbye on the last page (page 28), how is it similar to when they said good-bye the first time (on pages 18–19)?

» *Note to teachers: you might take this opportunity to review the structure of the story, and how the plot developed as a result of the characters' traits and motivations.*

- Both times, Boris and Amos are very sad.
- Both times, they think that they will never see each other again.
- Both times, the author describes how they will never forget each other.

The first time, each tells the other he will not forget his friend.

At the end, the author says, "They knew they would never forget each other."

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

PART ONE

Ask students to fill in a chart that lists the characters' traits/motivations/feelings in one column (the teacher could fill in the first column) and their actions in second. In a class discussion, guide students to recognize that the events in the second column-read top to bottom-comprise the plot of the story. Help them to understand that it is the characters' qualities/traits/motivations that determine the action of the story.

Character Traits/Motivations/Feelings (CAUSE)	Action (EFFECT)
Amos is curious about the sea	...so he builds a boat and learns navigation.
Amos is practical	...so he prepares carefully for his journey.
Amos is distracted by the beauty of what he sees at sea	...so he falls off the ship, loses it, and gets stranded in the middle of the sea.
Amos is optimistic/patient	...so he treads water, hoping that something will rescue him.
Boris is adventurous	...so he agrees to change his course and rescue Amos/bring Amos home....and so on...

PART TWO

Give students the following writing task:

Write an informative/explanatory essay that summarizes the plot of the story and describes what causes the main events of this story to happen. Be sure to cite three to four examples from the text that explain the connection between the characters' traits and their actions.

Your response should:

- Summarize the plot of the story.
- Tell how characters' traits and actions cause the main events of this story.
- Cite three to four examples from the text that explain the connection between the characters' traits and their actions.
- Have a sense of conclusion.
- Include proper punctuation, capitalization, and correct spelling in the final draft.

OR

Give students the following writing task:

Write an opinion essay in which you answer the question, "Why do you think Amos and Boris became such good and loyal friends?" Be sure to cite three to four examples from the text to support your opinions.

Your response should:

- Introduce the topic, including your opinion, of why Amos and Boris became such good and loyal friends.
- Include an organized list of reasons for your opinion.
- Provide three or four examples from the text to support the reasons for your opinion.
- Use linking words and phrases (e.g., *because, therefore, since, for example*) to connect opinion and reasons.
- Provide a concluding statement.

TEXT FLUENCY

Read the following text out loud for students, demonstrating the elements of fluent reading: accuracy, prosody, and appropriate rate.

Fluent reading of the first passage will require students to relay a change of mood from absolute admiration of the beauty around him, to the rolling off the deck and into the sea. The long phrases and effortless pronunciation of new vocabulary will take practice.

The second passage explores the ways their differences deepened their mutual friendship.

PASSAGE1

(106 words)

One night, in a phosphorescent sea, he marveled at the sight of some whales spouting luminous water; and later, lying on the deck of his boat gazing at the immense, starry sky, the tiny mouse Amos, a little speck of a living thing in a vast universe, felt thoroughly akin to it all. Overwhelmed by the beauty and mystery of everything, he rolled over and over and right off the deck of his boat and into the sea.

"Help!" he squeaked as he grabbed desperately at the Rodent. But it evaded his grasp and went bowling along under full sail, and he never saw it again. (Steig, page 7)

PASSAGE1

(79 words)

Swimming along, sometimes at great speed, sometimes slowly and leisurely, sometimes resting and exchanging ideas, sometimes stopping to sleep, it took them a week to reach Amos's home shore. During that time, they developed a deep admiration for one another. Boris admired the delicacy, the quivering daintiness, the light touch, the small voice, the gemlike radiance of the mouse. Amos admired the bulk, the grandeur, the power, the purpose, the rich voice, and the abounding friendliness of the whale. (Steig, page 16)