

My Brain Won't Float Away
Mi cerebro no va a salir flotando



Written by / Escrito por
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Illustrated by / Ilustrado por
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Synopsis

My Brain Won't Float Away (*Mi cerebro no va a salir flotando*) is the story of Annie, an eight-year old girl who realizes there is something “different” about her. Annie’s mother explains to her that she has a condition called hydrocephalus, also referred to as “water on the brain.” From that moment on, Annie, filled with fear, embarks on a journey of discovery that teaches her about her disability but also teaches her about love, friendship, perseverance, and courage. Annie’s triumph over adversity changes her life forever. This heartwarming story will be an inspiration to any child or adult that reads it. The book is based on Ms. Pérez’s own experiences growing up with hydrocephalus.

The book in the classroom

Written in English and Spanish, *My Brain Won't Float Away* (*Mi cerebro no va a salir flotando*) makes a great teaching tool for ESL students, foreign language students, and character education curriculum, and helps develop the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking for all students, while recognizing and respecting their diversity. We welcome and encourage teachers and students to write to the real-life Annie, author Annette Pérez.

Themes of Focus: Acceptance through Understanding

Understanding leads to acceptance. *My Brain Won't Float Away* highlights the importance of respecting differences among people — gender, race, disabilities, culture, and language. Once we are able to understand one another, we gain the ability to accept, and to change our behavior for the better. What we don't understand can be scary. In the story, Annie's courage and perseverance, together with the support of her family, teachers, and doctors allow her to teach her classmates not just about hydrocephalus, but, more importantly, about Annie and about themselves.

Introduction

Dear Teacher/Parent,

This guide provides you with a series of activities and strategies in presenting the book. Annie's story is ideal to illustrate our need to understand and accept differences and should aid teachers needing to integrate students with a variety of learning and functioning levels in a classroom. Based upon your time constraints, and your student body needs, pick and choose the activities you feel will help your class better understand:

- a) the importance of acceptance and perseverance and,
- b) the needs and lives of people with disabilities.

A downloadable PDF version of the study guide will be periodically updated on our website, www.campanitabooks.com, so be sure to check for new activities and exercises. Any suggestions that can make this study guide better can be sent to us through our website.



About the Author

Annette Pérez was born in New York City to a family of Puerto Rican descent. She was diagnosed with hydrocephalus, a disability that affects motor skills, as an infant. Although her childhood was filled with constant challenges, including learning how to tie her shoelaces one-handed, and being the target of ridicule, she has written a funny, uplifting story about her experience. Ms. Pérez is a graduate of York College and resides in Queens, New York.

To read an interview with Annette Pérez visit www.campanitabooks.com.

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Critical Thinking

Before Reading

- Have students study the cover of the book. Ask: What do you think is happening in this picture? What do you think the title means? Do you think her brain will really float away?

- Define and discuss key vocabulary words from the story with students:

Disability, curious, embarrassed, impossible, nervous, brace, occupational therapist.

- Read the title and discuss the cover of the book. Ask the children what they think the book will be about. Encourage children to make predictions about the story.

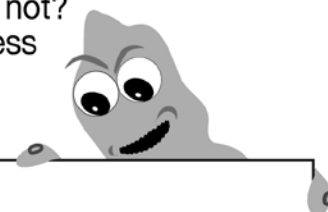
During Reading

- Create interest. Read aloud to page 5. Ask discussion questions. What do we know about Annie so far? How does Annie feel? How would you feel?

- Read the story aloud to the end. Provide time for students to look carefully at the illustrations.

After Reading/Re-reading

- Discuss students' reactions to the story and the illustrations. Ask questions for comprehension and discussion. Did you like the story? Why or why not? Follow up on students' predictions. Encourage the children to express how they do or don't identify with Annie's feelings in the story. Can they make connections to their own personal experiences?



Discussion Questions

Use these questions to generate class discussion after reading the book.

How old was Annie when she found out that she had hydrocephalus? (*Eight*)

Where did Annie think her mom was taking her? (*To get ice cream*)

Where did Annie really go? (*To her first occupational therapy session*)

What is Annie's favorite ice cream flavor? (*Chocolate*)

What did she do with the therapist that was surprising and fun? (*Shake hands*)

Is hydrocephalus really water on the brain? (*No, what some people call "water" is actually a clear liquid called cerebrospinal fluid, CSF for short. Sometimes, for many different reasons, our body cannot produce the right amount of CSF, or the CSF doesn't flow right and gets trapped in the channels of the brain called ventricles.*) **For more information, see page 29 of the book.**



Other questions to generate class discussion.

Is there something special you can do that you can teach the class?

Do you think Annie still feels scared about having hydrocephalus?

How does having hydrocephalus make Annie feel at first?

Have you ever felt like you were different from everyone else?

What would you say to Annie if she were one of your friends?

Key Vocabulary

The following words are important to the story. Discuss their meaning with your students.

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Different | Curious |
| Same | Scared |
| Make fun | Happy |
| Difficult | Disability |
| Impossible | Therapy |

Building Strong Character

Perseverance is the ability to achieve something despite difficulty or delay of success. In the story Annie perseveres because:

She is determined.

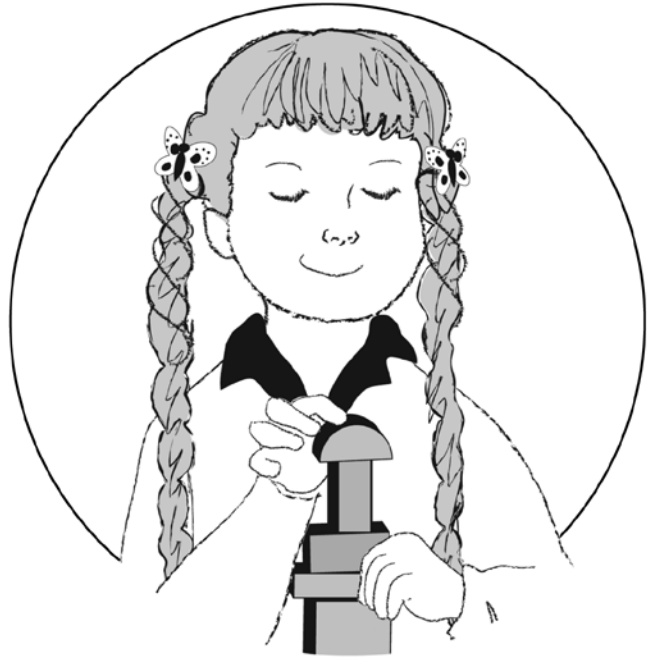
She has the love and support of her mother and the guidance of her occupational therapist.

She doesn't give up.

Ask students to recall things that were difficult to achieve in their own lives.

(e.g., learning to ride a bike)

Who helped them succeed?



With your class, create signs with words of encouragement with phrases like:

Keep on trying!

Don't give up!

You can do it!

Cause and effect chart

Explain cause and effect and their relationship to one another. Write on the board in two columns: cause/effect and have students match the two.

Cause

Effect

Kids made fun of Annie at school.

Annie felt sad.

Annie's mom told her she has hydrocephalus.

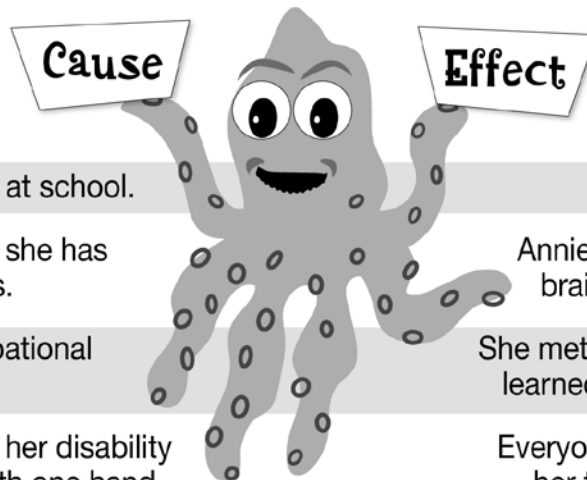
Annie felt scared and thought her brain was going to float away.

Annie went to occupational therapy.

She met other kids with disabilities and learned more about hydrocephalus.

Annie told her class about her disability and tied her shoelaces with one hand.

Everyone was surprised and wanted her to teach them how to do it.



Activities

1. Have students draw a picture depicting a situation when they used perseverance to overcome a problem. Have them share what they drew in the picture.
2. We can all learn about each other by sharing knowledge. Alexis teaches Annie many skills that give her the confidence to manage her disability. Pair up students and have them share at least one skill with one another. (e.g., Students can tutor one another in a subject they are particularly strong in.)
3. Have students write these events on strips of paper and put them in the correct order they happened in the story.

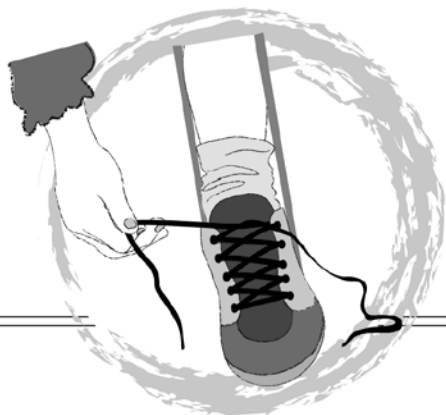
Sequence strips: (Mix them up)

- Annie notices there is something different about her.
- Annie's mom tells her she has hydrocephalus.
- Annie feels scared and thinks her brain will float away.
- Annie goes to occupational therapy.
- Annie learns how to zip her jacket and tie her shoelaces with one hand.
- Annie teaches her class about hydrocephalus.



4. Your students will want to try tying their shoelaces with just one hand. Is it easy? Need help? Have students compose a letter to Annette Perez requesting the directions for the one-hand shoe tie and/or to answer any questions about the book. Her e-mail address is included in the back of the book.

5. Have students choose their favorite picture or page from the book and let them draw or paint their own version. Hang students' work on a bulletin board for display.



Curriculum Activities

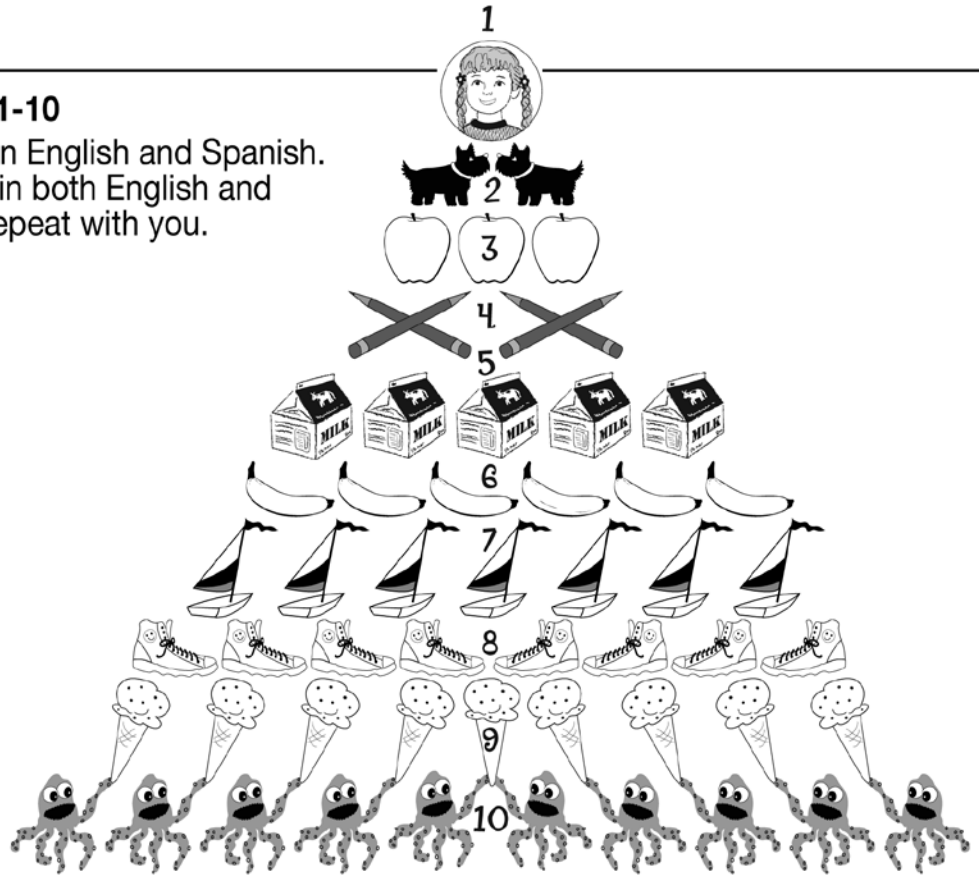
(Science) What Is Hydrocephalus?

Hydrocephalus is not really water on the brain. A scientific explanation is provided following the story. Explore the scientific meaning of hydrocephalus.

(Math) Numbers/ Numeros 1-10

Teach your class numbers in English and Spanish. Pronounce numbers aloud in both English and Spanish. Have your class repeat with you.

One / Uno
Two / Dos
Three / Tres
Four / Cuatro
Five / Cinco
Six / Seis
Seven / Siete
Eight / Ocho
Nine / Nueve
Ten / Diez



(Language) Words and Phrases

Make giant flash cards with these terms to share with the class. Pronounce aloud both the English and Spanish meanings. Have your class repeat after you.

Sad / Triste
Hello / Hola
Nervous / Nerviosa
Happy / Contenta
My name is . . . / Mi nombre es . . .
I am ___ years old. / Yo tengo ___ años.



(Social Studies) Learning from Community Helpers

Annie's occupational therapist helped her succeed. What is an occupational therapist? Invite an O.T. from your building or community to come into your classroom to talk about her job.

What's on Your Mind?

What did you think of the book?
Write your response below.

¿Qué tienes en mente?

¿Qué piensas del libro? Escriban sus reacciones a la historia en el dibujo que se encuentra debajo.



I think / Yo pienso _____

Teachers: Invite students to decorate their picture with crayons, markers, colored pencils, yarn and glue, or paints. Students can then cut them out to be displayed on a bulletin board.

Maestros/as: Inviten a sus estudiantes a colorear sus ilustraciones con crayolas, lápices de colores, o pintura. Los estudiantes podrán recortar sus dibujos y ponerlos en el mural del aula.

NAME/ NOMBRE _____

Picture Find

Help Annie find her lost objects in this scene:

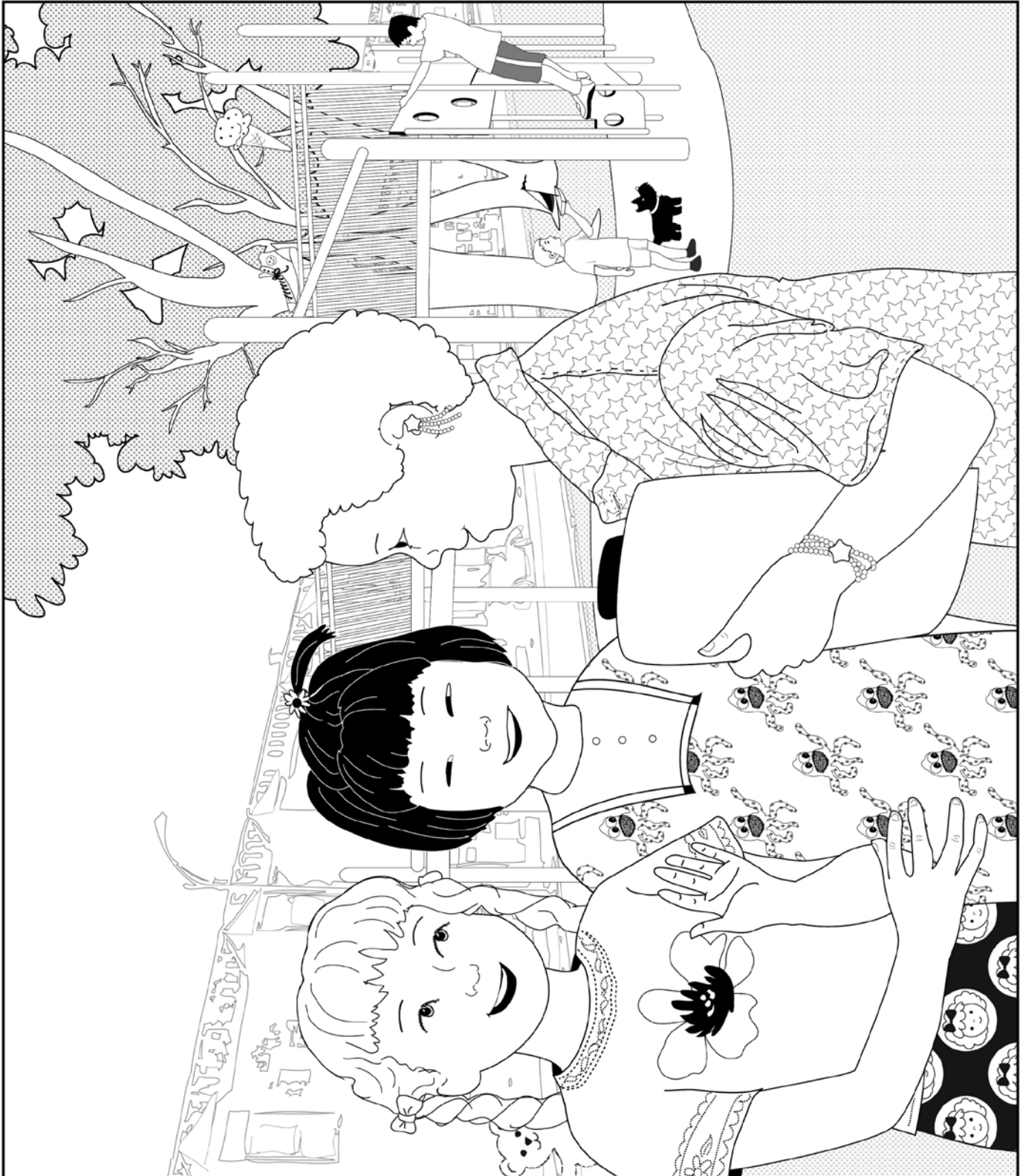
- ice cream cone imaginary monster
 sneaker teddy bear black terrier
 sailboat Alexis' clipboard Annie's doll

Students can color the picture once they find the objects.

Encuentre el objeto escondido

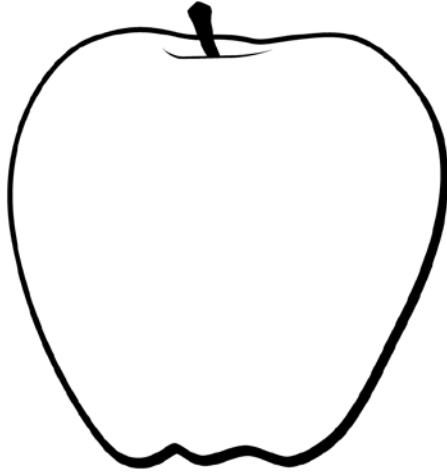
Ayuden a Annie a encontrar sus objetos perdidos en esta escena.

- el helado monstruo imaginario
 los tenis el osito su perrito negro
 el botecito la pizarrita de Alexis la muñeca de Annie
 Los estudiantes podrán colorear la ilustración una vez encuentren los objetos perdidos.



Fruits/Colors

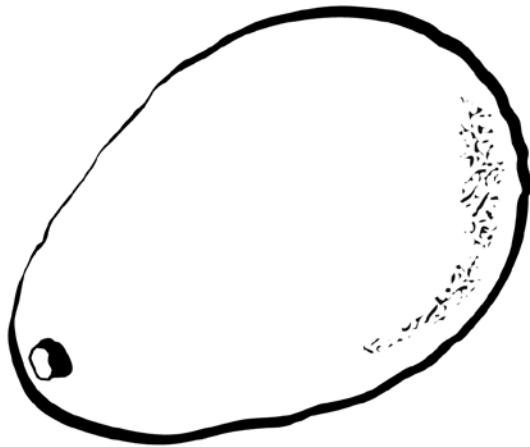
Identify the color for each fruit, in English and Spanish.
Color the fruits. Ask your teacher for help with the translations.



Apple/Manzana

The apple is _____

La manzana es _____



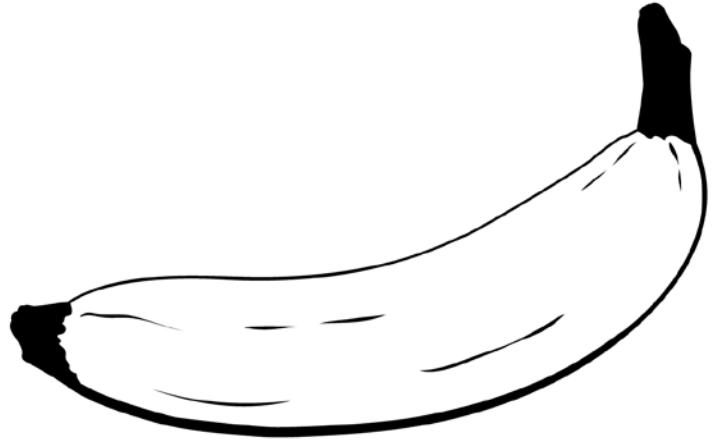
Avocado/Aguacate

The avocado is _____

El aguacate es _____

Frutas/ Colores

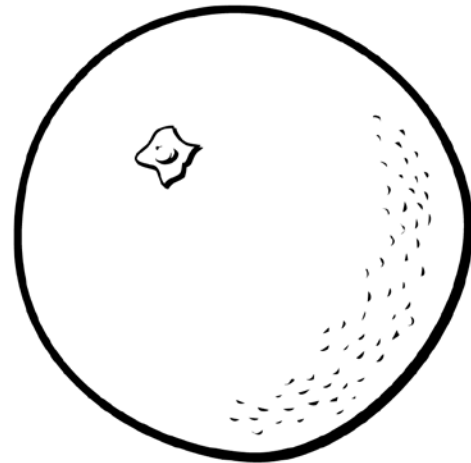
Identifique el color de cada fruta en inglés y en español.
Coloree las frutas. Pídale a su maestro/a ayuda con las traducciones.



Banana/Banana

The banana is _____

La banana es _____



Orange/Naranja

The orange is _____

La naranja es _____

Teachers: Yellow-Amarillo Red-Rojo Green-Verde Orange-Naranja. Yellow-Amarillo Red-Rojo Green-Verde Orange-Naranja. Go over color and fruit names in both languages. Have your students color and decorate the fruit shapes with color pencils, crayons or markers. After doing this activity you could quiz your students on both colors and fruit names. Read the completed sentences. Students will probably find it amusing that banana is the same in both languages. It will give them a sense of familiarity with their non-native language.

Maestros/as: Amarillo-Yellow, Rojo-Red, Verde-Green, Naranja-Orange. Repase los colores y los nombres de las frutas en ambas lenguas. Pídale a sus estudiantes que coloreen y decoren las frutas con lápices de colores, crayolas o marcadores. Después de hacer esta actividad, usted puede hacerles preguntas de comprobación a sus estudiantes acerca de ambas cosas, los colores y los nombres de las frutas. Lea las oraciones completas. Probablemente los estudiantes encontrarán interesante que banana se escribe igual en los dos idiomas. También les gustará saber que "naranja" significa las dos cosas: el nombre de la fruta y el color. ¡Lo mismo ocurre en inglés! Esto familiarizará a los estudiantes con su lengua no nativa.

NAME/ NOMBRE _____

Annie's Feelings

Fill in the blanks. (each could have more than one answer):

Word bank:
embarrassed
happy
nervous
proud
sad
scared
strong
worried



1. Annie notices that there is something different about her.

Annie feels _____ .

2. The kids at school don't want to play with Annie.

Annie feels _____ .

3. Annie's mom tells her she has hydrocephalus. Annie feels _____ .

4. Alexis asks Annie if she can tie her shoelaces with one hand.

Annie feels _____ .

5. Alexis teaches Annie about hydrocephalus and how to strengthen her small hand.

Annie feels _____ .

6. Annie meets other kids with disabilities.

Annie feels _____ .

7. Annie's teacher asks her to stand in front of the class.

Annie feels _____ .

8. Annie is the only one who can tie her shoelaces one-handed.

Annie feels _____ .

9. Annie has lots of friends.

Annie feels _____ .

La hoja de trabajo de las emociones de Annie

Llene los espacios en blanco (puede haber más de una respuesta).

Banco de palabras:
avergonzada
feliz
nerviosa
orgullosa
triste
asustada
fuerte
preocupada

1. Annie se da cuenta que ella es diferente de los demás.

Annie se siente _____ .

2. Los niños en la escuela no quieren jugar con Annie.

Annie se siente _____ .

3. La mamá de Annie le explica a Annie que tiene hidrocefalia.

Annie se siente _____ .

4. Alexis le pregunta a Annie si ella puede amarrarse los cordones de los zapatos con una sola mano. Annie dice que no, se siente _____ .

5. Alexis le enseña a Annie qué es hidrocefalia y cómo hacer que su mano pequeña se haga más fuerte.

Annie se siente _____ .

6. Annie conoce a otros niños con discapacidades.

Annie se siente _____ .

7. El maestro de Annie le pide a ella que se pare delante de la clase.

Annie se pone _____ .

8. Annie es la única que sabe cómo amarrarse los cordones de los zapatos con una sola mano.

Annie se siente _____ .

9. Annie tiene muchos amigos.

Annie se siente _____ .

Teachers: Possible answers: 1) worried/scared/sad, 2) sad, 3) sad, nervous, 4) embarrassed, 5) strong, 6) happy, 7) nervous, 8) happy/strong

Maestros/as: Posibles respuestas: 1) preocupada/asustada/triste, 2) triste, 3) triste/nerviosa, 4) avergonzada, 5) fuerte, 6) feliz, 7) nerviosa, 8) feliz/fuerte