

Alexander Used to Be Rich

A lesson in understanding the consequences of unplanned spending for young learners

Overview

This lesson is appropriate for children who recognize coins and have been introduced to coin values. Follow the instructions in the lesson that allow different levels of ability to participate. Many children can relate to Alexander's quandary in the book *Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday*. Feeling rich after just receiving money for his allowance, Alexander somehow spends all he has within a short amount of time, leaving him with only bus tokens. After reading the book, students take on the task of keeping track of Alexander's money. Using addition and subtraction skills, students track Alexander's coins as they hear the story again—until Alexander has no coins left. Students then think about ways to help Alexander make financially smart decisions in the future; they may write a letter to Alexander or draw pictures representing their advice to him. The problem-solving context of this lesson makes it rich both mathematically and financially—albeit Alexander is now poor!

Mathematics Goals

Students will:

- ▶ use addition and subtraction to solve problems
- ▶ skip count
- ▶ solve word problems involving money

Economics Goals

Students will show:

- ▶ understanding of the Concept of Wants and Needs by:
 - explaining that individuals and families cannot have everything they want
 - identifying examples of wanting more than we have
 - explaining why wanting more than we have requires people to make choices

Time

1 class period

Materials

7 dimes, 4 nickels, and 10 pennies per student
 Alexander's Money (Reproducible 4.3a), 1 copy per student
 A Letter to Alexander (Reproducible 4.3b), 1 copy per student

Common Core State Standards for Mathematics:

Operations and Algebraic Thinking 1.OA.1

- Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction

Operations and Algebraic Thinking 2.OA.1

- Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction

Number and Operations in Base Ten 2.NBT.2

- Understand place value

Measurement and Data 2.MD.8

- Work with time and money

Literature Connections

Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday by Judith Viorst

Teaching Directions

Part 1: Reading the Book

1. Gather students in the whole-group area of your classroom. Read the book *Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday* to students, making sure they can see the illustrations.
2. After reading Alexander's story, ask students, "What happened to Alexander's money?" Listen while students retell what happened to Alexander's money. Ask the key questions.

Part 2: Counting Alexander's Money

3. Explain to students that they are now going to keep track of Alexander's money with him. Give one copy of the recording sheet *Alexander's Money* (Reproducible 4.3a) and a set of coins to each student. Have students count their set of coins to make sure they each have seven dimes, four nickels, and ten pennies.
4. Ask students to place the coins in the appropriate places on the graph on their recording sheet. If you are working with young children, you may have to review coin values.
5. Ask students to complete the statements at the top of the graph.
6. Once all students have their coins on their graphs and have completed the statements, reread the book. As you come to each amount Alexander used, give students time to remove the corresponding number of coins from their graphs. Instruct students to put the coins they remove back into the bags. Each time, stop and recount the coins with students. Ask students, "How much money is left?"
7. Continue reading the story, repeating Step 6 until students' graphs no longer have any coins.
8. Ask students to now count the coins in their bags. Does the number match the number on the list in the bag? Collect all coin sets.

Teaching Insight: Picture Books

When reading picture books in whole-group settings, consider using a document camera or some form of technology that will project the illustrations for the whole class to more easily see.

Teaching Insight: Sets of Coins

Put each set of coins in plastic sandwich bags ahead of time. Include a note in each bag that lists the number of coins that should be in it. Have students count the coins against the list before returning each bag to you at the end of the lesson.

Key Questions

Did Alexander plan ahead for spending his money?

Did he want to save any money? What did he want to save for?

Do you think Alexander will ever save enough money to buy what he wants?

If you could give Alexander advice, what would it be?

What should Alexander's parents do?

Part 3: Writing a Letter to Alexander

9. Ask students, "Does Alexander need help?" The consensus should be "yes!" Explain to students that one way to help Alexander might be to write a letter of advice to him. They should advise Alexander on what he needs to do when he gets money. Give each student a copy of *A Letter to Alexander* (Reproducible 4.3b). Students who are not able to write should draw what Alexander should do.
10. Circulate as students are writing their letters, prompting their thinking as needed and making notes about any particular challenges.

Extensions

As an extension to this lesson, mail the letters to the book's author, Judith Viorst, via the book's publisher. Encouraging the mailing of lots of letters to Judith Viorst might be overwhelming. Consider instead forwarding a small sample of particularly great letters in hopes that Judith writes back (note that Judith is now in her elder years; I believe at the time of this resource being published she's in her eighties). It's interesting to note that Judith based her book on a real boy who actually grew up to be a community project lender for a bank!

Ideas for Parents

You can use this lesson at home with your child just as it is written here. Read the book in this lesson at home with your child. Encourage discussions about the consequences of not saving money. Have your child share his or her letter with your family.

For further insights on helping your child understand that once money is spent, it's gone, see the section, Additional Ideas for Parents, page 125. See also the Letter to the Parents, page 234.

Alexander's Money

Recording Sheet

Name _____

Place all your coins on the graph. Count the coins and record:

Alexander had _____ dimes, worth _____ cents.

Alexander had _____ nickels, worth _____ cents.

Alexander had _____ pennies, worth _____ cents.

How much were Alexander's coins worth altogether? _____

Dimes						
Nickels						
Pennies						

Listen to Alexander's story. As he spends his money, remove it from your graph.

A Letter to Alexander

Name _____

Dear Alexander,

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