Wordsworth Dances the Waltz

by Frances H. Kakugawa | illustrations by Melissa DeSica

Reader’s Activity Guide
Dear Teachers, Parents and Students,

Frances, the author of my adventures, asked me to write a reader’s guide for you for my second book, too. I told her; “Frances, isn’t it enough they enjoyed reading my story?” She said, “Yes, Wordsworth, I agree but it may be fun for readers to explore the story with some activities as they did with your first book.” So here I am again! Frances will explain the format to you; you’ll find her instructions on the next page.

By the way, when I say “write a poem or write a report,” I really mean that you can choose any medium you like to use to express yourself. For example, instead of writing a report, you could write a song if composing is your thing. This is pretty open-ended. The main thing is to enjoy and have fun while learning something more about how you feel and think about things.

I’d really like it if you would share your work with me; then I’ll feel like a teacher, like Frances! I promise to answer every mail. Poets keep promises, you know.

I have my own email address: wordsworth@bookshawaii.net and I also have a Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/WordsworthThePoet.

You can also write to me at:

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Frances and I also accept invitations to classrooms. We work with writing, both poetry and narrative. Have your teacher get in touch with Frances at:

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Let’s get started!

Aloha,
Wordsworth’s open-ended activity guides are mere suggestions for readers or parents/teachers. Each activity is intended for readers of all ages. How can this be, you ask, when there is such a range among readers? I look at it this way: each reader’s responses will be at his or her own level of comprehension, capability and experiences so the simplicity or complexity of the activity itself shouldn’t really matter. Here are some basic guidelines:

1. Activities are categorized in two groups: “Explorations” and “Extended Activities.” “Explorations” engage readers and invite them to interact and respond to the text. “Extended Activities” are learning exercises that extend beyond the text. Readers should complete one or more of the “Exploration” activities before selecting an “Extended Activity”.

2. Select a few activities that best fit your readers’ interest. Using all the exploratory activities will diminish the joy of literature and Wordsworth, too.

3. Alternatively, instead of selecting for them, present all the activities to your class of readers. Give them a choice to either work alone, in pairs or in groups of 3-5 and pick one or more activities they would like to pursue. They can later share their work with the entire class.

4. For younger readers, a group approach may be more effective. If they’re unable to write, group responses may be dictated to an adult and charted. Art and creative drama are other possibilities.

— Frances H. Kakugawa

Frances Kakugawa’s books are available at bookstores, online retailers or from the publisher’s website at www.bookshawaii.net. Contact Watermark Publishing to inquire about bulk or educational discounts:

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I. EXPLORE THE THEME OF THE STORY THROUGH DISCUSSION, WRITING AND ART. The theme of change occurs throughout the story, both externally and internally. Discuss instances where changes in attitude and insights lead to changes in behavior.

EXPLORATION #1

Discuss changes I experienced and observed throughout the story (Grandma, the old mouse, the Rubberband game, the leaf, bonsai, etc.). Were these changes for the good? Explain why or why not. Do you think I'm the same person I was at the beginning of the story? Why or why not?

(Chart responses as a large group. For older students, allow reflection time to jot down thoughts before discussion.)

After your discussion, write some of your main insights on chart paper and later share with the entire group.

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #1

Express the general theme of change through discussion/writing/creative drama/art.

1. Discuss changes you have experienced that you feel are “good” changes. Give reasons for each.
2. Discuss changes that created problems for you and why.
3. Discuss the stages of a person’s life from birth to the elderhood. Take one aspect, such as walking, and dramatize the differences in walking from infancy to the very elderly. Drum beats, rhythm sticks or other rhythmic music can be used to depict how the elderly’s ability to walk returns to that of the infants learning to walk. Art can be used to depict various levels of change in a person or things in nature like trees going through the four seasons. Explore the world to discover changes during life span.

II. EXPLORE MEMORY THROUGH DISCUSSION OR WRITING. Read the poem “Grandma” from Wordsworth Dances the Waltz. I have many good memories of Grandma in this poem. Grandma can’t remember them but I do.

EXPLORATION #2

Think of one special memory you have of a grandparent. Why is it so special? Can you describe it in detail so when you share your with others, they will know why this is such a special memory for you?

III. EXPLORE CREATIVITY AND STRETCH YOUR IMAGINATION WITH THE RUBBERBAND GAME.

EXPLORATION #3

Think of the game my friends and I played. Think of all the ways a mind is like a rubberband. Think of inventions, medical research, writers and others who use their imagination in their lives. How do you stretch your mind?

EXPLORATION #4

Paint or draw your own Rubberband game. Murals can be painted using various imaginative images of clouds or other aspects of nature.
III. EXPLORE THE THEME OF THE POEM “GRANDPARENTS” THROUGH STORY-TELLING AND WRITING.

EXPLORATION #5

You have many memories of your grandparents. Do you know what stories and memories your grandparents have? How can you preserve these memories together? On a recording or on paper? Start a collection of these stories on an audio or video recording, or assemble them in a book or on a family blog.

Think of yourself as a writer/illustrator; add drawings or photos to your stories.

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #2

Explore phrases using the word “memory.”

What does the phrase “the gift of memory” mean to you? Write an essay or journal entry on this or any other phrases associated with memory. On a special occasion, think of giving a gift of memory to someone special in your life. What are some ways you can do this?

IV. EXPLORE POETRY WRITING THROUGH DISCUSSION AND WRITING.

EXPLORATION #6

Poetry writing is a form of therapy for me. It helps me so much to look at my problems through poetry writing. Discuss how poetry writing helped me resolve my problems. Did they bring on the changes I wanted? How did that happen? How do you resolve some of your problems?

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #3

Write some poems or song lyrics about questions that seem to have no answers for you. What do you think about when you ponder those questions? How do you feel inside or what do you remember when you ask yourself these questions? You may want to reread my poems, “Bonsai” and “Grandma.”

V. EXPLORE THE THEME OF FRIENDSHIP THROUGH DISCUSSION AND WRITING/ART/MUSIC.

EXPLORATION #7

Dylan likes to tease people. Sometimes people feel hurt or angry when they are teased. Why do you think Dylan’s teasing doesn’t cause problems among his friends?

EXPLORATION #8

Dylan, Eliot, Emily and I are very different from each other, but we get along fine. How do we manage these differences? Can you be friends with others who are very different from you? How about people who are physically or mentally handicapped? Why or why not?

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #4

Think about your most special friend. Write a poem, a story, or a song about this relationship. You could also present your friend in art and write a description to explain your creation.

OR: Instead of thinking of one single person, imagine how you perceive a good and trusted friend. Write a poem, story or song or create an art piece that expresses these qualities.
VI. EXPLORE DANCING THE WALTZ AND OTHER SHARED MOMENTS.

EXPLORATION #9

Why did I dance the waltz with my grandma?

My waltz with Grandma was a special memory we shared. We all have our own “waltzes” to treasure. In EXPLORATION #2 I asked you to think about a special moment you shared or a memory you have of your grandparents. Re-live that moment with your grandparents.

For example, if your special moment is fishing with your grandfather because he taught you how to bait a hook, go fishing again! Even if he has a hard time remembering things, maybe he will be like my grandma: She lost her memory but it came back to her while we were dancing. Maybe this will happen with you, too. And if your grandfather still has his memories, he will surely enjoy knowing you treasure that time together.

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #5

Dance the waltz. Experience what my grandmother, my family, neighbors and I did. Bring in waltz music, listen to the 1-2-3 rhythm and dance. If you play a musical instrument, ask others to play a waltz with you. Why, you can even invite parents and grand-parents and have the waltzing event of the year! Read some of your essays, poems and display your art work at this event.

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #6

Do the following phrases mean anything to you?

- The dance of life.
- Life as a dance.
- The final dance of life.

Can you think of others that use the word “dance” as a metaphor? Discuss and write out your thoughts.

EXTENDED ACTIVITY #7

Dance with the elderly through field trips and personal relationships. This activity is based on Frances’ own personal experiences. Her mother had Alzheimer’s Disease and I feel she really knows what she’s talking about, so I’m going to let her explain it to you:

The elderly in nursing homes are often alone, without visitors, because they have out-lived their children and friends or they are not living in close proximity. Often, the later generations of grand- or great-grandchildren feel removed from them. People with dementia and loss of memory are often viewed as non-people because illnesses have stolen their bodily functions and their capacity to communicate with others. But they do understand the presence of someone who is there with compassionate and genuine care. My mother had Alzheimer’s disease and spent the last few years of her life in a nursing facility. She and others often responded to children. Somehow, children brought a recognizable light into their eyes and a smile on their faces.

One school I know of instituted a year-long project where students visited the nursing facility with art work for each of the rooms and holiday murals for the hallway walls. The children sang songs, went into the rooms and hugged the residents or shook their hands. They made a great difference to the residents, their families, nursing staff and to themselves.

Contact a local nursing home or senior care center and start a similar class project.

Ask the students to keep a running journal of experiences and insights gained. At the end of the term, ask students if any of their previous attitudes toward the elderly underwent a transformation.
Thank you for doing this because the elderly are people just like you and me and they have many things to teach us, even in their silence.

—FHK

**EXTENDED ACTIVITY #8**

Build a classroom library of books that extend the themes found in *Wordsworth Dances the Waltz*. Write short synopses of books you’ve read that may interest other readers. Keep them on file in your classroom to share.

Suggested for children:

*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox

Some suggestions for adult readers:

*I Am Somebody: Bringing Dignity and Compassion to Alzheimer’s Caregiving; Mosaic Moon: Caregiving through Poetry and Breaking the Silence* by Frances Kakugawa

**A Final Note from Wordsworth:**

Thank you for spending so much time on my story. If you haven’t already, be sure to read my first adventure, *Wordsworth the Poet*. You’ll find out more about me and my friends. (Have you figured out how Emily, Dylan, Eliot and I got our names?)

I’m curious: did this story make a difference in your life? Write to me and tell if you have new insights or feelings about the elderly.

Tell me your honest reactions to the story. Send me your poems, stories or artwork. Ask me questions if you wish.

Aloha!