



Curriculum Guide for *Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer*

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“Science and math books are in great demand, and I could think of **no better way to introduce a unit on measurement** than with Magnus. **Alliterations abound and the vocabulary is so juicy** that readers receive a **double dose of learning** and entertainment with each paragraph...” —*Library Media Connection*, Starred Review

Summary: The renowned Magnus Maximus measures wetness and dryness, nearness and farness and simply everything from the wobbliness of a jellyfish to the itchiness of an itch. One calamitous day, however, Magnus breaks his glasses and is unable to measure a single thing! A quite unprecedented day of playing in the surf and sand with a young boy leads Magnus to wonder if there is life...beyond measure.

About the Author: Kathleen Pelley grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, but owes her passion for stories to her gentle, Irish father, who loved to feed her tales of fairies, leprechauns, and banshees. A former teacher, Kathleen moved to the United States in 1990. As well as writing stories, Kathleen worked for several years recording books on tape for the blind at the Colorado Talking Books Library. She has published: a children’s play, stories in *Hopscotch* and *Cricket* magazines, and the picture books **The Giant King**, **Inventor McGregor**, **Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer**, and **Raj, the Bookstore Tiger**. She lives in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Explore more at www.KathleenTPelley.com.

Reading Connections

Before Reading: Tap Background Knowledge

Introduce the concept of measuring. Ask: *What does it mean to measure? Can you recall a time when you measured something?* Provide time for students to make personal connections and to come up with a range of responses. Perhaps they will recall measuring ingredients while cooking, weighing a suitcase, or recording snowfall.

Introduce new vocabulary: Ask students if they know the meaning of the words listed below. Invite them to give you a thumbs up, thumbs down, or a wavering thumb (for *I think I know the meaning, but I'm not sure*). Discuss the definition of those words in which some, but not all of your students know the meaning. (Revisit those words that none of the students know after reading the book. Can they determine the meaning from the context?)

Ramshackle

Thermometers

Barometers

Telescopes

Periscopes

Stethoscope

Marvelous

Paraded

Flitted

Fluttered

Skittered

Scattered

Dither

Croon

After Reading: Discuss

-What do you like to measure? (or count)

-Are there any extraordinary things you would like to measure? (or count)

- What problem did all Magnus's measuring cause? (never noticed his friends, the blackbird's song, or the butterfly).
- Can you think of a time when you failed to notice something because you were too busy?
- Maximus was unable to count his blessings. What does "counting your blessings mean?"
- Do you think that's a good thing to count?
- Why do we measure?
- What sort of measurements do you think are important? Why?
- Are there any things you think we should not measure as much as we do? Why?

Response to Literature: Journal

Make text to self connections. Ask students to consider the following questions and to write a response: *When have you been measured? Do you like being measured? Why or why not?* Encourage them to include specific details in their reflections.

Make text-world connections. Help students to understand that many jobs involve measurement. (Point out that your job is to measure their learning!) Ask them to consider their parents' jobs, or jobs they might perform when they're older. What types of measurement do these jobs entail? How are these measurements useful?

At home: Invite students to interview parents, grandparents, and neighbors to see what they routinely measure in their jobs.

Writing Connections

Traits

Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer is an excellent mentor text. Use this story to model:

Ideas: Remind students that quality details are those that go beyond the obvious or general. Kathleen Pelley does a wonderful job of providing unique details in her writing. Ask: *What extraordinary things did Magnus measure? What extraordinary things did Magnus count?* Help them to see that it's the specificity: petals on a geranium, freckles on a nose that give this story such charm.

Voice: Kathleen Pelley writes, “that [Magnus] never noticed smiles in their eyes, or the tears in their voices.” Discuss the effectiveness of this phrase. Ask: *What does this sentence tell you about the author?* Point out that writing something from a unique perspective or in an unexpected way brings voice to a piece. Encourage students to find other examples of voice in the text.

Word choice: Lively, vivid verbs energize writing. To illustrate the effectiveness of the “just right verb”, highlight the actions in this paragraph from **Magnus Maximus**:

“One day, when a traveling circus was passing through town, a lion escaped and paraded down High Street, swishing his tail and tossing his mane from side to side. People screamed and scrambled up lampposts. They skittered and scattered. They flitted and fluttered in a terrible dither.

Challenge students to write with a similar attention to verb choice.

Or:

Remind students that Magnus rediscovered his sense of wonder at the world when he held Michael’s hand. Invite students to consider all of the way we use our hands – to: write, draw, create things, play instrument, feed birds, shake another’s hand, wave goodbye, bake, sculpt, count, hold, play, touch and feel, cradle a baby, heal, shelter, scatter breadcrumbs, clutch, link, stroke, mend, anoint, tie a shoelace, open a door, wipe away a tear. Create an “Applause for Hands” list of verbs.

Conventions: Give students a list of adjectives and have them list the comparatives and superlatives of each. Examples:

Fast faster fastest

Far farther farthest

Near nearer nearest

Or:

Have students find the superlatives for words ending in *y*. (Review the spelling rule of changing the *y* to *i*.)

Stinky

Floppy

Itchy

Wobbly

Or:

Play with words ending in *ness* – farness, wetness, dryness. Discuss how adjectives can turn into nouns with this suffix (again, review the spelling rule of changing the y to i). Give students a list of adjectives to change into nouns, for example:

Happy	happiness
Clever	cleverness
Clean	cleanliness
Prickly	prickliness
Busy	busyness
Tidy	tidiness

Creative Writing

Have students write a story with one of the following prompts:

Someone who has the longest nose or...

The prickliest hair

The stinkiest feet

The biggest dog

The longest nails

The cleverest cat

The largest cake

Or:

Have students write diaries for the characters. For example:

Write a diary entry from Michael after he spends a day by the sea with Magnus.

Write a diary entry from Magnus after he spends a day with Michael.

Write a ‘Day in the Life of Magnus Maximus: A Marvelous Measurer’ in which the student chronicles Magnus’ day. For example:

7:00 AM I walked to park and counted the number of trees along the way. At the park, counted the number of people, the number of dogs, the number of children, and the number of benches. I measured the circumference of all the trees.

Math Connections

Read **Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer** to launch your unit on measurement. Consider these activities:

-Provide students with an object to measure. Choose something that can be measured in a number of ways such as lunchbox, a globe, or a plant. Measure it in as many ways as possible: length, breadth, height, volume, weight. Record findings together and display them on the wall.

- Divide your class into pairs, or small groups, and have them measure one another, recording their findings on a chart. Include:

Height

Foot length

Hair length

Arm length

Thumbnail length

Circumference of neck

-Examine measuring instruments. Bring in as many different measuring instruments as possible. Examples may include: stopwatches, scales, measuring spoons, thermometers, metronomes, pedometers, stethoscopes. After children are familiar with the different ways of using the instruments, set up several measuring stations in the classroom. Encourage students to experiment with the instruments and to record their findings.

-Have students devise a new form of measure. For example instead of inches and feet, they could use paper clips, marbles, pencils, and fingers as units of measure.

Hold a measuring contest. Introduce children to the Guinness Book of Records. (Teachers could also refer to Winter/Summer Olympics). Pick out about 10 examples of world records that you think will be of the most interest to your students and discuss with them. Consider holding your own Guinness Class Record, some examples:

Food theme: saltiest cracker, sweetest drink, crunchiest cookie, or tastiest sandwich

Academic theme: Best speller, fastest reader, or neatest writer

Personal theme: tidiest locker, longest hair, curliest hair, or most freckles

Athletic theme: fastest runner, fastest walker, highest jumper, or fastest skipper

Social Studies and Technology Connections

Have students research and find out the names of the following:

The largest country in the world (per square mile) (Russia)

The highest mountain (Everest/ Nepal)

The longest river (Nile/Africa)

The largest desert (Sahara/N. Africa)

The largest lake (Caspian Sea)

The largest island (Greenland/Atlantic Ocean)

The biggest city (Tokyo/Japan – 35.7 million people)

Creative Connections

Art

Have children draw the statue that is at the Queen's ceremony, but not unveiled.

Drama

Create a small dramatic play centered around the day the Queen makes Magnus the town's official measurer. Have students write the Queen's speech, the Mayor's speech, Magnus' response, cheers and jeers from the crowd, the song the band might play, and so on. Have a neighboring classroom read the book and then perform this play for them.

Role Playing

To end your unit on Magnus, hold a tea party on the playground during lunchtime or snack time. Have children bring their snacks or create an English tea party complete with a teapot and crustless sandwiches.

Have your students sit in silence listening and observing the world around them. Have them come back to class and write down everything they remember about what they saw, smelled, felt, touched, or saw.

Additional Connections for Older Readers

Language Arts: Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots

Consider conducting a unit on prefixes and suffixes. Introduce student to prefixes from many of the measuring instruments. For example:

Periscope (peri –Greek – around)

telescope (tele – Greek – far)

Discuss the Latin Roots of:

infinite (in – Latin – not)

Extraordinary (extra – Latin – outside)

Magnus (Latin for big)

Maximus (Latin for biggest, most)

Language Arts: Discussion

“Beware of the barrenness of a busy life.” --Socrates.

Discuss the meaning of the word, barren (empty or opposite of life-giving). Discuss the truth of this saying and the dangers of being too busy.

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the number of moments that take our breath away.” --Anonymous

Discuss the meaning of this quote and have students list things that have taken their breath away.