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"Penny Lu Porcupine" Lesson Plan Guide

by Katie Gilstrap, illustrated by Maribel Lechuga

Unit Overview

Duration: 2 weeks

Grade Level: K-2

Subject Integration: ELA, Science, Character Education, Social-Emotional Learning

Essential Question: How can understanding our unique strengths and limitations help us build genuine confidence and face our fears?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze character development and the relationship between external appearance and internal feelings
- Understand themes of self-acceptance, courage, and working with personal limitations
- Explore animal adaptations and sensory abilities in natural environments
- Make connections between story themes and personal self-awareness and confidence building
- Practice identifying and celebrating individual strengths while acknowledging challenges
- Express understanding through creative projects and reflective discussions

WEEK 1: Self-Awareness, Strengths, and Limitations

Day 1: Introduction to Self-Perception and Animal Adaptations

Objective: Activate prior knowledge about how we see ourselves vs. how others see us

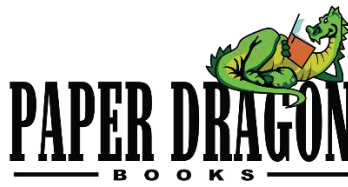
Materials: Animal adaptation images, self-perception reflection sheet, book cover

Opening (10 minutes)

- Quick-write: "Describe a time when you felt different on the inside than how you looked on the outside"
- Partner share experiences

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Self-Perception Exploration** (15 minutes)
 - Discuss the difference between how we feel and how we appear to others
 - Create class chart: "Times when we might look confident but feel nervous"
 - Connect to universal human experiences
2. **Animal Adaptation Preview** (15 minutes)



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- Show images of animals with interesting adaptations
- Introduce porcupines: physical characteristics and abilities
- Preview Penny Lu's specific combination of strengths and challenges

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What do you think might be challenging about being a porcupine?"
- Assign reading: Opening chapters introducing Penny Lu

Assessment: Self-perception reflection quality, animal adaptation understanding

Day 2: Meeting Penny Lu and Understanding Her World

Objective: Analyze character introduction and environmental context

Materials: Character analysis worksheet, forest ecosystem chart

Opening (10 minutes)

- Think-pair-share: "What did you learn about Penny Lu's daily life and challenges?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Character Foundation** (20 minutes)
 - Character analysis focusing on Penny Lu's abilities and limitations
 - Identify: What makes Penny Lu special? What challenges does she face?
 - Explore the contrast between her impressive appearance and internal feelings
2. **Forest Environment Analysis** (10 minutes)
 - Map Penny Lu's forest habitat
 - Identify opportunities (food sources) and challenges (predators) in her environment
 - Discuss how her abilities help and hinder her forest navigation

Closing (5 minutes)

- Quick poll: "What do you think is Penny Lu's greatest strength?"

Homework: Read chapters about Penny Lu's food adventures

Assessment: Character analysis accuracy, environment understanding

Day 3: The Power of Unique Abilities

Objective: Explore how Penny Lu's sense of smell compensates for limited vision

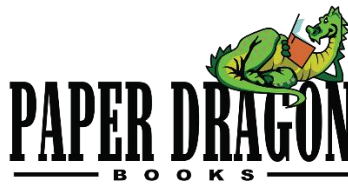
Materials: Sensory ability comparison chart, smell identification activity supplies

Opening (5 minutes)

- Quick discussion: "How does Penny Lu's incredible sense of smell help her?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Sensory Compensation Analysis** (20 minutes)



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- Track how Penny Lu uses her sense of smell for navigation and food finding
- Discuss concept of sensory compensation in humans and animals
- Connect to real-world examples of people with enhanced senses

2. Sensory Experience Activity (15 minutes)

- Safe smell identification game (various scents in containers)
- Students practice navigating with limited sight, enhanced other senses
- Reflect on how different senses provide different information

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What's one thing you learned about how senses work together?"

Assessment: Understanding of sensory compensation, activity participation

Day 4: Food Adventures and Forest Navigation

Objective: Analyze how Penny Lu balances opportunity-seeking with safety awareness

Materials: Adventure tracking sheet, risk vs. reward analysis chart

Opening (10 minutes)

- Partner discussion: "What exciting discoveries does Penny Lu make with her sense of smell?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. Adventure Analysis (20 minutes)

- Track Penny Lu's food discoveries and the adventures they lead to
- Identify how her curiosity about smells creates both opportunities and challenges
- Discuss the balance between exploration and safety

2. Risk Assessment Discussion (10 minutes)

- Analyze how Penny Lu tries to balance her desire to explore with awareness of dangers
- Connect to age-appropriate discussions about taking reasonable risks
- Explore how knowledge of your abilities helps in decision-making

Closing (5 minutes)

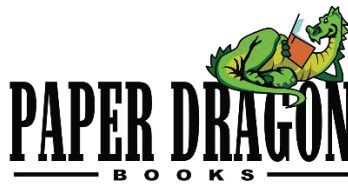
- Share one adventure you'd want to have if you had Penny Lu's sense of smell

Assessment: Adventure tracking accuracy, risk assessment understanding

Day 5: The Fear of THE BEAR

Objective: Understand how specific fears can feel overwhelming

Materials: Fear analysis worksheet, courage-building strategy sheet



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Opening (5 minutes)

- Quick-write: "Why do you think THE BEAR is Penny Lu's biggest fear?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Fear Analysis** (20 minutes)
 - Explore why THE BEAR represents Penny Lu's ultimate challenge
 - Discuss how our biggest fears often seem more scary in our imagination
 - Connect to students' own experiences with specific fears
2. **Courage-Building Strategies** (15 minutes)
 - Identify what might help someone face their biggest fear
 - Discuss the difference between avoiding all risks and being appropriately cautious
 - Explore how self-knowledge contributes to courage

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What's one thing that helps people be brave when they're scared?"

Assessment: Fear analysis insight, courage strategy understanding

WEEK 2: Facing Fears, Building Confidence, and Personal Applications

Day 6: The Encounter - Facing Your Biggest Fear

Objective: Analyze how Penny Lu handles her ultimate challenge

Materials: Courage moments tracking sheet, problem-solving analysis chart

Opening (10 minutes)

- Partner share: "How do you think Penny Lu will handle meeting THE BEAR?"

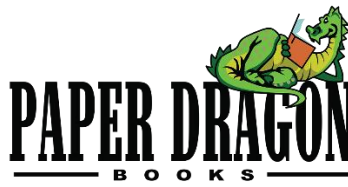
Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Confrontation Analysis** (20 minutes)
 - Read the bear encounter together
 - Track specific moments when Penny Lu shows courage despite fear
 - Identify how her self-knowledge and abilities help her in the critical moment
2. **Problem-Solving Discussion** (10 minutes)
 - Analyze how Penny Lu uses both her strengths (quills, knowledge) and smart thinking
 - Discuss how preparation and self-awareness contribute to handling crisis
 - Connect to real-world applications of facing difficult situations

Closing (5 minutes)

- Quick-write: "What did Penny Lu discover about herself through this experience?"

Assessment: Courage identification, problem-solving analysis



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Day 7: Character Growth and Self-Confidence

Objective: Examine how Penny Lu's self-perception changes

Materials: Before/after character chart, confidence building worksheet

Opening (5 minutes)

- Poll: "How is Penny Lu different at the end of the story?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Character Transformation** (25 minutes)
 - Complete before/after analysis of Penny Lu's self-confidence
 - Identify key moments that contributed to her growth
 - Discuss how facing fears can build genuine confidence
2. **Confidence Building Discussion** (10 minutes)
 - Explore difference between fake confidence and real self-assurance
 - Connect Penny Lu's journey to students' own confidence-building experiences
 - Identify practical steps for building authentic self-confidence

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What's the most important thing Penny Lu learned about herself?"

Assessment: Character transformation analysis, confidence concept understanding

Day 8: Celebrating Strengths and Working with Limitations

Objective: Apply story themes to personal self-awareness

Materials: Personal strengths inventory, adaptation strategy worksheet

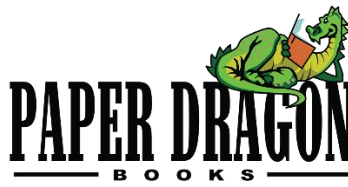
Opening (10 minutes)

- Small group discussion: "How does Penny Lu learn to work with her nearsightedness?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Personal Strengths Identification** (20 minutes)
 - Students create their own "superpowers" inventory like Penny Lu's amazing sense of smell
 - Identify areas where they need to be more careful or use different strategies
 - Discuss how everyone has unique combinations of strengths and challenges
2. **Adaptation Strategies** (10 minutes)
 - Explore how people work with limitations and celebrate strengths
 - Connect to real-world examples of adaptation and accommodation
 - Practice positive self-talk about both abilities and challenges

Closing (5 minutes)



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- Partner share: One personal strength and one area where you use different strategies

Assessment: Personal awareness quality, adaptation understanding

Day 9: Animal Adaptations and Forest Ecosystems

Objective: Connect story themes to scientific understanding

Materials: Animal research materials, ecosystem interaction chart

Opening (5 minutes)

- Review what we learned about porcupines from Penny Lu's story

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Porcupine Research** (20 minutes)
 - Research real porcupine facts and compare to story details
 - Explore how porcupine adaptations help them survive in forest ecosystems
 - Investigate other animals with interesting sensory adaptations
2. **Predator-Prey Relationships** (15 minutes)
 - Study forest ecosystem relationships including bears and porcupines
 - Discuss how different animals have evolved different survival strategies
 - Connect to themes about using your strengths and being aware of challenges

Closing (5 minutes)

- Share one interesting fact about animal adaptations

Assessment: Research accuracy, ecosystem understanding

Day 10: Personal Courage Project Planning

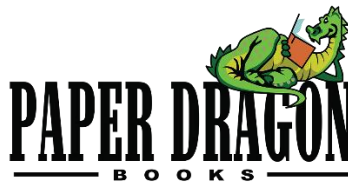
Objective: Apply story themes to personal goal-setting and courage building

Materials: Project planning sheets, courage goal templates

Project Options:

1. **Personal Courage Plan:** Design a plan for facing a fear or challenge using Penny Lu's model
2. **Superpower Celebration:** Create a presentation about personal strengths and how to use them
3. **Animal Adaptation Guide:** Research and present about animals with amazing adaptations
4. **Confidence Building Toolkit:** Develop resources to help others build authentic self-confidence
5. **Forest Adventure Story:** Write an original story about an animal character facing fears

Structure:



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- **Opening** (10 min): Project explanation and personal reflection
- **Work Time** (30 min): Project planning and initial development
- **Closing** (5 min): Share project plans with partners for feedback

Assessment: Project plan thoughtfulness, connection to story themes

Day 11: Project Development and Peer Support

Objective: Develop projects while practicing encouragement and feedback skills

Materials: Project supplies, peer feedback forms

Opening (5 minutes)

- Review supportive feedback and encouragement guidelines

Main Activity (35 minutes)

- Individual project work with peer consultation opportunities
- Practice giving specific, helpful feedback about courage and confidence themes
- Teacher conferences about personal applications and growth

Closing (5 minutes)

- Appreciation circle: share one encouraging observation about a classmate's project

Assessment: Project progress, quality of peer support

Day 12: Project Presentations and Celebration

Objective: Share learning and celebrate personal growth and courage

Materials: Presentation materials, celebration supplies

Opening (5 minutes)

- Presentation expectations focusing on celebrating courage and growth

Main Activity (35 minutes)

- Student project presentations (3-4 minutes each)
- Audience provides encouraging feedback using positive sentence starters
- Celebrate both the courage to present and the personal growth represented

Closing (5 minutes)

- Group reflection: "What did we learn about courage and confidence from each other?"

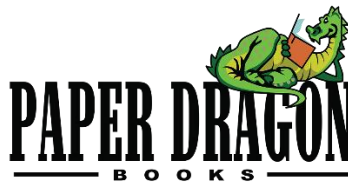
Assessment: Presentation quality, supportive audience participation

Day 13: Unit Reflection and Personal Action Planning

Objective: Synthesize learning and commit to ongoing self-awareness and confidence building

Materials: Reflection prompts, personal action planning sheets

Opening (10 minutes)



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- Think-pair-share: "What's the most important thing you learned from Penny Lu's story?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Unit Synthesis** (15 minutes)
 - Reflect on how the story changed their thinking about strengths, limitations, and confidence
 - Connect story lessons to real-world applications
 - Discuss ongoing ways to practice self-awareness and courage
2. **Personal Action Planning** (15 minutes)
 - Students identify one area where they want to build confidence like Penny Lu
 - Create simple action plans with specific steps
 - Partner sharing and mutual encouragement

Closing (5 minutes)

- Unit celebration: acknowledge everyone's unique strengths and growth

Assessment: Reflection depth, realistic action planning

Assessment Rubric

Reading Comprehension (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates deep understanding of character development, themes, and story progression
- **Meets:** Shows solid comprehension with adequate text evidence
- **Approaching:** Basic understanding with some support needed
- **Below:** Limited comprehension of story elements

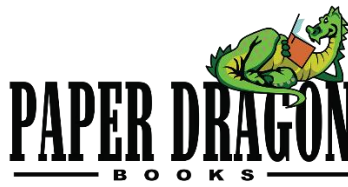
Character Analysis (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Insightful analysis of Penny Lu's internal and external journey, connecting to broader themes
- **Meets:** Clear understanding of character growth with specific examples
- **Approaching:** Basic character recognition and simple connections
- **Below:** Limited character analysis

Self-Awareness and Application (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Makes meaningful connections between story themes and personal growth opportunities
- **Meets:** Shows understanding of self-awareness concepts and some personal application
- **Approaching:** Basic grasp of personal strength and challenge concepts
- **Below:** Limited connection to personal development themes

Scientific Understanding (25%)



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- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates clear understanding of animal adaptations and ecosystem relationships
- **Meets:** Grasps basic concepts about animal abilities and forest environments
- **Approaching:** Recognizes some animal adaptation concepts with guidance
- **Below:** Minimal understanding of scientific themes

Differentiation Strategies

For Students with Confidence Challenges:

- Provide extra scaffolding for personal strength identification
- Celebrate small steps and efforts consistently
- Pair with supportive classmates for encouragement activities
- Offer multiple ways to demonstrate understanding and growth

For Students Who Appear Very Confident:

- Explore the theme of feeling different inside than you appear outside
- Challenge them to support classmates who are more hesitant
- Discuss different types of courage and challenges
- Connect to leadership and empathy development opportunities

For Students with Learning Differences:

- Emphasize the theme of different abilities and adaptations
- Provide visual and hands-on learning opportunities
- Celebrate diverse ways of processing and understanding information
- Connect to accommodation and adaptation strategies

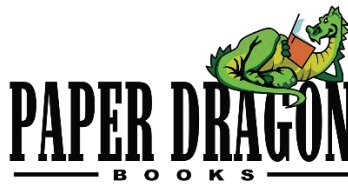
For English Language Learners:

- Use visual supports for emotion and character analysis vocabulary
- Encourage sharing examples from their own cultural backgrounds
- Provide collaborative opportunities for language development
- Connect to universal themes while respecting cultural differences

Materials List

- Class set of "Penny Lu Porcupine"
- Animal adaptation images and research materials
- Safe sensory experience supplies (various scents, textures)
- Chart paper and markers for tracking themes
- Art supplies for creative projects

Extension Activities



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Home Connections:

- Family discussions about individual strengths and how family members support each other
- Nature walks focusing on using different senses
- Research family members' experiences with overcoming fears or building confidence
- Create family traditions that celebrate unique abilities

Community Service:

- Create encouraging messages for younger students facing challenges
- Research and support local wildlife conservation efforts
- Volunteer for activities that help people work with different abilities
- Develop presentations about animal adaptations for community groups

Cross-Curricular Connections

Science:

- Study animal sensory systems and adaptations
- Explore forest ecosystems and predator-prey relationships
- Investigate how humans adapt to different challenges
- Learn about conservation and wildlife protection

Health and PE:

- Discuss how physical differences contribute to different abilities
- Explore activities that use different senses and skills
- Practice confidence-building exercises and positive self-talk
- Learn about adaptive sports and inclusive activities

Social Studies:

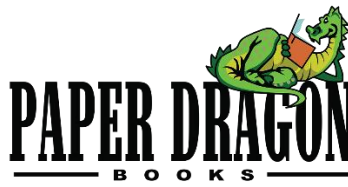
- Research how different cultures view individual differences and abilities
- Study historical figures who worked with limitations to achieve great things
- Explore community resources that help people work with different challenges
- Discuss how communities can be inclusive and supportive

Real-World Applications

Personal Development:

- Practice identifying and celebrating personal strengths
- Learn strategies for working with personal challenges
- Develop skills for building authentic confidence over time
- Practice courage in age-appropriate situations

Social-Emotional Skills:



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- Build empathy for others with different abilities and challenges
- Practice giving and receiving encouragement and support
- Learn to appreciate diversity in abilities and perspectives
- Develop resilience and positive self-concept