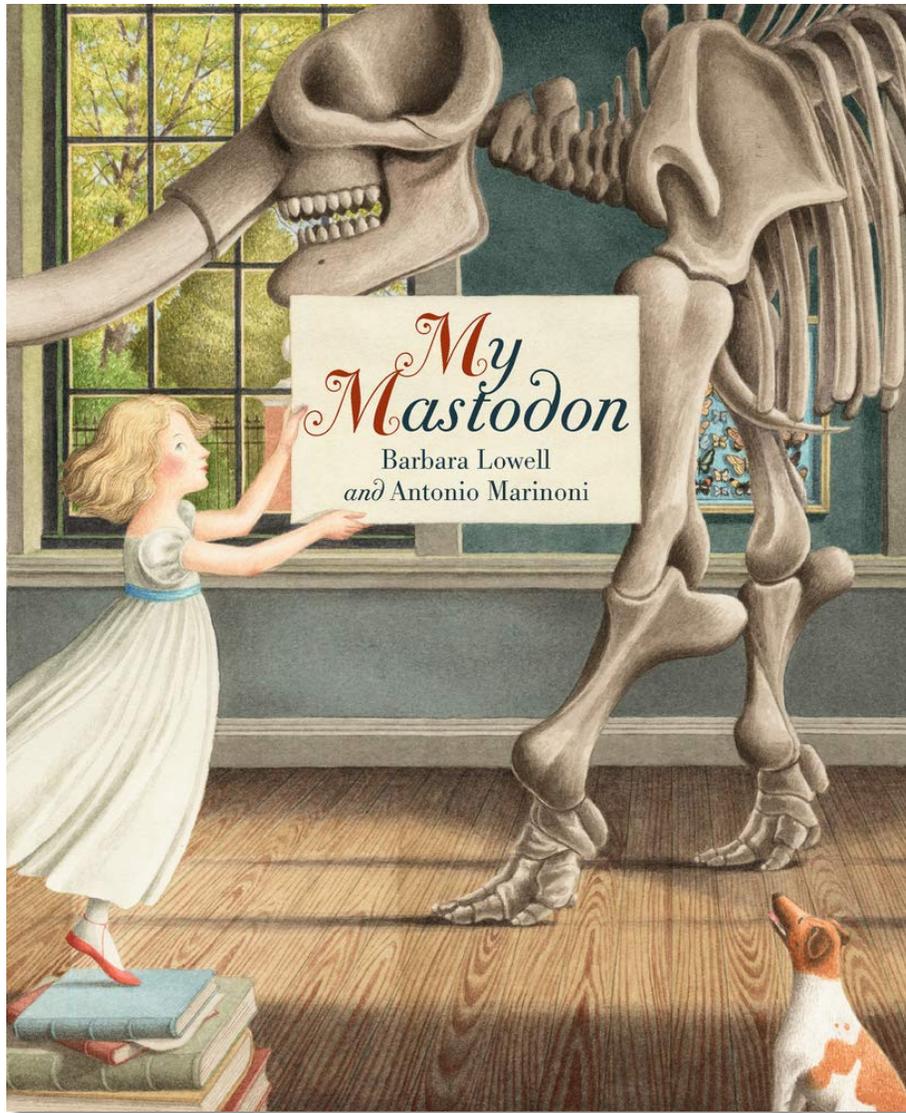


My Mastodon

A teacher's guide created by Marcie Colleen
based upon the picture book
written by Barbara Lowell and illustrated by Antonio Marinoni



Published by
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Barbara Lowell, Author, *My Mastodon*

Barbara Lowell is the author of *Sparky & Spike: Charles Schulz and the Wildest, Smartest Dog Ever*, a Junior Library Guild Selection and more books for children. She writes nonfiction picture books and early readers and picture books inspired by historical events. She lives in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. You can visit her online at: <https://www.barbaralowell.com>.

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Antonio Marinoni is an Italian illustrator and designer whose work has been featured at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. This is his first picture book for Creative Editions.

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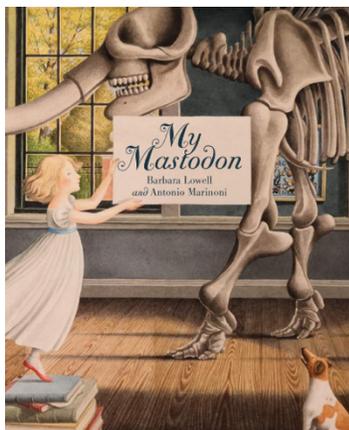
How to Use This Guide

This classroom guide for *My Mastodon* is designed for students in kindergarten through third grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

It offers activities to help teachers integrate *My Mastodon* into English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies curricula. Art and drama are used as teaching tools throughout the guide.

All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in ELA, math, science, social studies, art, and drama.

Book Information



My Mastodon

Age Range: 6 – 8 years

Grade Level: 1 -2

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Inspired by the 19th century lives of artist and scientist Charles Wilson Peale’s family, this is a tale of his daughter Sybilla and her favorite companion—a fossilized mastodon.

Crisis looms when young Sybilla Peale learns that big brother Rembrandt is taking a beloved fossil for a tour of England. Sybilla is accustomed to living among the wildlife exhibits (“They are very well behaved. They’re stuffed.”) that fill the natural history museum set up in their home by Rembrandt and their father, Charles Willson Peale.

She is understandably infuriated at the news that the “magnificent” fossil skeleton beneath which she holds her doll tea parties will be leaving. Her rebellion melts away, though, when Rembrandt actually bows to her wishes. “Even if he is bossy, he is my brother,” she reflects, and rather than force him to leave the mastodon behind she lets the bones themselves decide.

Marinoni illustrates this fictional episode in the life of the multitalented Peales with painterly views of a small, blonde spark plug confidently at home amid her all-white clan, exactly rendered early-American art and furnishings...not to mention all sorts of birds, insects, fossils, and other specimens. The scale of the mastodon skeleton relative to Sybilla is jaw-dropping, emphasized in image after image. Occasional outbreaks of elegantly set italics add an appropriately antique flavor to Sybilla’s narrative, and the author adds a pair of well-chosen period illustrations to an admiring explanatory afterward. Accomplished illustrations further elevate this engaging introduction to America’s first family of science.— *Kirkus Starred Review*

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English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension

Before reading *My Mastodon*,

Help students identify the basic parts of a picture book: jacket, front cover, back cover, title page, spine, end papers, and jacket flap.

- Look at the cover illustration. Describe what you see.
- How would you describe the girl?
- Who else do you see in the cover illustration?
- Mimic what girl is doing. How does it make you feel?
- Can you guess what the story might be about? What are some clues you can find in the cover and copyright illustrations?
- Can you guess when the story might take place? Is this modern day or from a long ago time? What clues in the cover illustration indicate time period?

Now read or listen to the book.

Help students summarize in their own words what the book was about.

- Sybilla and her family are explorers. What do they look for when they dig deep in the earth?
- Who is Rembrandt?
- What do you think Sybilla means when she says, “no mess, no mastodon?”
- What is a mastodon?
- What is special about Sybilla’s house? Would you like to live in a house like that? Why?
- Sybilla says the animals and birds in her house are stuffed. What does that mean?
- What do the Peale’s do when some of the mastodon bones are missing? Why do you think they do this?
- Why doesn’t Sybilla want the mastodon to go to London?
- How does Sybilla try to keep the mastodon in Philadelphia with her? Does she succeed?
- Sybilla says the mastodon is real to her. What do you think she means by this? Are there some things that are not real that feel real to you? Explain.
- Why does Rembrandt decide to not send the mastodon to London? Does this make Sybilla happy? Why or why not?
- Why does Sybilla agree to let the mastodon go to London?

Let's talk about the people who made *My Mastodon*:

- Who is the author? Who is the illustrator?
- What kind of work did each person do to make the book?

Now, let's look closely at the illustrations.

- Look closely at how people are dressed in *My Mastodon*.
- Print out photos from the Internet of American clothing styles in the early 1800s.
- Draw your own character wearing clothing from this time period.
- Display the finished drawings in the classroom.

What Happened? ~ *My Mastodon's* Plot

My Mastodon has a simple plotline with one central conflict or problem—Sybilla befriends the bones of a mastodon and does not want it to be sent off to London. Help students define the plot arc within *My Mastodon*.

Beginning	Middle	End
Enter problem:	First Then Next After that Finally	They lived happily ever after.

- BONUS: Using the basic plot structure above, create an original story about Sybilla living in the museum. Students can work individually or as a class.
- Art center ~ Provide a variety of art materials including crayons, pencils, markers, paint, scissors, colored paper, old magazines, and glue for students to illustrate the scenes in their stories.

- Drama center ~ Provide puppets, costumes, and props so students can recreate their new stories.

Who is Sybilla? ~ Character Study

How a character acts and what a character says can tell readers a lot about who the character is.

Read *My Mastodon* paying close attention to the character of Sybilla. Scene by scene, record your thoughts, in a chart like the one below.

What she does	Why do you think she does what she does?	How would you describe her?	What might she say?
Example: Helps her family excavate the mastodon bones.	It's what her family does and therefore she does.	Curious, eager to participate.	"I will help, too!"

After gathering information regarding Sybilla's character, use the scenarios below to write a new scene for *My Mastodon*. What would Sybilla do and say in one of the following situations?

- A group of kids come to the museum on a field trip.
- It's Sybilla's birthday and she wants to have a party.
- Sybilla starts school and wants to bring something in for show n' tell.

Critical Thinking

In fiction stories, a character usually changes in some way. Do you think Sybilla changed in the story? How? (*analyzing, inferring, giving support to an idea*)

How would the story be different if Sybilla had not decided to let the mastodon go?
(*predicting, cause and effect*)

What do you think is the message of this story?

Reading Nonfiction

While reading *My Mastodon* aloud to the class, have students take notes in two columns:

- *Things We Learned*
- *Questions We Have*

Pause before each page turn to add notes to the columns. These columns can either be individual or hung on the board and worked on as a class.

Things We Learned (Facts)	Questions We Have	Answers We Found

- Once the story is read, discuss the *Questions We Have* column.
 - Were any of these questions answered as the story went along?
 - If so, ask students to find the answer within the text.
 - Record the answer next to the question in a third column labeled *Answers We Found*.
- For all remaining questions in the *Questions We Have column*, that have yet to be answered, students will need to take the steps to find answers, either through Internet or book research.
 - Discuss how to find answers to questions through research.
 - Assign students to specific questions to help them focus.
 - Record all answers in the *Answers We Found* column.
- After the answers have been shared with the class, engage in a discussion on research practices.
 - What was most difficult about finding answers?
 - Was it easier to find answers on the Internet or in a book?
 - Which source is more reliable, the Internet or a printed book? Why?
 - How can you determine whether to trust a source?
 - What tips would you give someone who is about to do research?
- Read the Author's Note at the back of the book.

- Create an additional chart to document what information in this section was included in the story and what information was not included.
- Why do you think certain information was chosen to include in the story and leave other information to the back matter?
- Choose three facts from the back matter that were not included in the story and explain why you think each was excluded.

Extension: Design and illustrate posters representing each Fact, Question, and researched Answer based on *My Mastodon* and display them within the classroom.

Writing Activities

He's Real to Me ~ Point of View

Either as a class or individually, explore each scene in *My Mastodon* from the point of view of the mastodon bones. What is he thinking and doing in each illustration? How does he feel? What would he say to Sybilla?

Advanced classes will be able to write *My Mastodon* from the fossilized mastodon's point of view. However, classes can also create captions and thought-bubbles.

Wish You Were Here ~ Postcards from London

Sybilla's brother, Rembrandt, wants to send the mastodon to London for an exhibition.

If you were to travel there:

- How would you get there?
- What would you see?
- What would you hear?
- What would you do?
- What would the weather be like?

Create a large postcard of your trip to London. Be sure to illustrate one side and include a note to Sybilla on the other side, letting her know about your trip and how the mastodon is doing. Be sure to be descriptive.

Display the postcards on a bulletin board, along with a map indicating where London is located.

- Where are some of the major spots to visit in London?
- Where would you want to visit? Why?

Dear, Rembrandt: Writing a Persuasive Essay

Sybilla does not want Rembrandt to send her mastodon to London. She needs *persuade* Rembrandt to let the mastodon stay.

Ask your students if they know what “persuade” means. If not, can they make any guesses?

Discuss:

- What it means to persuade
- Times you might want to persuade someone (e.g., persuade your parents to let you stay up late, persuade your teacher to not give a test)

Writing to persuade tells the reader what you believe, gives the reader at least three reasons why you believe it, and has a good ending sentence. You want to try and convince the reader to agree with you.

Pretending to be Sybilla, have students write a persuasive essay to Rembrandt stating why you think the mastodon should stay in Philadelphia.

Use the following TREE structure:

T = Topic sentences

The topic sentence tells the reader what you think or believe. Example: *I am writing to you because I do not believe my mastodon should be sent to London.*

R = Reasons

The reasons why you believe what you believe. Write at least two to four sentences supporting three reasons. Use evidence directly from the text.

E = Ending

Wrap it up with a conclusive sentence.

E = Examine

Look closely. Do you have all of your parts?

Share your essays with the class. Which is the most persuasive? Why do you think so?

Speaking and Listening Activities

Picture books are written to be read aloud. Here are some other ways to bring *My Mastodon* to life in your classroom and have fun with speaking and listening skills!

Talking About Feelings

We all feel various feelings at different times. It is okay to feel happy or sad or angry. Read through *My Mastodon*, making special note of the feelings that Sybilla expresses.

Post the names of feelings in different colors for everyone to see. Have children choose a feeling to make a sentence about that feeling.

“Today I feel excited because we have pizza for lunch.”

“Last week I felt lonely because my brother went away.”

“Yesterday I felt worried because I lost my jacket.”

Mime/Charades

Mime a feeling with gestures and facial expressions. Then have others try to guess that feeling. For a variation, have children draw the feeling from a “hat”—a basket/box/bag.

Drama

Create a TV commercial to encourage people to read *My Mastodon*.

Math

Math Without Numbers

Inventors, like the Peale’s, use math skills every day, even when they don’t use numbers. These skills are important to anyone who is thinking critically and solving problems.

Help your students practice with the following activities:

Classifying and grouping games: Mixing many kinds of blocks and ask students to classify them by size, color, or shape. Older children can classify and group themselves based on birthday months, color of clothing, etc.

Estimation: Using dried beans and several containers of different heights and widths, students are to guess which containers will hold the most beans and which containers will hold the least beans. Have students put the containers in order according to their capacity. Once the class has agreed on the order, fill each container with beans, one at a time. Count how many beans are in each container. Were they right about the order?

Patterning: Build a simple pattern using M&Ms, buttons or pieces of paper. Start with an alternating pattern (called an AB pattern): one red candy, one green candy, one red, one green, and so forth. Be sure to repeat the pattern at least once. Next, students

should continue the pattern by building a sequence that's exactly like the initial pattern. "How did you know to start with a red?" or "Why did you use a green here?" Some more difficult patterns to practice are: AAB, ABB, AABB, and ABC.

BONUS:

- How do you think classifying and grouping, estimating, and patterning assist inventors like the Peale's?
- How would you use these skills in your daily activities?

A Fossil Scavenger Hunt

This scavenger hunt will help students sharpen observational and counting skills.

- Create several copies of the paper cut-outs of different shapes that represent different kinds of bones or fossils.
- Number each different shape set from 1-5.
- Hide these cut-outs around the room.
- Assign students a certain kind of bone or fossil.
- Ask students to find their set of bones/fossils numbered 1-5. If a student sees a type of bone/fossil they are NOT collecting, he/she must leave it for another student to find.
- The first student to find a bone/fossil 1-5 sequence, wins.
- Additional activity: This same game can be played with a set pattern of colors or pictures to teach sequencing.

Science

Mastodon Research Project

Take a trip to the school library and research the mastodon.

Possible sources for information:

- Nonfiction books
- Encyclopedias
- The Internet

Take notes and gather as much information as possible on the following 6 topics:

- Physical traits (including teeth!)

- Food
- Habitat
- Babies
- Predators/Survival
- Other fun facts

Once the information is gathered, work to create either an illustrated poster or booklet of the findings.

Ask the Paleontologist

Invite a paleontologist to your class or ask them to visit via Skype to teach about fossil digs. The list of museums and dig sites above can be a great resource in contacting a paleontologist.

What do you want to know about? Write a list of questions ahead of time and provide them to the paleontologist.

During the visit, practice taking notes and creating follow up questions.

After the visit, draft a written report and present what you learned.

For something fun and extra watch this short YouTube video on paleontologists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FjyKmpmQzc>

Social Studies

Natural History Museums and Archaeological Digs

Visit a few of these museums and digs on the Internet.

- Museum of Western Colorado in Grand Junction, Colorado
- Casper College Tate Geological Museum in Casper, Wyoming
- The Mammoth Site of Hot Springs, South Dakota
- Fossil Butte National Monument in Kemmerer, Wyoming

Explore all of the things to see and do at one of these museums or dig sites and create a tourism brochure encouraging people to visit.

Museums

Discuss museums with the class.

- What is a museum?

- Describe the museum in the illustrations of *My Mastodon*. What kind of museum do you think it is? What is it a collection of? Do you think it is loud or quiet inside? How are things displayed (glass cases, on walls, etc.)?
- Have you ever been to a museum? If so, what kind of museum? Describe a museum you have been to.
- Visit a few of these wacky museums on the Internet:
 - The Trash Museum in Hartford, CT
 - The Giant Shoe Museum in Seattle, WA
 - The Lunch Box Museum in Columbus, GA
 - The Museum of Bad Art in Boston, MA
 - The International Banana Museum in North Shore, CA
 - The Burlingame Museum of Pez Memorabilia in Burlingame, CA
 - The Bigfoot Discovery Museum in Felton, CA
 - The Bunny Museum in Pasadena, CA
- If you could go to any kind of museum where would you like to go?

BONUS: A museum can be a collection of *anything!* As a class, design (with interesting displays and printed information) your own museum! Be as creative and wacky as you want! Invite other classes to visit your museum.