



The Big Tree Gang

Jo Ellen Bogart

illustrated by Dean Griffiths

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About the Book

The Big Tree Gang and *Out and About with the Big Tree Gang* look at friendship between siblings, between parent and child, and between friends. How does friendship work and how do people get along? Keely and Reg are brother and sister twin skunks, and they act like brothers and sisters everywhere—squabbling, teasing, competing and being good friends anyway. Their friends, Shawna and Burt, are great companions for the adventures that the four have in these stories.

About the Author

Jo Ellen Bogart grew up in Texas with warm weather and chiggers, but moved to the cold North and became a dual citizen of the US and Canada. She has enjoyed traveling across her adopted country, meeting her readers and gaining new ones. These trips have been very educational and have inspired a number of new works. Jo Ellen hopes to keep writing for a long time and has lots of projects in mind.

Jo Ellen's homebody self enjoys cooking and eating, reading and writing, gardening and pets, some well-chosen movies and Internet exploration. Her grown daughter, Jill, co-authored *Out and About with the Big Tree Gang*.

About the Writing

Jo Ellen likes to write about the everyday life of characters, dealing with daily concerns that we all have. Growing up with three younger siblings gave her lots of chances to deal with relationships, and she incorporates these experiences into the Big Tree Gang stories.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections**Prereading Idea**

Have students think about what being a friend means to them and how they would like to be treated by a friend.

Classroom Discussion Questions

How are the four friends different from each other? How are they the same?

What are some activities you would enjoy doing on a very hot day?

What are some places you would enjoy taking a hike? For example, the rain forest, the Arctic or the desert? What sorts of things would you need to take along with you?

If you did something bad to a friend, how would you try to make it up to that person?

Would you be tempted to tell a lie to save yourself from punishment or embarrassment? Would you lie to keep a friend from being hurt by your opinions?

Suggested Activities

A winter activity could be the building of a snow sculpture such as Keely and Reg built. This can be a group or individual activity. If there is no snow to work with, try Plasticine for modeling or even soap for carving. Maybe mashed potatoes? Kidding!

How about a treasure hunt like the one the Big Tree Gang went on? Make up a new list or use the one in the story, “The Hunt,” in *Out and About with the Big Tree Gang*. Use your imagination to find good items to fit the categories.

If the season is right, go on a bug walk, as the Gang did in “Bug Walk” in *The Big Tree Gang*. Make a list of the bugs you see and then look them up when you get home to find out more about them. Or do some research before the walk to have a better idea of what to watch for. Take along a magnifying glass to get a close-up look at the insects and other creepy-crawlies like spiders and millipedes.

Make up some really silly songs like Keely’s or puns like Burt’s. Hint for puns: use words that sound alike but mean different things, such as Burt used with his *ant* and *aunt* pun.

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Simon & Schuster Children's Guide to Insects and Spiders by Jinny Johnson. This is a kids' book on insects and would be great to examine in conjunction with the story "Bug Walk."

Keely and Reg built a kite for their neighbor Mr. Brown in the story "The Golden Tulip" in *The Big Tree Gang*. Try a kite building website such as this one: <http://www.molokai.com/kites/20kidskites.html>

Reg loves his new compass in "The Compass" in *Out and About with the Big Tree Gang*. Learn about compasses. The Wikipedia site is helpful: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compass>. Draw a map of the school and its playground and mark the directions of the compass on the map.

Reg loves and collects rocks. Check out these books on rocks:

National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Rocks and Minerals

Let's Go Rock Collecting by Roma Gans and Holly Keller

This website has a commercial aspect, but it all grew out of a home-schooled kid's enthusiasm for rock collecting. I think that kids would find it fun and interesting. <http://www.rockhoundkids.com/rh-articles.html>.

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Out and About with the Big Tree Gang

Reviews

"This book is ideal for young readers venturing into chapter reading. It features short sentences with chapters six or seven pages long including plenty of illustrations to break up the text. Since each chapter is non-sequential, young readers could read chapters randomly without losing the meaning of the stories. Highly Recommended."

—*CM Magazine*