

# the **Tomato** Collection **A c t i v i t y   G u i d e**



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Grades K - 6  
Teachers/Parents

**The following are activities for all of the poems and songs of *The Tomato Collection*. The activities are presented in the same order as the poems appear in the book and CD.**

**Frogs and Toads:** (page 5)

- Create a Venn diagram for one or all of the following:
  - Crocodile/Alligator
  - Wasp/Bee
  - Frog/Toad
  - Bush/Tree
  - Me/Classmate: Find 3-6 (determined by the teacher) things that you have in common, and at least three things that are unique about each of you.

The diagrams could be used as a science connection, or the last one could be done as a getting-to-know-you activity, social skill activity, self-esteem activity on uniqueness, or for a discussion on differences and prejudice.

**Jacob's Poem:** (page 6)

- Have the students write and/or illustrate what they think Jacob is looking for.
- Write a class letter or e-mail to Kevin and Stephanie asking them what Jacob is searching for.

**Stronger Pushers:** (page 7)

- Lead a discussion on problem solving or use as an opportunity to write: Kevin's sisters had a problem. What was it? How did they solve their problem?
- Give each student a picture of a broken or incomplete item. They need to figure out a way to fix it, or come up with a different way to use it other than its intended use. Example: A peanut butter jar that is missing its lid. You need to make a new lid for the jar or use the peanut butter and/or jar for something else besides eating/storing.
- Have each student write down a problem (real or fictional). Switch papers and have someone else solve it.
- Give groups of students a scenario with a life-skill problem to solve, such as: You are shopping at the mall with your older brother and you get separated from him. What can you do to solve your problem? Write down all possible answers, circling the answer your group feels is the best solution. Read aloud to the class. (The scenarios can be as simple or complex as the teacher deems appropriate for the level of students being taught.)

**Natalie:** (pages 8, 24, 38, 47, and 58)

- Read each page of the poem to your students and talk about Natalie's dreams. Then, encourage the students to pick their favorite line(s) and draw or paint those dreams.

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- As a group or individually, have the students write more dreams for Natalie and illustrate them.
- Have the students write and illustrate dreams using their *own* name as the character.
- Create a classroom book. Write each line of the poem on a separate piece of paper and have each student illustrate a page. To make it more personal, add the dreams and pictures the students created. Staple or bind the pages together and decide on a cover.
- When Kevin wrote “Natalie,” he wrote the first things that entered his mind and continued to write whatever came to mind without second-guessing it. He then chose his favorite lines to create the poem. Have students tell stories to each other using the first ideas and thoughts that enter their mind. If students have difficulty finding ideas, they are trying too hard. As Kevin describes it, the idea is to simply have fun and not worry if the idea may sound goofy or “dumb.” In fact, the goofier the thoughts are, the better. Encourage them to write down *all* of their ideas, not just their favorites.

### Noonies: (page 9)

- Have the students share in small groups any silly or unique names they or their family members have for everyday items. After all have shared, each group must decide which name they want to share with the class. Have them write a poem based on one of the silly names mentioned.
- Distribute a picture of an everyday item to each student. Have the students write a description of the item, without revealing what the item is. Pair the students and have them read their descriptions, their partner guessing what is being described. Upon reading the description aloud, a student may determine that what was written is confusing or needs more detail. After one or two more times, discuss as a class the importance of details in writing and on being descriptive.
- Have the students create noodle-art.
- Use noodles to represent different parts of speech. For **verbs, use wagon wheels** because verbs tell the *action*, what is being done. For **nouns, use spaghetti** because nouns are words to which actions are *typically* being done. For **adverbs, use shells** because they *restrict*, or modify, other parts of speech. For **adjectives, use spirals** because adjectives make writing more *interesting*. Then arrange the noodles on a projector or at tables in small groups and have students write silly sentences.

Example:        spiral - spaghetti - wagon wheel - shell  
                  |            |                    |            |  
          The    fuzzy        fish                    runs        fast.

### Joe: (page 10)

- Have the students write their own misinterpreted poem.
- This poem is an example of a conversation that might occur if one person had a hearing impairment. Lead a discussion on students with special needs.

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- Read picture books about someone who has a hearing impairment or other disability. Here are a few to get you started: *Moses Goes to...* series by Isaac Millman, *Elana's Ears* by Gloria Lowell, and *Dad and Me In the Morning* by Pat Lakin.
- Learn basic sign language with students. Resources you might use: *Beginning Sign Language Series* by S. Harold Collins and *You Can Learn Sign Language* by Jackie Kramer and Tali Ovadia.

### **A Tree Without a Trunk:** (page 11)

- Discuss concepts that are brought up in the poem: Would a tree be a tree if it didn't have a trunk? Would a lake be a lake if it didn't have water? Etc.
- Have the students think of other "crazy" concepts. Example: A book without pages. They can create a class list together, or can work in small groups, writing down what they come up with and even illustrating their ideas.
- Discuss with students what the song is about (track 11): Why is there silence? What's going on? (The concept is based on the line "a song without a sound.")

### **The Sun Will Always Float:** (page 12)

- Briefly discuss the feelings that the poem mentioned – worry, fear, and sadness. In their journals, have the students write about a time when they felt each emotion. Once they've finished, discuss how Kevin thinks about the sun always floating whenever he's feeling sad, scared, or anxious. Have the students think of what would make them feel better when they are feeling these emotions, and have them write it in their journals and/or on paper which could be laminated and taped onto their desk.

### **Concert of the Blind:** (page 13)

- Have the students write in their journals: Write about a time when someone's words have hurt you. Then write about a time when you used *your* words to hurt someone. How did you feel afterwards?
- Lead a discussion on conflict resolution - how to solve problems with others by using words in a positive way, instead of weapons or fists.

### **Well Hey:** (page 14)

- Hold a teacher-led class discussion: Has anyone ever felt a little down, but you're not sure why? I know I have. Does crying solve anything? (Discuss.) Does giving up solve the problem? (Discuss.) What about lying? Does it solve anything? (Discuss.) At the end of the poem, he decides to try. How will that solve what's wrong? (Discuss.)
- Have the students write a narrative or poem about a time when they had a problem and what they did to solve it.

### **29 Cookies:** (page 15)

- Have the students write a poem or story (real or fictitious) about a time when they ate too much. Cut out the writing and glue each on a cookie-shaped paper, or a paper shaped like whatever they've eaten too much of.

### **How to Cook an Egg:** (page 16)

- Have the students write their own how-to poem (good for sequencing). Example: How to make.... How to eat.... How to build....
- Have the students illustrate each step then combine them into a book or comic strip.

### **Norwood:** (page 17)

- Have each student or group of students write a poem for, or about, Norwood.
- Have the students draw or paint their own Norwood to go along with their writing.
- Write a song as a class or sing the poems the students wrote to go along with the music from the CD (track 17).
- Have the students create their own Norwood or recycled art project. Collect "junk" from family, neighbors, school maintenance person, etc. and bring a character to life. This can be done individually or as a class. The students could then name their characters and also write a poem or story to go with them. This is also a great way to encourage students to recycle and reuse.

### **Opening Gifts:** (page 18)

- Lead a discussion on why people sometimes do not tell the truth when they receive a gift they do not like.
- Discuss the concept of materialism.
- Have each student write a thank you card to someone who recently gave him or her a gift. (It doesn't have to be for a tangible item. Help students think about other "gifts" people give them – time, affection, talents shared, etc.)

### **Art Poem:** (page 19)

- Discuss the concept of what constitutes art.
- Have the students create their own art - they can draw with crayons, colored pencils, markers, they can paint, do a collage, make a sculpture out of clay or with every day items, etc. Encourage them to really stretch reality and make it crazy!

**Broken Sled:** (pages 20 - 21)

- This poem could be used with “Sloppy Sloopy Slop” (page 56): Brainstorm winter words and activities as a class. Have the students write and illustrate their own poem, fictional story, or comic strip about winter, using words and/or activities from the list.
- While holding up the illustration for this poem, use as a springboard to discuss issues of safety, specifically during play activities.

**Sleeper People:** (page 22)

- Have the students illustrate the poem. What do the Sleeper People look like?
- Students could write a fictional story, poem, or play about the Sleeper People. Tell them to use their imaginations and think about where the Sleeper People live, sleep, what they eat, where they are from, etc.

**Cookie Batch:** (page 23)

- As a life skill and math connection, use the poem to teach measurement and reading a recipe. Make cookies from scratch.
- Have the students either write their own recipe or copy down a family recipe or one from a book. Create a classroom cookbook. Throughout the year, cook all of the recipes or have families bring in the prepared dishes.

**Afraid Too?:** (page 25)

- Have the students write in their journals about things they are afraid to do. Example: Speaking in front of the class.

**Little Low One:** (page 26)

- (We’ll leave this one up to you!)

**The Couch:** (page 27)

- Have the students illustrate the poem. Encourage them to use their imaginations. Who or what could be writing this? Does it have to be a person? Example: coins, mice, crackers, ants, etc.
- Discuss point of view and perspectives. After reading *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka for example, have the students write a poem or fictional story in the point of view of the couch.

**Pumpkin Belly:** (page 28)

- Ask the students if they’ve ever swallowed something they shouldn’t have. Have them write a fictional poem about what could have happened.

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- Use this poem before or after teaching the life cycle of a pumpkin. Create a booklet.
- Cook pumpkin seeds as a class.

**Quitter:** (page 29)

- Have the students “paint a beautiful painting of happy thoughts and smiling bananas.”
- Have the students write a poem or fictional story about “giraffes and mice.”
- Have the students write and illustrate what they imagine “a terrific job” would be. What would it take to someday have that job?
- Discuss the concept of quitting. (Use the last stanza of the poem to start with.)
- Have the students write in their journals about a time they felt like quitting, but didn’t: What kept you from quitting? How did you feel? Or, write about a time you did quit something you had started. Why did you quit? How did you feel about doing so? What would have happened if you had not quit?

**Page 30 Poems:** (page 30)

- For the poem, “First Things First,” discuss the importance of being oneself.
- For the poem, “Better?,” discuss concepts: Is it better to see than to hear? Etc.
- For the poem, “Ice Cubes,” have the students write a poem about an everyday frustration.

**Stuck With a Frown:** (page 31)

- Give students situations where they have two options that they could do, neither one being good. Have the students write what they would do. (The students could do this as an independent writing assignment, or it could be done in cooperative groups.) Here are some examples: Go to your room or have no dessert. Eat ants or eat worms. Burn your finger or stub your toe.

**Eyebrow Trick:** (page 32)

- Have the students illustrate the poem.
- This poem was inspired by advice from Kevin’s grandfather. Have the students ask their grandparents, or an older adult, for some advice. Have them share it with the class in written form.

**Alphabet Rain:** (page 33)

- Use the poem and/or song to introduce or reinforce the alphabet.
- Play the song (track 33) and form an alphabet parade, playing instruments while marching around the room singing to the music.

### **Up and Down Frowns:** (page 34)

- Discuss what Kevin's message is in this poem.
- Have the students compare and contrast this poem with "Grouchy" (page 45).

### **Positively, Absolutely:** (page 35)

- Have the students write a poem about what's "under the bed."
- Have the students write in their journals about what fears they have: How long have you had each fear? Do you know why? If so, write about it.
- Have the students think about their favorite animal. Have them write about a fear from that animal's point of view. For example, an ant walking across the sidewalk and fearing being crushed by mammoth shoes.

### **Dinner:** (page 36)

- This poem could be used with "Wholly See" (page 55): Introduce or reinforce homonyms.
- Have the students create a menu for this "dinner."
- Make cutouts of fish, carrots, squash, and pies. Have the students create "dinner" mobiles with the cutouts, string, and a hanger - (a potentially lengthy, but fun, project).

### **The Best Poem Ever:** (page 37)

- Have the students write a poem about "elephants that eat little cheese crackers."
- Reveal to the class how Kevin now prevents this from happening: So he can write down spontaneous ideas, he carries a small notebook and pen in his pocket wherever he goes. Encourage the students to try this.

### **Sun and Moon:** (page 39)

- Create a Venn diagram for the sun and moon. Give a blank copy to each student or group of students. Students must fill in the diagram, using various resources to gain the needed information: encyclopedias, science books, the Internet, etc.
- How long would it take the sun to reach the moon? The distance between them is  $149.6 \times 10^6$ . If traveling 100 mph, when would the sun reach the moon? 1000 mph? Etc.

### **Little Man Jay:** (page 40)

- Have each student write a humorous poem, creating a fictional character who lives inside an appliance or a machine such as an ATM.



### **Moogie Monster Man:** (page 41)

- Have each student describe in writing what the Moogie Monster Man might look like. Collect and randomly redistribute the descriptions to the students. Each student then illustrates the description written by another student.
- Have the students write a short biography to go along with their illustration: Where does he live? How old is he? What does he eat? Does he have family or friends? Etc.
- Have the students think of a time when they blamed someone for something they did: How can you take responsibility for your own actions?

### **Call Turals:** (page 42)

- Discuss possible meanings of the poem with the class. What may have been Kevin’s point with this idea? Why did he illustrate the poem with a multicolored mailbox?
- Read picture books aloud to the class that have as the subject each culture mentioned in the poem. (As students inquire about cultures not mentioned, include them too.)
- Have each student or group of students choose one of the aforementioned cultures that they would like to learn more about. Students could then choose a project to do on their chosen culture: create an ABC book, create a travel brochure, or create a power point presentation.
- Have the students write or e-mail someone from a culture they learned about, i.e. pen-pals.
- Have the students share about *their* cultural background and different family traditions.

### **Impressions of Each Other:** (page 43)

- Discuss possible meanings of the poem with the class.
- This poem, along with “Other Side Inside” (page 54) and “If Everyone Was Just Like Me” (page 57), all have the theme of diversity. Use these three poems together to discuss that topic.

### **To My Family and Friends:** (page 44)

- Have the students write a letter to their family in their journal, telling their family how they really feel. Let each student then decide for themselves if they’d like to copy it onto good paper and send or deliver it.

### **Grouchy:** (page 45)

- Have the students illustrate the poem.
- Have the students compare and contrast this poem with “Up and Down Frowns” (page 34).

### **Remote Control:** (page 46)

- As a class, brainstorm activities that could be done instead of sitting “in silence.”

**Sweet Pea Emily:** (page 48)

- Have the students write in their journal about someone they admire.

**Thanks:** (page 49)

- Have the students write in their journals about how they feel after reading this poem. They could also write about a time when life is or has been tough, mean, sad, angry, and/or loud.

**Magooie and Achoogie:** (pages 50 – 53)

- The characters are not shown in the illustrations on purpose. Similar to the “Natalie” idea, have the students draw what they think the characters of the story might look like.
- This story works great to perform. With eight students, seven students become one of the characters and “hip and hop” and “bip and bop” and so forth as the eighth student narrates. To include more students, have each one come up with their own name.
- Have the students write a new ending for the story. Example: What if Papa Wizard did not “sing and dance along?”
- Have the students write their own story/script and perform it.

**Other Side Inside:** (page 54)

- Discuss the message of this poem with the class: (It’s not what’s on the outside that matters, but what’s on the inside that counts.) Discuss how you can’t know who a person really is just by looking at him or her. Also, discuss the question “do you control who you are and how you look?”
- Trace the outline of each student on large, white paper. Instead of having the students draw what they look like from the outside, have them decorate their outline to represent what they look like on the inside. Display in classroom and hallway.
- This poem, along with “Impressions of Each Other” (page 43) and “If Everyone Was Just Like Me” (page 57), all have the theme of diversity. Use these three poems together to discuss that topic.

**Wholly See:** (page 55)

- This poem could be used with “Dinner” (page 36): Introduce or reinforce homonyms.
- Have the students write their own poem using homonyms.

**Sloppy Sloopy Slop:** (page 56)

- This poem could be used with “Broken Sled” (pages 20 - 21): As a class, brainstorm winter words and activities. Have the students write and illustrate their own poem, fictional story, or comic strip about winter, using words and/or activities from the list.

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- Have the students draw, paint, collage, etc. winter scenes. This could be done as an individual activity, small group, or as a whole class with a long stretch of paper, each student taking a small section to work on.

### **If Everyone Was Just Like Me:** (page 57)

- Discuss different career interests, abilities, skill levels, etc. Have students write in their journals what job they would like to have after they finish school.
- Have the students dress up as a person whose job they'd like to have, and present to the class what they would do in a typical day on the job.
- This poem, along with "Impressions of Each Other" (page 43) and "Other Side Inside" (page 54), all have the theme of diversity. Use these three poems together to discuss that topic.

### **The Entire Book and CD:**

- Many of the poems are illustrated in a manner to encourage students to use their imagination and create their own illustrations. Use any poem and challenge the students to create their own illustration.
- Inform your students that Kevin began his book simply by writing in journals. He wrote any and all ideas that ran through his head filling five journals, almost 700 pages. Show them the rough drafts in the front and back of the book and share the Author's Notes with them.
- Have each child bring in a fun picture of themselves, a friend, or family members. Photocopy the originals leaving space on the page to write a poem about the image. Example: "Pumpkin Belly," "Stronger Pushers," etc.
- Have the students create their own puppets and write scripts for them or have them sing.
- Use various instruments to perform along with the songs.
- Read various poems to the students and predict what the song on the album will be like: What type of music? Instruments? Vocals? Tempo? Etc. Discuss how the predictions compare to the actual songs.
- Read Kevin's Question and Answer page found at [www.tomatocollection.com](http://www.tomatocollection.com).
- Play the CD during transitional times of the day and/or free time. Sing and dance along!
- Have a different student read and/or perform a poem from the book, or any poetry book, each day in front of the class.
- Most importantly, simply have fun with the book and excite your students to read, write, and create. Encourage and nurture their imagination!

***The Tomato Collection*** is a book of goofy thoughts, some fears, and a few dreams. Packed with fun and insightful poetry, simple drawings, old photographs, and characters such as Magoogie Balooie, Jacob, Norwood, Natalie, Wendel, and Little Man Jay, *The Tomato Collection* is a colorful, full size book with 64 pages. It is ideal for grades K-6, yet appealing to all ages. Hardcover edition ISBN 0-9669504-0-2 • Paperback edition ISBN 0-9669504-3-7

***The Tomato Collection: the Big album CD*** takes things a step further, translating every poem of *The Tomato Collection* into a song. Featuring 53 musicians and a variety of musical styles, *the Big album* is a musical journey of the book. The track numbers of the CD match the page numbers of the book so listeners may easily follow along. The running time is a whopping 77 minutes!  
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**The activities in this guide** have been developed primarily for use in classrooms from Kindergarten through grade six. While developing these activities, certain Best Practices were kept in mind, as well as Bloom's Taxonomy, differences in learning styles, and the benefits of using cooperative learning. The hope is that this guide is comprehensive enough to stand alone, yet provides a springboard for new ideas and activities to be created.



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[www.tomatocollection.com](http://www.tomatocollection.com)  
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