



Educator Activities

Grades 1-5

“Smelly” Kelly and His Super Senses How James Kelly’s Nose Saved the New York City Subway

Written by Beth Anderson

Illustrated by Jenn Harney

Calkins Creek

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OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

James Kelly smelled EVERYTHING: rats in the shed; circus elephants a mile away; tomorrow’s rain. His sense of smell was EXTRAORDINARY. But what good was a powerful nose? How could his super-sniffer make him special? In the New York City subway, James found his calling—and earned the nickname “Smelly” Kelly. Armed with his super-sniffer and the tools he invented, he tracked down leaks from the dangerous to the disgusting, from the comical to the bizarre. Then, he sprang into action to prevent cave-ins and explosions in the tunnels beneath the city. Smelly Kelly not only hunted leaks but also saved lives—and he discovered the truly extraordinary power inside him. Beth Anderson’s fast-paced text and Jenn Harney’s comical illustrations bring to life this everyday hero.

Based on a true story, “SMELLY” KELLY AND HIS SUPER SENSES takes the reader into the labyrinth of the 1930s New York City subway where leaks and stinks abound as the growing metropolis sinks its roots into the world beneath the streets. Curricular connections include STEM and social studies topics, such as occupations, transportation, communities, and invention, as well as the interplay between humans and the environment, interdependence of people performing various jobs, and cause and effect relationships in a city over time.

About the author:

Beth Anderson has always been fascinated with words and language. After earning a B.A. in linguistics and a M. Ed. in reading, she taught English as a Second Language for more than 20 years. Surrounded by young people from all over the world, with literature as her favorite tool, Beth experienced the power of books to teach, connect, and inspire.

From the start, with poems, plays, and puppet shows, Beth’s elementary teachers encouraged her to write. With stories, memoir pieces, and research papers, she continued to mold words into text. Her itch to write followed her through Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, and into Colorado. In 2013, she began writing for children. Combining her love of writing with the joys of discovery and learning, she found her niche with narrative nonfiction and historical fiction picture books.

To Beth, writing is mining. It's digging deep inside for special memories, emotions, and meaning. It's burrowing into history for inspiring characters and moments that change the course of events. It's delving into the *how* and *why* and *what if* and seeing how the past relates to where we are today. Then the search for just the right words begins—words that will create voice, bring characters to life, and reveal the heart of the story.

When she's not writing, Beth might be weaving, gardening, exploring nature, or playing with her grandkids. Born and raised in Illinois, she now lives near the mountains in Colorado. Beth believes in laughter, learning, and...though we can't change history, history can change us. You can learn more about Beth Anderson's writing journey, read posts from other kid lit people, and get book recommendations at her website: <https://bethandersonwriter.com>.

About the illustrator:

Jenn Harney has been working in and around the children's market for the last 25 years—first in coloring books and textbooks, then as a toy designer, and finally ending up doing what she always set out to do, illustrating for kids. Her work has been featured in Highlights for Children as well as several picture book titles. *Underwear!* marked her debut as an author-illustrator, and she followed it up with another adorable read-aloud, *Swim Swim Sink*. Jenn lives in Clevelandish, Ohio, with her husband, her daughter, and a corgi named Steve. You can see some of Jenn Harney's work at <http://jkharney.blogspot.com>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

NOTE: Questions and activities cover a range of ages and abilities. Please use them as appropriate for your learners.

Vocabulary Preview

Preview and discuss any vocabulary words that might be new to students.

Pre-reading

1. Look at the cover and read the title of the book.
 - What interesting details do you notice?
 - What clues help you understand the setting?
 - What do you know about the subway and New York City?
 - What do you think “super senses” means?
 - What do you think the story is about?

2. What questions do you have?

Post-reading

Return to your predictions. Were you correct?
Have your questions been answered by the story?
What would you like to know more about?

Key Ideas and Details

1. Why do you think James Kelly chose to work in the subway? Do you think that was a good choice? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think his coworkers gave him the nickname “Smelly” Kelly? Do you think it was an appropriate nickname? How did James Kelly react to his new name?
3. Did Smelly Kelly take his responsibility as leak detector and subway inspector seriously? How do you know?
4. Why was it important for him to train others to inspect the subway tunnels?
5. At the end, Smelly Kelly discovers his special power. What do you think it is? What clues did you use?
6. Do you think James Kelly was a hero? Why or why not?
7. What is the most important idea or theme you found in the story? Support your choice with textual evidence.
8. Interview: Work with a partner to conduct an interview or talk show with Smelly Kelly. Prepare your questions and answers. Then perform your interview for others.
9. Cause and Effect: Why were leaks such a problem in the subway? Complete the Cause and Effect chart using what you know and information from the text.
10. Characterization: Use the character trait organizer to identify 3 traits for Smelly Kelly. Use textual evidence to support your ideas.

Craft and Structure:

Words and Pictures

1. The subway trains ran on electricity from the “third rail.” A metal “sliding shoe” on the cars carried the power to the train’s electric motor. Which words and pictures help you understand the dangers of touching the rail or of sparks from the rail?
2. How do words and illustrations work together to create the underground and above-ground worlds? Make a T chart with your ideas.

Underground world	Above-ground world

Meanings of Words and Phrases

3. The story says that “*James Kelly had a knack for leaks.*” What does it mean to have a “knack” for something? What do you have a knack for?
4. When Smelly Kelly proved himself by finding the leak in the hotel, he was “*in leaks for keeps.*” What do you think this means?

Author’s Word Choice

In this story about super senses, the author uses several types of figurative language that feature sound. She also uses sensory language to make Smelly Kelly’s world come alive for the reader.

5. Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds. Look at the following examples. What initial sounds are repeated?

“James arrived in New York City with nothing but a suitcase and a keen sense of smell.”

“...scents familiar and foreign wafted in the breeze.”

What other examples can you find in the story? How do the different kinds of sounds affect the story?

6. (Extension for advanced learners) Consonance is the repetition of final consonant sounds. Look at the following example. What final sounds are repeated?

“Where a nick, a crack, a break, a spark could wreak havoc.”

What other examples can you find in the story? How do the sounds affect the story?

7. Onomatopoeia is the use of words that imitate sounds, or sound words. Look at the following examples.

*“He followed **whiffffs** no one else smelled...”*

*“...**drip...drip...drip.**”*

What other examples can you find in the story? How does onomatopoeia affect the storytelling?

8. Sensory language is the use of words that connect to any of the five senses. (Many words connected to hearing may also be considered onomatopoeia.) The following passage has several examples:

*“The metropolis **hummed**. Buildings **stretched** to the sky. Scents familiar and foreign **wafted** in the breeze. ...He felt a **rumble** below the sidewalk and peered through the grate. The **damp** air **bristled** with mystery.”*

What other examples can you find? How does sensory language affect the storytelling?
Option: Use a sensory language organizer to collect examples from the story.

Challenge yourself to use sensory language and play with the sounds of words in your own writing.

9. Point of View: Why do you think people blamed the subway for every “*obnoxious stink, mysterious leak, and suspicious noise in the city?*” Why do you think their point of view was different than Smelly Kelly’s?

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

1. Text to Text Connections: Compare and contrast “SMELLY” KELLY AND HIS SUPER SENSES with another book about the subway or underground world. Here are a few suggestions:

The Great New York Subway Map by Emiliano Ponzi
The Secret Subway by Shana Corey and Red Nose Studio
The Street Beneath My Feet by Charlotte Guillain and Yuval Zommer

Use a Venn diagram to note similarities and differences with content, structure, genre, and more. These three books are very different and provide opportunities for extending learning with informational texts.

2. Art: How do the illustrations create mood? Discuss characterization, details, and color choices. Why do you think the illustrator chose to use two different palettes?
Fold a large piece of paper in half. Draw the same scene on each half, then color each side with a different palette, or combination of colors. How does it change the mood?
3. Maps: Maps can show a wide variety of information such as resources, crops, and weather. But they can also show sensory information. When doing research for “SMELLY” KELLY AND HIS SUPER SENSES, the author used maps of New York City to understand the setting. Besides subway maps, she examined sound maps, industrial maps, and smell maps from the early days in the growing city. Use these links to explore different types of historical maps. What inferences can you make about life in different parts of the city?
 - Sound: “The Roaring ‘Twenties: an interactive exploration of the historical soundscape of New York City” <http://vectorsdev.usc.edu/NYCsound/777b.html> (requires use of Flash Player). This site offers a lot to explore and an interesting window into the past. The most kid-friendly section is “sound,” which lists specific noises from different sources. Details and short video clips show snippets of daily life. “Space” shows an interactive map of sounds, and “time” shows sounds plotted on a timeline. This site is a great example of showing information in different formats.
 - Industries produce noises and odors. An industrial map from 1922 is available here: http://www.slate.com/content/dam/slate/blogs/the_vault/2014/01/23/2LargeManufacturingMap.jpg

- Odors: A stench map circa 1870 appears in this article:
<https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/03/this-19th-century-stench-map-shows-how-smells-reshaped-new-york-city/388727/>

Make your own sensory map of your school, neighborhood, town, farm, or an area of a city. Take a sensory walk, and pause to listen and sniff. Choose one sense or several to map. Create a legend and use symbols for sounds and smells on the map. Or use a preprinted map and add symbols for the sounds or smells you find.

4. Evaluate: Consider the pros and cons of having an extraordinary nose. Then choose a super sense you'd like to have. Make a T-chart with the pros and cons you might experience.
5. Compare and Contrast: What's the difference between a hero and a superhero? Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast Smelly Kelly with one of your favorite superheroes.
6. Occupations: James Kelly became the first New York City subway inspector and depended upon many other people to help him do his job. Generate a list of other occupations in a city. How do they work together? Which job would you choose? Why?
7. Transportation: Sequence, Evaluate, Analyze. Generate a list of modes of transportation. Categorize your list in different ways such as chronological, speed, comfort. Create a class transportation collage.
8. Back Matter:
 - How does the Author's Note help you understand more about James Kelly?
 - Which tool do you think was most important? Why?
 - "The Underground World"—Talk about how various wires, cables, pipes, and mains are important to homes and businesses. (Steam lines provide heat for some buildings and are also used by dry cleaners.)
What surprised you? Knowing this information, what connections can you make to the story? What connections can you make to your own life?

Write In Response To Reading:

1. Journal: Write a journal entry as Smelly Kelly for one event in the story. Consider what it feels like to be him.
2. Write to persuade: What effects does "mass transit" have on our lives and environment? Make a poster or write an article to promote the use of mass transit.
3. Connect to Self: The last page of the story says "*He would bet each person had something special inside. He could almost smell it.*" What do you think you've got inside that is your special power? Draw or write a story about how you discovered this in yourself or about how you can use it in the future.

4. Connect and Act: What “everyday” or community heroes do you appreciate? Draw or write to thank someone.
5. Sensory Writing Project – This can be done as a class, small group, or individual. If done as a group, choose one sense to focus on for the map and pros/cons.
 - Do Craft and Structure #8 to explore how authors use sensory language.
 - Do Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #3 to make a sensory map of your setting.
 - Do Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #4 to consider the pros and cons of your choice of “super sense.”
 - Write a story using ideas from your map and the pros/cons of your “super sense.” Make your story come alive by using sensory language in your writing.

For additional resources and to further explore the history of the New York City subway, visit the New York Transit Museum at <https://www.nytransitmuseum.org>.

“Smelly” Kelly and His Super Senses

Cause and Effect

There are many pipes, wires, and cables layered beneath our streets. Breaks and leaks from some of these caused problems for the subway. Look back at the story to help you determine causes and effects.

CAUSE	EFFECT
Dripping water	
Leaking gasoline	
Broken steam line	

Now think about what might cause these leaks and breaks.

CAUSE	EFFECT
	Dripping water
	Broken natural gas line
	Leaking gasoline

How would these problems affect you?

CAUSE	EFFECT
Broken electrical cable	
Broken water line	
Leaking sewer line	

“Smelly” Kelly and His Super Senses

Character Trait Organizer



TRAIT	TRAIT	TRAIT
EVIDENCE:	EVIDENCE:	EVIDENCE: