

JUMANJI

by CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG



Plot Summary

When Peter and Judy's parents head to the opera and leave the children to their own devices for the afternoon, the children's excitement quickly turns to boredom. This changes when they find what appears to be an ordinary board game labeled "Jumanji" sitting under a tree in the park. A note taped to the box warns them to read the instructions. Mildly curious, the children take the game home. When they halfheartedly begin to play, it becomes immediately apparent that they are dealing with a very unusual game!

With each roll of the dice, the events described by the game board begin to materialize around them. As the game progresses, their quiet home is transformed by a hungry lion, a band of mischievous monkeys, a befuddled guide, a monsoon, a rhinoceros stampede, and a giant python draped across the mantelpiece. Just as the children begin to lose hope that their home will ever be quiet again, Judy wins the game by landing on the square representing the golden city of Jumanji. In an instant, the house is exactly as it was before they began playing. Peter and Judy run back to the park, deposit the game under the tree where they found it, and are fast asleep when their parents return. Later that evening, they look out the window and see Danny and Walter Budwing, two children not known for reading instructions, carrying the box out of the park toward their home.

Special Features

Jumanji is a beloved classic. Van Allsburg's black-and-white pencil drawings create a richly textured world where bizarre clashes of context are made starkly apparent. The comfort and order of Judy and Peter's home is shockingly rearranged by the intrusion of the world of Jumanji. Children will delight in the appearance of hungry monkeys on the kitchen table and charging rhinos wrapped in the telephone cord. The pictures and the text work together to explore the boundary between fantasy and reality—creative territory in which Chris Van Allsburg is a clear master.

Children of all ages will be drawn immediately to the expressive drawings. Younger children can be invited to think and talk about the characters' changing emotions through a careful examination of the pictures. Older children may be interested in going deeper and discussing the pictorial composition—sometimes as readers we seem to hover in the air slightly above the action, sometimes we are placed down at kid level in the room with the characters. How are the pictures framed? What does Van Allsburg choose to include and not to include? These questions can be asked about

both the artwork and the text.

Jumanji provides teachers and students with many craft techniques to explore. Van Allsburg describes action in clear, concise, straightforward language that easily carries readers along. The following excerpt demonstrates his use of strong, descriptive verbs (*squeeze, scrambled, slammed*):

The lion roared so loud it knocked Peter right off his chair. The big cat jumped to the floor. Peter was up on his feet, running through the house with the lion a whisker's length behind. He ran upstairs and dove under a bed. The lion tried to squeeze under, but got his head stuck. Peter scrambled out, ran from the bedroom, and slammed the door behind him.

The use of dialogue in *Jumanji* also works to move the plot along. Younger children can be invited to simply notice the dialogue. Teachers might ask, "How do we know that someone is talking?" Children who are more experienced readers and writers will benefit from studying not only Van Allsburg's use of punctuation when writing dialogue, but how he brings his characters alive with realistic and exciting conversation. For example:

"I don't think," said Peter in between gasps of air, "that I want . . . to play . . . this game . . . anymore."

The book introduces rich themes to be explored during either a community book conversation with the entire class or children's independent or partner reading work. Children can be asked to think about the "big ideas" in the book (for example, always read the instructions, finish what you start, persevere in the face of adversity, and enjoy a simple life) and to collect text evidence for their theories.

Find Fritz:

In *Jumanji*, Fritz the dog is a pull toy on the floor in the living room where the children begin playing the game.



Teaching Ideas

Whether in the context of an author study of Chris Van Allsburg or studied on its own, *Jumanji* is full of teachable ideas for students of all ages. Both the pictures and the text are packed with details that invite the reader into the world of the story. Even young children can be asked to notice these details and discuss them—for example, Peter and Judy's home comes to life because of Van Allsburg's attention to detail in the drawings. He draws Peter's and Judy's toys scattered across the carpet and even includes their father's pipe resting on the mantel. The specificity of everyday life makes the intrusion of wild animals even more surprising. The text achieves an equally vivid effect with its use of sensory detail; for example, "Peter and Judy covered their ears as the sound of splintering wood and breaking china filled the house."

Because dialogue is a strong element of the text, more experienced writers can be asked to study both the punctuation of dialogue and the way Van Allsburg brings Peter and Judy to life by writing believable conversation. As a writing lesson, children can be asked to try out adding believable dialogue to their own stories. Or children can be encouraged to develop their reading fluency by reading the dialogue out loud with expression.

Van Allsburg moves the plot forward gracefully and thrillingly with his clear and vivid descriptions of action, which include the use of exciting, precise verbs. Instead of *shutting* the door, Peter *slams* it. Instead of *running* through the living room, the rhinos *charge*. The author's thoughtful choice of verbs provides a wonderful example for children who are working on describing action in their own stories.

Guiding Questions for a *Jumanji* Read-Aloud

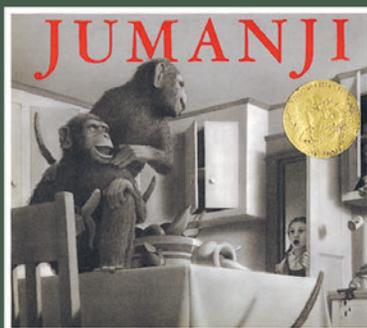
- Have you ever played a game or put something together without reading the instructions? What happened?
- What do you do when you are bored the way Peter and Judy were before they found the game? How do you find imaginative ways to amuse yourself?
- What might have happened to Peter and Judy if they had not read the instructions to *Jumanji*? What might happen to the Budwing boys?
- How do Peter and Judy change as a result of their adventure with *Jumanji*? What have they learned?

Strong Verbs for Writing Action

An upper-grade writing lesson

What You'll Need:

- A copy of *Jumanji*
- Chart paper or an overhead projector with a T-chart entitled "Be Specific: Using Strong Verbs." Label one side "strong verbs" and the other "boring verbs."
- Markers/overhead pens
- Writing paper and pencils for the students



Background Knowledge:

It will be helpful if your students are already familiar with the story of *Jumanji*. That way, they can focus on specific aspects of the text while understanding the story as a whole. Your class should have a basic understanding of how different parts of speech function in a sentence, particularly verbs. The teaching point focuses on verb *choice* rather than verb function. The lesson is designed to be used within the context of an ongoing writing workshop, but can be presented outside of that context as well.

Introduction:

As your children are gathered around you in a central meeting place, tell them that they are going to be studying one of the ways that Chris Van Allsburg makes *Jumanji* such an engaging story. Tell them directly that one way in which writers create excitement in their stories is to use strong and interesting verbs. Chris Van Allsburg uses strong verbs when describing the action that takes place in *Jumanji*, which draws readers in. Tell the students that they will be studying how he does this and then trying it out in their own writing.

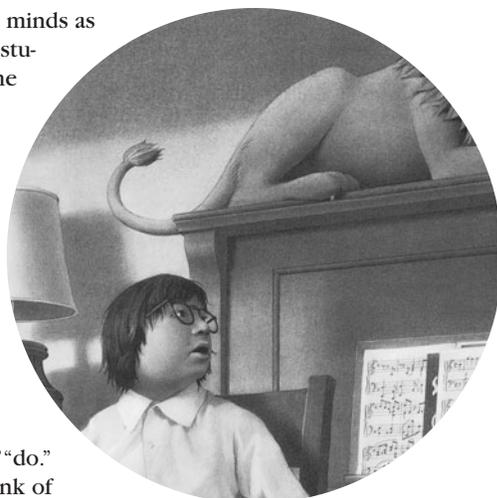
Teaching:

Ask your students to recall the part in the book in which Peter is chased by the lion. Read the section aloud, asking your students to pay attention to the verbs Van Allsburg uses.

Peter was up on his feet, running through the house with the lion a whisker's length behind. He ran upstairs and dove under a bed. The lion tried to squeeze under, but got his head stuck. Peter scrambled out, ran from the bedroom, and slammed the door behind him. He stood in the hall with Judy, gasping for breath.

Ask the children to tell you what strong verbs they heard. They will probably notice verbs like "dove," "squeeze," "scrambled," "slammed," "gasping." If they don't, support their noticing by drawing their attention to certain verbs. Collect the strong verbs they have noticed on the "strong verbs" side of your chart. Point out that Van Allsburg chose those verbs for a reason. He could have used "went" instead of "dove" to describe how Peter got under the bed, but "dove" puts a clearer and more vivid picture in our minds as we read. With your students' help, write the boring equivalent for each strong verb on your chart.

Now ask your students to think of some boring verbs. Add two or three of them to your chart. The students may suggest verbs like "go," "say," "do." Now have them think of some strong verbs that give a more specific picture to the reader. Each child may come up with different "exciting" verbs for each of the "boring" verbs they started



with. This will provide you with a good opportunity to discuss how nonspecific the boring verbs are and how important it is to write with precision and clarity.

Tell your students that in their writing lesson that day, they should go back to a piece they wrote earlier and circle several verbs that are not specific. Ask them to replace these with strong verbs that describe the action in a more specific way.

Writing Time:

As your students write, confer with them about the process of discerning differences in verbs. Some students may need help simply identifying verbs in the sentence and some may need help thinking of more specific verbs.

If your students are not involved in an ongoing writing workshop in which they are writing each day about topics of their own choosing, this work can be done in the context of any writing piece the children have been working on. Simply pass out some of their earlier writing and ask them to revise it by changing boring verbs into strong ones.

Share:

Share the work of a student who has effectively identified a nonspecific verb and changed it into a strong and specific verb. Discuss with the class how much clearer and more vivid the description of action is when this is done.

Adapting This Lesson for Use with Less Experienced Writers:

- Turn this idea into a lesson on simply identifying verbs. It will be helpful if children have already been exposed to the idea of verbs in some other context.
- Write a group story with your students. You be the scribe. Encourage them to choose strong verbs in the context of this story.

Expanding This Lesson:

Start a list of strong verbs to be displayed in your classroom as reminders to your students when they are writing about action. Ask the students to change the exciting verbs in *Jumanji* to boring ones. Then examine how different the story is, and how much less exciting.

What Is the Big Idea?

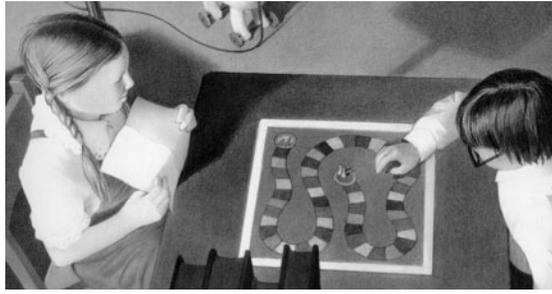
A lower-grade reading lesson

What You'll Need:

- A copy of *Jumanji*
- Chart paper and markers

Background Knowledge:

It will be helpful to your students if they are already familiar with the story of *Jumanji* so that they can easily focus on your teaching point. This lesson works as an introduction to the idea of finding larger ideas, lessons, or messages in what we read. If you have already introduced this idea to your class, the lesson can serve as a helpful follow-up. Students should already be relatively comfortable with retelling the important events in a story.



Introduction:

Tell the children that writers usually include a lesson or a message in their stories that goes beyond what the words actually say, and that our job as readers is to pay attention to the meaning of the whole story to determine what this message, or “big idea,” might be. Tell them that in *Jumanji*, Chris Van Allsburg does more than just tell the story of Peter and Judy and

the game; he teaches us a lesson about how to be in the world. All good books have big ideas in them. Tell the students that today you will be retelling *Jumanji*, then talking about what some possible big ideas might be, and then they will try doing the same thing in their independent reading books.

Teaching:

Together as a class, retell the story of *Jumanji*. You may want to reread the entire book so that the story is fresh in your students' minds. You may choose to create a quick timeline on chart paper for your students to refer to. Ask them to turn and talk to someone near them about what they think some of the big ideas are. What is Chris Van Allsburg trying to teach us? Share some of these ideas as a community and record them on chart paper.

You may find that some children simply retell the events of the story without thinking about the deeper meaning. These students will need more support from you as they think—you may want to prepare some guiding questions for this conversation. For example, “Did Peter and Judy learn anything from their experience? What did they learn? What in the book makes you think that? What do we readers learn from Peter and Judy's mistakes?” Create a list on chart paper of some of the big ideas your students collect. They may come up with ideas like “it is important to read the instructions thoroughly before starting something,” or “keep going even when things get tough.” Before you send your students off to read on their own, ask them to think about finding the big ideas in their own books. You may want to ask them to record their ideas in a reader's notebook.

Reading Time:

As your students read independently, confer with them about the theme of the big idea. Some children may have a more difficult time than others with synthesizing the information they gather from the text into a more abstract idea or life lesson. It can be helpful to encourage students to keep referring back to the text so that they don't go off on wild tangents. Keep saying, “What in the book makes you think that? Show me.”



If your students are not working within a reading workshop model, they can do this lesson as a community simply within the context of *Jumanji*.

Share:

Share the work of a student or students who have made strides toward determining the big idea or ideas in their independent texts. Make sure to ask the students to notice how important it is to tie their thinking to what the book actually says, even though they are moving beyond the text into the deeper meanings.

Adapting This Lesson for Use with More Experienced Readers:

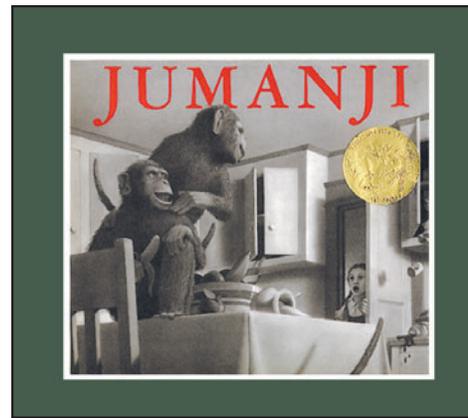
- More experienced readers will need less support from you. One way to go deeper into the ideas presented in this lesson is to organize your students into small groups, or book clubs, and invite them to discuss the big ideas of *Jumanji* in these clubs.
- Experienced readers will more easily transfer the ideas you discuss within this lesson to the context of their independent reading. Either in the context of book groups or partnerships, have your students study several of Chris Van Allsburg's books and look for consistent themes or big ideas across these stories and within each text.

Expanding This Lesson:

- Discuss inference with your students. Explain that as readers we must infer big ideas from the text. Writers don't just come out and tell us what their main messages are; they leave it to their readers to infer deeper meaning from the words on the page.
- Teach a lesson in which you invite children to make a record of evidence in the text that they can use to back up their big ideas. You can use *Jumanji* as a model and then invite children to do the same in their own reading, or you can focus on *Jumanji* as a community.

Just for Fun

- In *Jumanji*, wild creatures and events enter into Peter and Judy's normal home life. Imagine a situation in which strange animals or events enter into the context of a very familiar situation (home, school, grandma's house, etc.) and then write about it.
- Invent your own magical board game. Think carefully about the rules of the game as you design it. Don't forget to write the rules down!
- Study the way Chris Van Allsburg wrote the instructions that are included with the Jumanji game. Notice how they proceed in a clear, step-by-step fashion. Think of something you know how to do really well, and write clear, step-by-step instructions on how to do it.



Jumanji

- Caldecott Medal winner (1982)
- New York Times Best Illustrated Book of the Year
- Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Award
- School Library Journal, Best Books of the Year
- ALA Notable Book for Children
- Booklist Editors' Choice
- IRA/CBC Children's Choice
- Blockbuster movie starring Robin Williams

