

WHY EPOSSUMONDAS HAS NO HAIR ON HIS TAIL

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 3-5

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Why Epossumondas Has No Hair on His Tail by Coleen Salley. Illustrated by Janet Stevens. Harcourt, 2004. 40 p.

Summary

Epossumondas is an inquisitive baby possum that wonders why his tail is so different from the other animals' tails. He observes that skunks, foxes, and rabbits have hairy and bushy tails. He then asks his mama (a woman who looks just like Coleen Salley) why his tail is so long, hairless and not as attractive as other tails. Mama proceeds to tell Epossumondas a story about his great-great-grandpa, Papapossum. According to the legend, possums used to have fluffy bunny-type tails, but Papapossum changed all that. Papapossum was hungry one day and decided to go find some persimmons to eat. On his journey he meets Hare who tells him that Bear has a persimmon tree full of persimmons, in hopes that Papapossum will climb the tree and throw down some persimmons to him. When Papapossum gets up the tree, he starts gobbling up persimmons and won't throw any down to Hare. Hare gets upset and tells Bear what Papapossum is up to. When Bear gets to the tree, he is angry that Papapossum is eating all his persimmons, so Bear shakes him out of the tree. While Papapossum is running away, Bear grabs him by the tail with his teeth just as Papapossum slips through a fence. This strips all the hair off Papapossum's tail and stretches the tail out so it is long and thin. Having this new tail was not bad at all for Papapossum. He put it to good use: writing and hanging from a tree with it.

This is a very clever "pourquoi" tale about why possums don't have hair on their tails. The illustrations are humorous and attention-grabbing. This Southern tale, which is excellent for reading aloud, captures a hilarious and important moment in possum history.

Awards

Bill Martin Jr. Picture Book Award Nominee 2005

SEBA Book Award Finalist 2005

Best Children's Books of the Year, 2004; Bank Street College of Education

Author's Biography

Coleen Salley was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After 30 years, she retired as a Distinguished Professor of Children's Literature at the University of New Orleans. She has been a Visiting Professor at a number of universities and has received a number of distinguished teaching awards. Ms. Salley has made special reading presentations worldwide, spreading her own style in the oral tradition. She even starred as a Cajun storyteller in a nationally televised campaign of Visa commercials. She grew up hearing the old tale of Epaminondas, which has become her trademark story. Her new variation, *Epossumondas*, was published in 2002. Coleen lives in the French Quarter in New Orleans - where she's also known as Queen Coleen, a colorful character of Mardi Gras.

<http://www.coleensalley.com>

http://www.mardigrasunmasked.com/mardigras/colorfulcharacters/Coleen_Salley.htm

Illustrator's Biography

Janet Stevens was born into a military family in Dallas, Texas. She is the author and illustrator of many popular and award-winning books for children, including the Caldecott Honor Book *Tops and Bottoms*. *To Market, To Market*, a 1998 ALA Notable Book, includes illustrations of Coleen Salley. Janet used to spend much of her time visiting schools and libraries across the United States. However, in recent years, she has limited her traveling, freeing up more time to concentrate on illustrating. She now resides in Boulder, Colorado.

<http://www.janetstevens.com>

<http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authIllustrator/author.asp?id=125&fn=Janet&ln=Stevens>

Other Titles by Coleen Salley

Epossumondas

Epossumondas Saves the Day (September 2006)

Who's That Tripping Over My Bridge

Other Books Illustrated by Janet Stevens

Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock

And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon (Wrote)

Coyote Steals the Blanket (Adapted)

The Dog Who Had Kittens

To Market, To Market

Tops and Bottoms

Related Titles

Possum Stories

Alien and Possum: Friends No Matter What by Tony Johnston.

Count the Possums by Richard Douglas Punnett. Illustrated by Tom Dunnington.

Don't Laugh, Joe! by Keiko Kasza.

Possum Magic by Mem Fox. Illustrated by Julie Vivas.

Possum Come A-Knockin' by Nancy Van Laan. Illustrated by George Booth.

Possum's Harvest Moon by Anne Hunter.

Opossum and the Great Firemaker: A Mexican Legend by Jan M. Mike. Illustrated by Charles Reasoner.

Six Little Possums and the Babysitter by Marci McGill. Illustrated by Cyndy Szekeres.

We Gather Together-Now Please Get Lost! by Diane de Groat.

Why Opossum is Gray: A Story from Mexico by Janet Palazzo-Craig. Illustrated by Charles Reasoner.

Winnie and Ernst by Gina Freschet.

"Pourquoi" Tales

How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Tell by Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss.

How the Animals Got Their Colors: Animal Myths from Around the World by Marcia Rosen. Illustrated by J. Clamentson.

How the Chipmunk Got His Stripes by Joseph and James Bruchac.

How the Guinea Fowl Got Her Spots: A Swahili Tale of Friendship by Barbara Knutson.

Why Alligator Hates Dog by J. J. Reneaux.

Why Lapin's Ears are Long and Other Tales from the Louisiana Bayou by Sharon A. Doucet.
Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears by Verna Aardema. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon.
Why Snails Have Shells: Minority and Han Folktales of China by Carolyn Han.
Why the Crab Has No Head: An African Folktale by Barbara Knutson.
Why the Possum's Tale is Bare and Other North American Indian Nature Tales edited by James E. Connolly. Illustrated by Andrea Adams.

Classroom Connections

See this site for a lesson plan for the book:

Tulsa City-County Library

<http://kids.tulsalibrary.org/services/stevens/eopossumondas2.htm>

Lesson plans and a reader's theater for the book.

Language Arts: Pourquoi Tales

- Discuss the term "pourquoi tale." Read several pourquoi tales aloud and discuss their similarities and differences.
- See the web links for several good lesson plans and information about pourquoi tales.

Humanities: Themes in the Story

- Use this story as a basis for discussion and study of: sharing, stealing, animals and family. For example: "Should Papapossum be eating fruit that does not belong to him without asking first?"

Science

- **Animal Tails**
Have the students research different animals, concentrating on their physical characteristics with emphasis on their tails. Compare and contrast the different types of tails and their uses.
- **Animals: Research different animals**
Where does the animal live?
How big is the animal?
What kind of food does the animal eat?
Would the animal make a good pet?
- **Opossums**
After reading *Why Eopossumondas Has No Hair on His Tail*, introduce and read to the class a nonfiction book about opossums.
- **Persimmons**
Bring a persimmon to class to share with the students. Have the students study different types of fruit.

Social Studies

- Invite a guest speaker to discuss the Cajun culture and dialect.
- Have a Cajun day. Set aside a day for children to experience the culture. Have the children dress up in old Cajun clothing, introduce Cajun music and dancing, have a Cajun lunch, and read a Cajun story.

Web Links

Book, Author, Illustrator

Coleen Salley

<http://www.coleensalley.com>

Salley's website includes a biography, a list of her books and a link to the Coleen Salley/Bill Morris Literacy Foundation.

Harcourt Books

<http://www.harcourtbooks.com/bookcatalogs/bookpages/0152049355.asp>

Brief information about the book.

Janet Stevens

<http://www.janetstevens.com>

<http://www.janetstevens.com/books/epossTail.html>

Stevens' website includes a biography, lists of her books and awards and an e-mail address to contact her. She welcomes ideas and suggestions.

Kaboose-Kids Domain

<http://www.kidsdomain.com/reviews/product.php?pid=929>

Offers a summary, review, tips, pros, and cons of the book.

Nancy Keane's Booktalk

http://www.nancykeane.com/booktalks/salley_why.htm

This site includes a quick and simple booktalk.

Animals and Opossums

National Geographic.com - Kids

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/>

Site contains factual information about animals and games for kids to help them learn about different animals.

World Almanac For Kids: Opossum

<http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/animals/opossum.html>

This is an excellent website for children to find factual information about opossums.

Pourquoi Stories

Alberta Author Connection: Pourquoi Stories

<http://tlc.epsb.ca/aauthor/buchholz/pourquoi.htm>

This website gives information on how to introduce and teach pourquoi tales in the classroom. There are links on how to integrate pourquoi stories with language arts and science and on how to introduce multicultural literature.

Cherokees of California

<http://www.powersource.com//cocinc/articles/default.htm>

Cherokee tales that includes "Why the Possum's Tail is Bare."

Education Place

http://www.eduplace.com/activity/why_tales.html

This includes a lesson plan for pourquoi tales.

Lesson Plans Page

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/LAPublishingPourquoiTales57.htm>

This includes a detailed lesson plan on pourquoi tales.

Romine Bibliography of Pourquoi Tales

http://courses.unt.edu/efiga/STORYTELLING/5440%20Best%20Projects%20Fall%202003/Project_Romine.html

Lists books of pourquoi tales.

Scholastic: Teaching With Pourquoi Tales

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/pourquoitales.htm>

Windows to Understanding: Bridging Cultures Through Stories

http://herrickses.org/searingtown/wtu/bridging_cultures.htm

Lesson plans for introducing students to types of folk tales.