



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

"Don't Trust Fish" Lesson Plan Guide

written by Neil Sharpson, illustrated by Dan Santat

Unit Overview

Duration: 1 week

Grade Level: K–2

Subject Integration: ELA, Social-Emotional Learning, Science/Social Studies

Essential Question: *How does a book make us laugh—and what can silly stories teach us about thinking carefully?*

Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Identify how the book uses humor through exaggeration and silly logic
 - Distinguish between real information and silly/made-up claims
 - Engage with nonfiction text features as a point of comparison
 - Express humor through their own creative "warning" writing and illustration
-

ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

Day 1: The Big Read — Maximum Drama Required

Objective: Introduce the book with full comedic commitment and let kids discover the joke

Materials: Book, most serious teacher voice possible

Opening (10 min):

- Read the title and author with complete seriousness—no smiling
- Tell students: "This is a very important warning. We must take it seriously."

Main Activity (35 min):

- Read the entire book aloud with a completely straight face for as long as possible
- Let children laugh and react—give them space to enjoy the absurdity
- After finishing, break character: "Okay—was that a real warning? How do you know?"
- Discuss: "What makes this book funny? What would make it NOT funny?"
- Introduce the word "absurd": something silly that's treated as if it's totally serious

Closing (5 min):

- Ask: "What's the funniest reason the book gives not to trust fish?"

Assessment: Comprehension, humor recognition, oral discussion engagement

Day 2: Real vs. Silly — Fish Facts Showdown

Objective: Compare the book's claims to real fish information

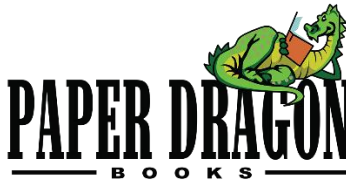
Materials: Real/Silly T-chart, fish fact resources (books or printed images)

Opening (10 min):

- Revisit one "warning" from the book: "Fish are teaching things in their schools." Ask: Is this real or silly?

Main Activity (35 min):

- Create a class Real vs. Silly T-chart using the book's claims
- Research 3–4 actual fish facts together: How big can they get? What do they eat? Where do they live?



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com **Phone:** (407) 212-7759

- For each real fact, ask: "Did the book get this one right or make it sillier?"
- Introduce the idea that good humor sometimes starts with real information and then exaggerates it

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "One REAL fish fact I learned today is ____"

Assessment: Fact vs. fiction, informational reading connection, real-world science curiosity

Day 3: How Comedy Works — Voice and Illustration

Objective: Analyze how the author's serious voice and Dan Santat's illustrations create the comedy together

Materials: Book (selected spreads), illustrator note about Dan Santat if available

Opening (10 min):

- Ask: "Why is it funnier when something silly is said with a SERIOUS voice?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Re-read 2–3 spreads focusing on the illustrations: "What is Dan Santat doing to make this funny?"
- Discuss how the pictures and words work together—the text says something scary, the pictures show something silly
- Try reading one page in a SILLY voice vs. a SERIOUS voice—which is funnier? Why?
- Share: "My favorite funny picture in the book is ____ because ____"

Closing (5 min):

- Quick discussion: "What would you illustrate for the fish plotting their doom?"

Assessment: Visual literacy, author/illustrator craft, humor analysis

Day 4: Write Your Own Warning Book

Objective: Apply understanding of comedic structure by creating an original "Don't Trust ____" warning

Materials: Drawing and writing supplies, "Don't Trust ____" template

Opening (10 min):

- Ask: "If you could write a warning about ANY animal or object, what would it be?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Students choose their subject: Don't Trust Cats / Squirrels / Clouds / Sandwiches / etc.
- Each student writes 2–3 "reasons" in the serious style of the book
- Illustrate each warning with appropriately dramatic (but silly) pictures
- Encourage students to try the serious-voice style: "WARNING: This is very important."

Closing (5 min):

- Author's chair: 2–3 students share their warning with the class in their best serious voice

Assessment: Creative writing, comedic voice, illustration, oral presentation

Day 5: Author's Chair and Fish Appreciation

Objective: Share warning books and end with a celebration of the real, amazing fish world

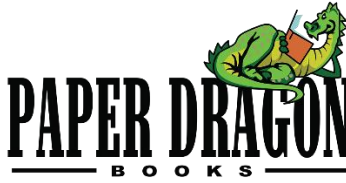
Materials: Student warning books, optional fish video clip

Opening (10 min):

- Preview: "Today we share our warning books AND find out if fish are actually interesting."

Main Activity (35 min):

- Author's Chair: All students share their "Don't Trust ____" warning book with the class
- Celebrate each one with enthusiastic, serious-faced listening
- Optional: Watch a 2–3 minute clip of real fish behavior (deep sea creatures are especially dramatic)



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com **Phone:** (407) 212-7759

- Closing question: "After everything we learned—do you ACTUALLY trust fish now? Why or why not?"

Closing (5 min):

- Class vote: Raise hand if you trust fish. Raise hand if you don't. Discuss the results.

Assessment: Oral presentation, creative book completion, science curiosity

Differentiation

- **Advanced learners:** Write a longer warning book with 4–5 reasons and a full illustrated cover
 - **Students needing support:** Provide a sentence frame: "You should NEVER trust ___ because ___" and drawing-first option
 - **English Language Learners:** Use visual cues and act out the "serious voice" together; allow drawing as primary response
-

Materials List

- Class set or big book of "Don't Trust Fish"
- Real/Silly T-chart (Day 2)
- Fish fact resources—books, printed images, or brief video clip
- "Don't Trust ___" writing and illustration template (Day 4)
- Drawing supplies and writing materials
- Optional: Brief deep-sea fish video clip for Day 5