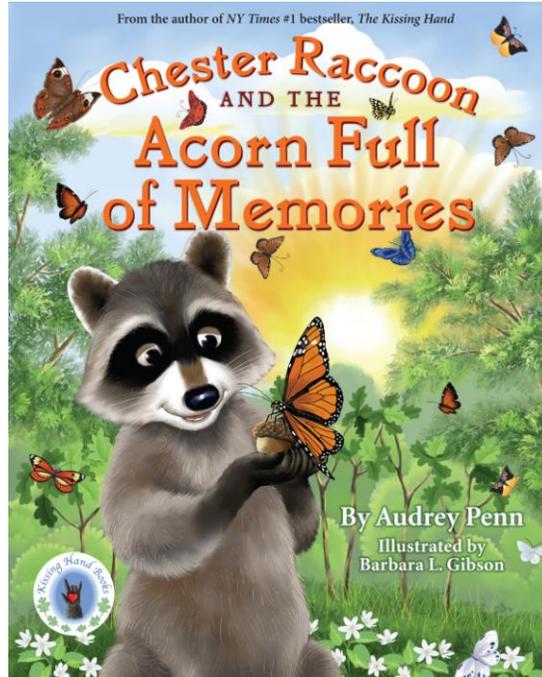


A Teacher's Guide to
Chester Raccoon
AND THE
Acorn Full of Memories

Written by Audrey Penn, Illustrated By Barbara L. Gibson



CHESTER RACCOON AND THE ACORN FULL OF MEMORIES
© 2009 by Audrey Penn; Art by Barbara L. Gibson; Tanglewood

Praise for
Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories

“Simple, direct dialogue demonstrates the love between this mother and child. Bright, stylized illustrations...depict the animals with human emotions, convey warmth, and reinforce the text. Despite the tough subject, this ...book ... has a reassuring tone and provides an opening for a discussion on death and remembering loved ones.” ~*School Library Journal*

“Beautifully illustrated and with lots of saturated color, this book will keep youngsters’ attention and maybe help them through a confusing time.”
~*Baton Rouge Advocate*

“This may sound like a dark subject, but it is handled so well and with such beautiful artwork that it provides a cushion of comfort.” ~*Bookviews*

Story Summary

Chester Raccoon is upset. His good friend Skiddil Squirrel has had an accident and will not be returning—ever. Mrs. Raccoon suggests that Chester and his friends “make some memories” of Skiddil, so that they will have good memories when they miss him. Chester and his friends gather at the pond, where they create a touching celebration of their friend’s life.

Many young children must face the loss of loved ones or the need to attend a funeral. This sweet story will help children to understand the positive purpose behind memorial services and how “making memories” can provide cheer and comfort when missing an absent loved one.

About the Author

AUDREY PENN is the author of the perennial bestseller, *The Kissing Hand*, and its sequels, *A Pocket Full of Kisses*, *A Kiss Goodbye* and *Chester Raccoon and the Big, Bad Bully*. This title is the fifth in this series of books. She takes her one-woman educational program, The Writing Penn, into schools, libraries, and children’s hospitals, where she shapes and refines her story ideas in partnership with kids. A longtime resident of the Washington DC area, she is a sought-after conference speaker for groups of teacher and other professionals who work with children. To learn more about Audrey Penn, please visit www.audreypenn.com.

About the Illustrator

Award-winning illustrator **BARBARA LEONARD GIBSON** has been a freelance artist in the Baltimore-Washington area for 25 years. Originally from New York, and with a degree in Fine Art and Design from Carnegie Mellon University, she has worked extensively in many areas and her work has appeared in a broad array of picture books and magazines. Children’s books illustrated by Ms. Gibson include *Pocket Full of Kisses* and *A Kiss Goodbye* by Audrey Penn, *The Nutmeg Adventure* by Lisa Reinhart, *Life’s Little Fable* by Patricia Cornwell, and *Counting* by Anne Miranda. to learn more about Barbara Gibson and her work, please visit www.barbaragibson.com.

Pre-Reading

TAKE A BOOK WALK

Show the front cover, title, and names of the author and illustrator. To whom did the author and illustrator dedicate this book? Why do you think they did so?

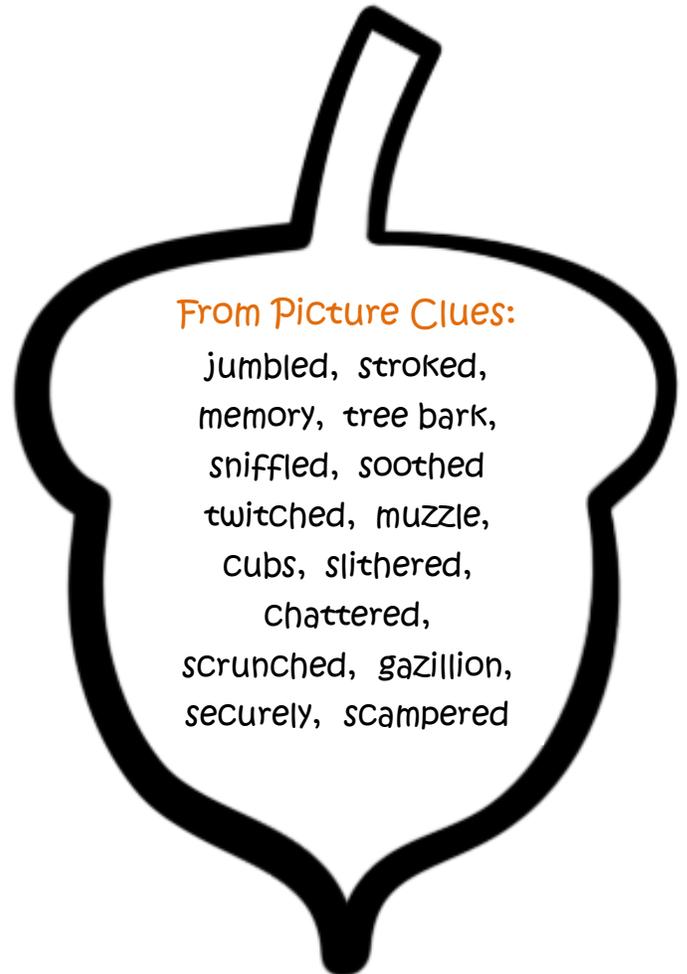
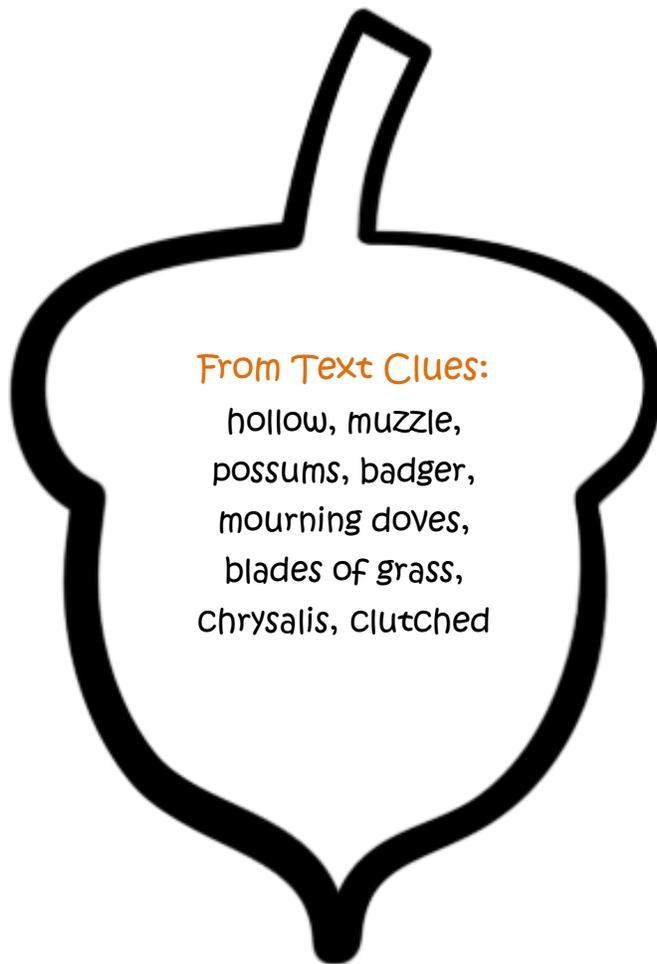
Ask students if they have ever known anyone (person or pet) who has died. Discuss what a memory is, then “walk” through the pages showing only the illustrations. What is happening in the story? Ask students why some scenes are illustrated in “thought bubbles” (to show flashbacks of Chester’s memories of Skiddil Squirrel).

- *Engage in pre-reading and reading activities to identify what students know and have learned about a specific story or topic.*
- *Use illustrations to assist in understanding the content of a text and to anticipate what will happen next.*
- *Predict what could happen next or the outcome of a story read aloud.*
- *Name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.*

VOCABULARY

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. Encourage them to use text and picture clues to infer meanings.

- *Connect vocabulary and life experiences to ideas in books.*



Discussion Starters

1. Why was Chester Raccoon sad? (*knowledge*)
2. What happened to Skiddil Squirrel? (*comprehension*)
3. Look at the illustration on the second page spread of the story. Can you tell how Chester feels just by looking at the illustration? How? What is his mother doing? Why? Act out this scene without words. Next, think of ways you can tell when a friend is sad. What could you do to help a sad friend feel better? Role-play your ideas. (*application*)
4. Look at the illustration of Chester and the butterfly on the dedication page. What do you think Chester might be feeling and thinking? Why? (*analysis*)
5. Think of someone you miss (a person or pet who has died or who lives far away). What reminds you of that person? (This could be a song, a ritual, or an object). Make a list (with words or pictures) of the fond memories you have of your loved one. How does this memento make you feel when you remember him or her? (*synthesis*)
6. Although Chester and his friends are sad, they laugh at some of their memories of Skiddil. How can they laugh when they're sad? Is it good to laugh when you're sad? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Student Activities

SHARING MEMORIES

Ask children to bring in mementos of anything (or anyone) they love— a person, place, vacation, etc. Take a digital photo of each child holding his or her memento. Let children dictate or write a caption to go along with their photo, such as:

This is me holding a shell from Virginia Beach. My family went last summer. My grandfather helped me collect shells. This one is my favorite.

Scan children's photos with their captions. Ask parents to send in a stamped, addressed envelope to someone with whom their child would like to share this memory. Have students write a note (either in their own words or using the one below), then send it off with the scanned copy of their photos and captions.

- Draw or write facts and ideas gathered from personal experiences
- Share writings and drawings with peers or adults

Dear _____,

My teacher read a book called Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories by Audrey Penn, illustrated by Barbara L. Gibson. We talked about memories, and one of my favorite memories is with you. I wrote about my memory next to this photo of me, and I want to share it with you!

Love,

RAISING BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies were one of Skiddil Squirrel's favorite things. Order a butterfly kit for your class (do an Internet search for "classroom butterfly kits"). Let students take photos of each stage of the life cycle and have them record their observations under each photo. Arrange the photos in a circular display to which students may refer when explaining their understanding of the life cycle.

- *Describe the major stages in the life cycles of selected plants and animals.*
- *Use a digital camera to take a picture.*

MEMORIAL BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Research the butterflies that are native to your area and which plants attract them. For instructions on how to plant a butterfly-friendly garden, visit the National Wildlife Federation site (<http://www.nwf.org>) and search for "butterfly garden."

When your butterfly guests arrive, have students observe the garden for a few minutes and estimate how many there are. Challenge them to try and count how many butterflies are in the garden. How many different kinds of butterflies did they see? Which flowers or plants did the butterflies visit most often?

- *Count and compare groups formed (quantify groups formed).*
- *Describe the attributes of objects.*
- *Estimate the number in a collection to 50 and then compare by counting the actual items in the collection.*

COOKING WITH ACORNS

Many Native American tribes prepared meals containing acorns. Visit <http://siouxme.com/acorn.html> for a history of how Native Americans harvested and cooked acorns. You'll also find recipes for acorn bread and griddle cakes.

- *Use the Internet to explore and investigate questions with a teacher's support.*
- *Learn about and respect other cultures within the classroom and community.*
- *Follow simple sets of directions (e.g., from a recipe).*
- *Use standard units of measurement.*

AUTHOR STUDY

Share the other Chester books by Audrey Penn. Help students compare and contrast the stories with a chart like the one below. At the end of the unit, have students vote for their favorite. Display the results in a bar graph and analyze the results.

- *Show familiarity with some book titles and authors.*
- *Express an opinion or judgment about a story.*
- *Identify more, less, and same amounts from graphs.*
- *Interpret data in terms of the words: most, least, greater than, less than, or equal to.*
- *Construct a question that can be answered by using information from a graph.*

Title:	Problem:	Solution:
<u>Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories</u>		
<u>The Kissing Hand</u>		
<u>A Pocket Full of Kisses</u>		
<u>A Kiss Goodbye</u>		
<u>Chester Raccoon and the Big Bad Bully</u>		
<u>A Bedtime Kiss for Chester Raccoon</u>		

PLANT A TREE

Contact a local nursery or garden center to ask about donating a tree to plant near your school (planting an oak tree will eventually yield acorns).

Students can plant the tree in honor of someone special. If the person is living, invite him or her to the dedication ceremony. If the person is not living, invite someone who knew this person to share memories.

Like Chester's heart for Skiddil's trees on the last page of the story, make a "kissing hand" heart-shaped bird feeder for the tree. Follow this recipe using a heart-shaped cookie cutter or mini Bundt pan: <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/tweet-treats-671034/>.

Take a photo of your class next to the tree to compare growth and change throughout the year. Have students draw the tree in each new season to document how the tree changes over time. Help students to assemble their tree drawings into books to take home at the end of the year.

- *Describe patterns of seasonal changes in the environment.*
- *Follow simple sets of directions (e.g., from a recipe).*

REAL RACCOONS AND SQUIRRELS

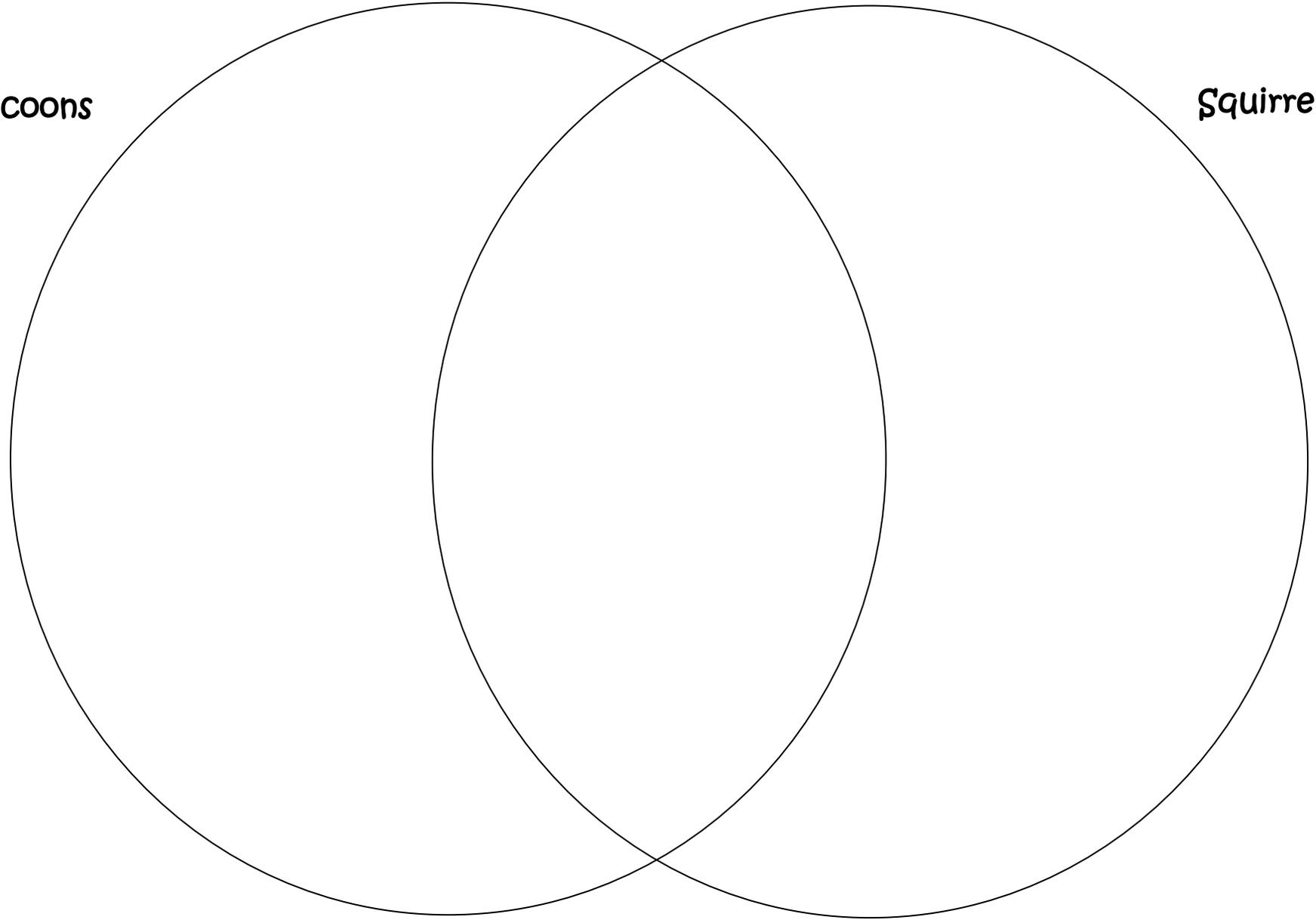
To learn about real raccoons, visit National Geographic Kids (<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/raccoon/>). Substitute "squirrel" for "raccoon" in the above web address to learn about squirrels. Use the Venn diagram on the following page to compare the two animals. What do they have in common? What makes them different? Ask students if they think real squirrels and raccoons would get along like Chester and Skiddil did. Why or why not?

- *Use Venn diagrams to sort and describe data.*
- *Draw pictures to record facts from a lesson, with assistance.*
- *Use the Internet to explore and investigate questions with a teacher's support.*

Both

Raccoons

Squirrels



MAP IT OUT

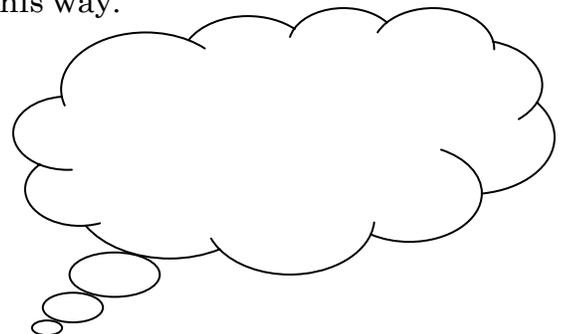
Help students list (with words or sketches) the various places mentioned in the story. Create a mural-sized map of the woods and mark the places that are mentioned in the story. Have children make a raccoon puppet with paper and wooden craft sticks (sample template here: <http://www.first-school.ws/t/craft/raccoon-hearts-bb.htm>), then let them use the map and puppet to retell the story in sequence. Students may also make a mask (<http://childcareandbeyond.tripod.com/mask-raccoon.html>) and act out the story.

- *Retell or dramatize stories or parts of stories.*
- *Listen to literary texts to identify character and setting.*
- *Role-play characters or events from stories.*

MEMORY BUBBLE

Look at the memory bubble of Skiddil Squirrel on the second page spread of the story. Ask students why this scene is illustrated in this way.

After a shared experience such as a field trip or special class activity, have each child think of a favorite memory from that experience. Take a photo of each child and include a “thought bubble” like the one on the right. Have each child illustrate the favorite memory in the bubble.



When everyone has finished, let students show their pictures one at a time. After the first child has shown his or her picture, use a clothespin to attach it to a string. After the second child shares, ask the class which event came first, and place the second picture either before or after the first, depending upon the sequence of events. Continue until everyone has shared and the pictures have formed a timeline of the shared event. Staple identical events one on top of the other in a vertical strip to show that they describe the same point in time.

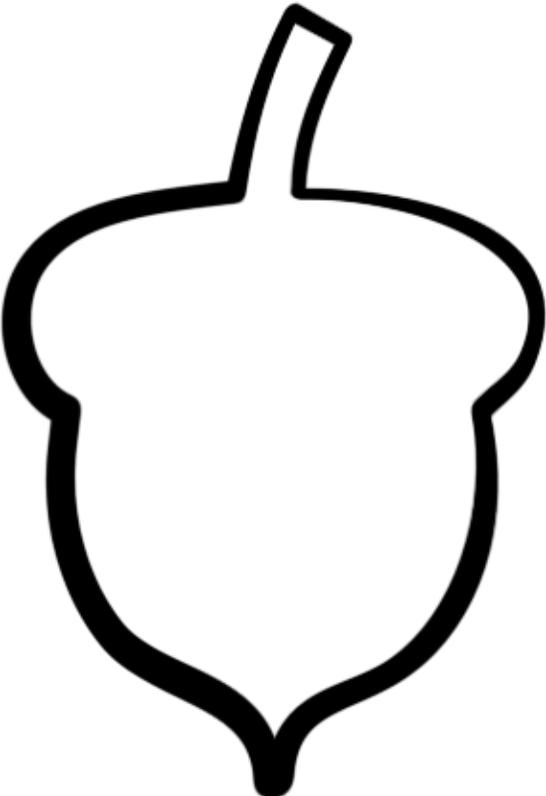
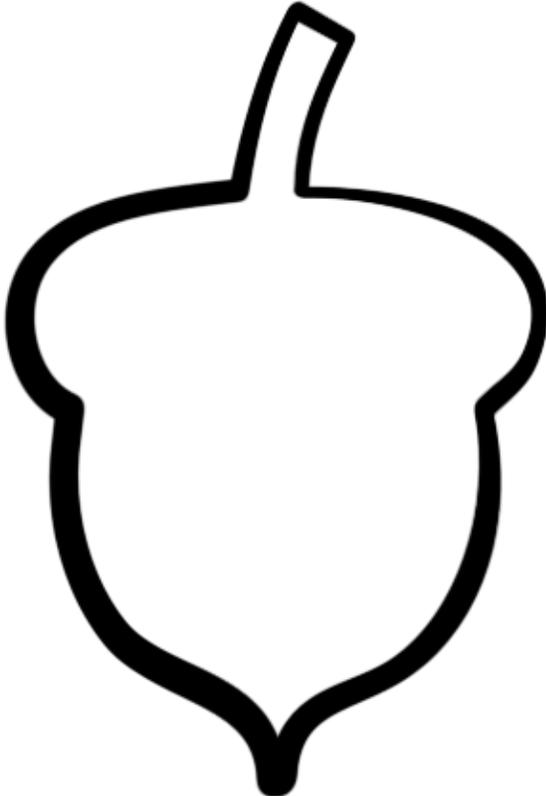
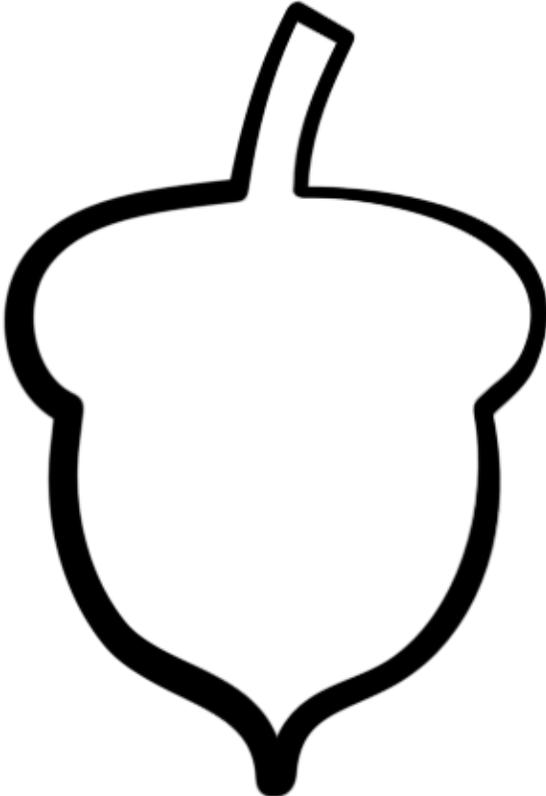
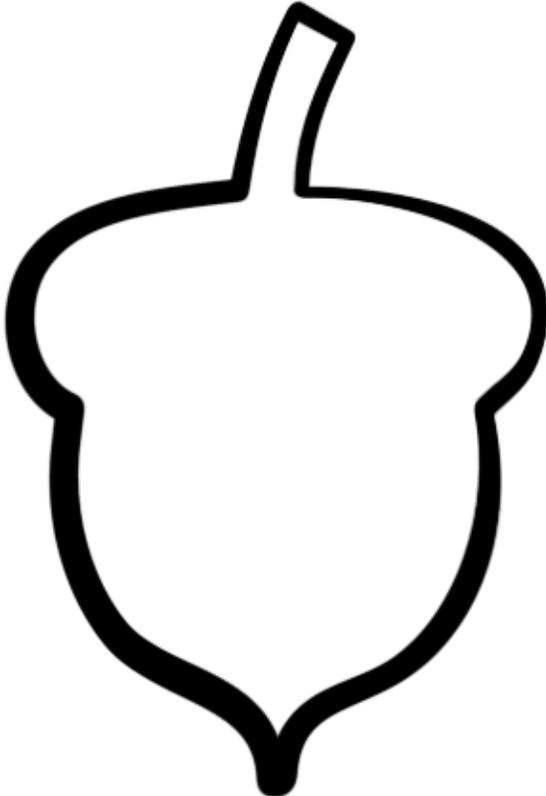
- *Interpret simple time lines.*
- *Speak for different purposes (e.g., share ideas about personal experiences).*
- *Take turns when speaking in a group.*
- *Respond in pictures or words to an experience or event shared by a classmate*

ACORN FULL OF MEMORIES

Leave this year's class memories behind for your new students next Fall with a jar full of acorn memories. Copy the acorn templates on the following page onto cardstock. At the end of the school year, let each child draw and/or write about a favorite school memory from this year. Place them in a jar.

The following September, read one memory each day during the first month of school to get your new class excited about the year ahead. If your former students are still at your school, invite them to come back as special guests to share their memories.

- *Draw or write facts and ideas gathered from personal experiences.*



An Interview with Author Audrey Penn

1. How did you get the idea for CHESTER RACCOON AND THE ACORN FULL OF MEMORIES?

Twenty years ago, my rabbi, whom I loved and adored, asked me to please write a story to help kids who have known someone who died. It planted a seed in my brain, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not come up with a good story about death. Then my mom died about four years ago. After she died, the house was just overflowing with people talking about her. It was all about making memories.

When a friend of ours, Frannie, died, my daughter kept one of Frannie's golf balls on her desk, because that's what reminded her of Frannie. She even took it to college with her to remember Frannie. And I thought, that's it!

2. Once the idea came to you, what happened next?

I ran to the computer! But then it simmered for 20 years. It's not an easy subject. I decided to write about life, not death. When I first wrote it, I had Mrs. Raccoon telling Chester that Skiddil went to sleep and never woke up. I read it at a conference with 3,000 kindergarten teachers, and I asked if anyone had a problem with the story. Three-thousand hands went up. I called on the first person, who said that a book had come out earlier that had that explanation, and now her kindergarteners didn't want to take naps anymore. After that, I read the manuscript to kids, teachers, parents, psychologists, everyone.

3. What was the most challenging part of writing this book?

Every single word had to be correct. The proof was when those hands went up. I know my characters so well because I've done three other Chester books, but this book is so different and so complex, and the characters' reactions are different than they are in the other books.

4. What was the most rewarding part of writing this book?

The emails and reviews from the parents and the kids who said, "I'm not scared when I have this book."

5. What are the rewards and challenges of writing a series with the same characters?

The rewards are people who continue to connect with my characters. After 9/11, there was a kindergarten teacher who couldn't find one of her students, and she ended up finding him in the closet reading my book. Another little girl fell asleep on the school bus, and they didn't know she was there. They found her hours later sitting on the back seat of the bus with her hands pressed on each cheek because of the kissing hand.

The challenge with a series is making each book universal with the same characters.

6. How did the illustrations come about?

Most writers do not have the luck I had. My husband is a postal clerk, and one day a woman was mailing artwork to National Geographic. He said, "Do you do children's books? My wife is a writer." She said no, but that she'd like to. So I called her and we talked, but I didn't have anything for her to illustrate at the time. Then I wrote The Whistling Tree and asked if she would illustrate it, and she said yes!

7. What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?

There's no such thing as writer's block. It takes the brain time to process, and I really don't think I understood that until this book. When I'm stuck, it's not that I have writer's block, but that an idea hasn't matured yet, and I just need to think it out. The brain work is not finished. Things clarify in the shower! When I'm really stuck, I take a shower. I bought a waterproof tape recorder because the words just flow. I've taken as many as five showers in a day!

8. What advice do you have for young writers?

Three things:

1. Use all of your senses when you write.
2. Kids need to know that if someone doesn't like something you write, that's just one opinion. If I get a review where someone doesn't like one of my books, I know it's just that one person, who maybe spilled his coffee in his lap that morning. I don't let it stop me from being proud of my work.

3. When I do school visits, I talk about writing my ending first. Stories need conclusions, but a conclusion is not the same thing as the ending. You'll see that on TV—you'll have the conclusion, then the commercial, then the ending. So I don't write the conclusion, but the ending. I tell kids that before I come to their school, I take out a map because I need to know where I will end up.

9. Do you have a writing routine?

When I'm at home, I set the alarm for 7:00, and if it's warm and I'm feeling well, then I take the dogs outside for a little walk. Then I get right to work—no email, or anything else. And I write until 1:00.

When we're on Ocracoke Island, where my Blackbeard novels take place, my writing routine is completely different. I try to sleep in a little bit and then start writing at around 11:00, work for four hours, then go down to the beach. Then I'll work again from 11pm to 3am.

When I work on the Chester books, it's always in the afternoon, because that's when kids are around—neighbors, grandchildren—and I get their opinions!

10. Why did you decide to write for children?

Someone asked me a few months ago why I started writing children's books, and I always thought it was because I loved children's theater. But then it dawned on me that that's not what it was at all. I realized I had this memory. Starting at age four, I had to have blood work done every four weeks. Back then, they used the old-fashioned, long, steel needles. My uncle was a famous hematologist. He was one of thirteen kids with a fabulous house. We would go up once a month and he would do my blood work. My aunt was a costumer for the theater. So before I would get the blood work, my aunt would surprise me with a new costume—Little Red Riding Hood, Gretel, etc. They would read that story to me before I went in for my blood work, and then it wouldn't be Audrey going in, it would be the character.

11. When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

I love to collect shells—I'm a real shell collector—and driftwood. We have a lot of dolphins near Ocracoke Island, and once in awhile we'll see a horseshoe crab. In March, we help guide the turtles so they don't go the wrong way! That's a lot of fun.

I love petit point—half the size of needlepoint—and creweling. And reading—I can't read enough. I love mysteries by Agatha Christie. I also love music—listening to my son. He's down in Austin, Texas putting together a new trio of bass, drums and piano.

12. What was your favorite subject in school?

Getting out of class and working at the theater! I had a great English teacher, and he used to come to class dressed in theatrics. It was my 10th grade history teacher who got me into Blackbeard. I asked him where I should go if I wanted to write a book about Blackbeard that no one else has written. He told me to go to a little place in North Carolina called Ocracoke Island, and that's what I did!

An Interview with Illustrator Barbara L. Gibson

When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

From as far back as I can recall I have always felt that I was an artist. I started drawing when I was about 2 (strongly encouraged by my mother, who kept the paper coming) and never stopped. I was tempted by my ongoing fascination with natural sciences and my lifelong love of music throughout school and even college, but I don't think there was ever any real doubt about the path I was following.

How did you break into the illustrating profession?

My first professional job after college was for a printing and graphics studio in Morristown, NJ. It was there that I began to learn the business of illustration and design. Since I was a fine arts major in school, with no commercial training, I entered the commercial art arena somewhat disadvantaged. However, as a fine artist with a solid foundation in drawing and painting skills, I found it extremely easy to adapt to the "business" of illustration.

What type of media do you like working with the most, and why?

I would have to say that watercolor is probably my favorite medium because of its luminous and transparent quality, as well as the spontaneous nature of the process itself. I love the challenge of a medium that allows for no corrections to speak of. It can be both intimidating and deeply satisfying. But I do have to admit that I also love working in oils, acrylics, pen & ink and graphite as well, for completely different reasons.

How long did it take to illustrate CHESTER RACCOON AND THE ACORN FULL OF MEMORIES?

It took about 2 months to do the preliminary drawings and another 4 ½ months to complete all the final full color illustrations.

What was the most challenging thing about this project? The most rewarding?

The greatest challenge in creating the artwork was the effort to retain the touching emotional content of the story without allowing it to become maudlin and overly sentimental. To her great credit, Audrey Penn's narrative and its gentle sense of humor made this much easier for me. The most rewarding part will no doubt

present itself if and when we learn that the book has succeeded in helping kids through a difficult time.

Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

This is definitely a story of its own! I think it is safe to say that we found each other in a very unusual and atypical way. The year was 2003 and I was in the Olney Post Office mailing out several packages (padded legal-sized envelopes) of reprints of recent work to clients. The gentleman behind the counter, whom I had seen many times before, was curious enough to ask what the packages were. Since they weren't yet sealed, I showed him a set of reprints. He told me that his wife wrote children's books and that she would love to see my work. I didn't think there was any harm in giving him a set of reprints. I also erroneously concluded that "his wife" probably did this in her spare time at home and that I probably wouldn't hear any more about it. About a week later Audrey called and introduced herself and asked me to meet her for lunch. I did. The rest is history. We became friends soon after. ACORN is our 7th collaboration.

As to the process, Audrey is the author and I am the illustrator. We each grant the other the freedom to create her portion of the book without interference, although we confer on many occasions when questions arise. Initially I read the manuscript several times, taking "visual" notes as I go, and from these, the preliminaries are born. Before I send them to the publisher, I sit down with Audrey and we go over them. Sometimes I will amend a drawing to better illuminate a phrase or passage, and sometimes she will rewrite a line or two to better suit the illustration. It's a highly collaborative project because, in the final outcome, we don't want our "voices" to be disparate. They must complement one another. All I can say is that we work well together and we enjoy the process.

There are no hard and fast rules in the industry. I am fortunate enough to have illustrated many other books with different people and institutions. But it's safe to say that this is a singular situation, at least for Audrey and me, and we're both enjoying the experience of working together.

You have illustrated a number of books for children, each with a unique illustration style. How did you decide on a style for CHESTER?

I wanted a style for the Chester Raccoon books that was both playful and pseudo-realistic. Because of the (frequently) serious subject matter we didn't feel that a cartoony style would have been appropriate. However, we both wanted the features to be able to take on anthropomorphic expressions because young children are so

sensitive to facial features. And here and there I do try to sneak in some rather humorous characters for comic relief...

Are any of the characters or aspects of the setting modeled on real-life people and places?

Not that I am consciously aware of. I think we have both made an attempt to make these stories pertinent to children everywhere, which is one of the reasons why we use familiar animals as our protagonists and antagonists. Chester can be anybody. And his tree home can be anyone's home.

Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?

Absolutely!! You could also say the same about any of the arts. We're born with a natural predisposition to learning music, art, dance, language...undoubtedly a score of other things as well. But there is a critical time for the acquisition of these cultural skills and if children are not exposed to them and these innate abilities nurtured, they become lost in time and very difficult, if not impossible, to acquire later on. To add to the difficulty, we live in a society that does not encourage the arts and is, in fact, gradually drumming them out of the school curricula. (Sorry, but this is one of my soapbox topics!!)

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have always found writing to be intensely therapeutic and have been a "closet novelist" since 5th grade, as well as a life-long musician (flute & early instruments). And I **love** to cook. I also try to spend as much time as possible with my wonderful mare (whom I have had for 22 years) and our two adopted dogs. And, of course, as often as we can (now that our daughter is grown and on her own), my husband and I head north to our little place in Downeast Maine where I can indulge my love of painting the ocean.