

Title: Why Epossumondas Has No Hair on His Tail, written by Coleen Salley and illustrated by Janet Stevens.

Bibliographic Info: Coleen Salley's picture book Epossumondas was an IRA-CBC Children's Choice winner. Illustrator, Janet Steven's book Tops and Bottoms was selected for the first Bill Martin, Jr. Picture Book Award in 1997.

Synopsis: In this delightful book, Epossumondas wants to know why he doesn't have any hair on his tail. To explain why his tail is naked, his Mama shares with him a story that goes back to Epossumondas' great-great grandpa, Papapossum. The story's characters include hungry Papapossum, a wily hare, a cranky bear, and a persimmon tree, all of which adds up to a hair-raising tale!

Themes: folktales, legends, animals, and friendship

Author/Illustrator Information: Author Coleen Salley was a professor of children's literature for thirty years and now travels widely as a professional storyteller. Raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, she grew up hearing the old Southern tale of Epaminondas. She has adapted this tale and created the delightful character of Epossumondas, a possum who is full of mischief.

Website: www.coleensalley.com (I was not successful in getting this site to open up – it was blocked by a sonicwall content filter service.)

Illustrator/Author Janet Stevens is no stranger to KRA members. She received the first Bill Martin, Jr. Picture Book Award for her book Tops and Bottoms. Janet Stevens was born in Texas, but lived in many different places growing up because her father was in the Navy. She enjoys illustrating stories by other authors as well as writing her own stories and retelling old tales in a contemporary way.

Website: www.janetstevens.com

Activities:

This story provides a natural introduction to the writing benchmarks of #2 voice and #4 word choice. Benchmark #2 under the first Reading Standard requires that students need to be able to decode accurately and understand new words in reading materials. With a rich vocabulary like pussyfooting, lollygagging, jabbering, and confabbing to describe Epossumondas' activities, teachers will be able to excite and encourage students to be more creative in their own writing descriptions and to use context to help them determine the meaning of unknown words. The third Reading Standard focuses on Literature Genres. This book would be a fun to include in a study of legends/folk tales.

Discussion Questions:

Prior knowledge questions:

Animal tails – What kind of tails do other animals have? Why are some long, some short, some furry, some naked?

What do you do when you are hungry?

Questions to ask after reading the story.

The story says that Papapossum and Hare were friends. Did they treat each other the way you would like to be treated by a friend? Share some of the things they did that were not necessarily kind. What could they have done differently?

The story says that Papapossum found a million different ways to use his tail. In addition to the ways illustrated in the story, what are some ways you can think of to use it?