

The Lovesick Skunk

written by Joe Hayes
illustrated by Antonio Castro L.

About the Book

Genre: Fiction (Folktales)

Format: Paperback, pages 32

ISBN: 9781941026045

Reading Level: Grade 2-3

Interest Level: K-3

Guided Reading Level: P

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: AD800L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Animals (Skunks), Childhood Experiences and Memories, Environment and Nature (Deserts), Families (Mothers), Friendship, Folklore (Tall Tales), United States - Southwest (Arizona), Humor

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/the-lovesick-skunk

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

SYNOPSIS

Is it true that skunks fall in love? Joe Hayes, that tall-tale-telling raconteur, is glad you asked.

Joe Hayes must have had a singular growing up in the Arizona desert because he sure loves to write stories about it. And he tells those stories of his so much to audiences all over the United States that it seems like the stories just get more and more fantastic. I bet you've already heard the first tall tale he wrote—The Gum-Chewing Rattler—about a rattlesnake who chewed bubblegum. Yes, it's true. That scary snake even blew huuuuuge bubbles.

Now Joe has written a new story about his early years in Arizona. Joe, the kid, was a creature of habit. If he decided he liked to do something, he would do it over and over again. Like wear the same T-shirt until it nearly fell apart or use the same pencil until he'd sharpened it down to a nub. He also had a pair of black-and-white high-top sneakers that he loved to wear. He wore them every day. "Get rid of those shoes," his mother told him one morning. "They smell terrible!"

Did Joe listen? Not until he met the back end of a skunk.

And this wasn't just an ordinary skunk, but one who was lovesick.

But I'm not going to tell you who she was in love with. You'll have to find that out for yourself.

BACKGROUND

Skunks

Skunks live all over North America and South America in many different types of habitats. They are mostly active at night and eat fruit, plants, insects, bird eggs, birds, and small rodents—or garbage or pet food, if it's left outside! Female skunks are generally around 25% smaller than males of the same species. Skunks usually mate in February and March in the Northern hemisphere. After mating, the male skunk leaves and usually has nothing to do with raising babies. Baby skunks are born in spring or early summer in a litter of four to six. They stay with their mother until fall.

Skunks are most well-known for their unpleasantly-scented spray, called “musk.” When it's threatened, a skunk gives plenty of warning before it sprays, by stamping, growling, lifting its tail, or even, in some cases, doing a handstand to showcase its markings. When it does spray, it aims at its target's eyes. The spray can travel up to twelve feet and stick around for four days. Skunk babies, or kits, can spray when they are as young as eight days old.

For more information, see <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/facts/skunk#:~:text=Skunks%20are%20most%20active%20at,horned%20owl%20prey%20on%20skunks> or <https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/publications/yavcobulletins/Skunks.pdf>.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What's a thing that you love or loved and didn't want to get rid of? Do you still have it? If not, what happened to it?
- Have you ever seen a skunk? What do you know about skunks?
- What do you know about tall tales? What makes a story a tall tale?

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *The Lovesick Skunk*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? Do they think this will be a story or an informational book? What makes them think that?

- Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, and illustrations. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration?
- Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies: Read the author's and illustrator's biographies on the inside cover and the illustrator information at the end. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think these creators made this book for young readers?
- If appropriate, encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the reading when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.
- Have students write feeling(s) in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Why does this story have such an interesting title, "*The Lovesick Skunk*?"
- What parts of this story are realistic?
- What parts of this story make it a tall tale?

Encourage students to consider why the author, Joe Hayes, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The book contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of developmentally-appropriate strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: Look at a photo or picture that represents the word, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, explain the meaning of a word to a partner, act out the meaning of a word, explain how the meaning of one word is the similar and different to another word.

Content Specific

lovesick, skunk, tweezers, swiss cheese, high-top, desert, mesquite, cactus, quicksand, pasture, cow pie, cottonwood tree, campsite, camp-out, "pitched a tent," skunk, cocker spaniel, lovey-dovey, run-in

Academic Specific

simple, spiraling, invisible, embarrassing, tattered, gulp, wandering, tromping, trickle, declared, banned, permission, critter, investigating, purring, snuggling, cuddling, nuzzle, abandoned, jealous

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What information does the narrator give about his personality and habits as a kid to start the story? What examples does he give?
2. What does the boy love about his sneakers?
3. What do the boy and his friend Billy like to do together?
4. What happens to the sneakers as a result of the boy's adventures?
5. How does the boy's mom react to the smelly sneakers?
6. How do the boys get the idea for a campout? What do they do?
7. What happens when the boys are sleeping in their tent? Explain the events that happen with the skunks.
8. What happens when the boy gets home in the morning? How does the story end?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Why do you think the narrator gives so many examples of things he loves and doesn't want to give up?
2. Explain how the boy and the mom's perspectives about the sneakers are different? Why do you think they feel so differently from each other?
3. What do the boy's summer activities tell you about him as a character?
4. What does the narrator mean, "We were expecting the worst?" when the first skunk comes to the tent? What surprises them about the skunk's behavior?
5. How do the skunks communicate in the story? If skunks were able to talk, what might they say in this book?
6. What do you think about the ending? What does it tell us about the boy and the mother's relationship? What does it tell us about whether or not the story is true?
7. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in independent or collaborative writing, artwork, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Is this story a tall tale? Why or why not? Think about what you know about the characteristics of tall tales. Make a list of reasons this book should or should not be considered a tall tale.
2. Why do you think the author chose to write this story? What do you think the author's message to the reader is? What do you think he wanted to convey to young readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? How is the narrator similar or different to you and your role in your own family?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Lovesick Skunk*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *The Lovesick Skunk* make you think of that?
6. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *The Lovesick Skunk*?
7. How do the author and illustrator help readers imagine the setting (place) of this story? List some details from the text about the story's setting. How does the setting impact the events of the story?
8. What different type of conflicts are presented in *The Lovesick Skunk*? Discuss the boy's conflicts within himself, with his family, and conflicts in the world. Compare and contrast the different conflicts within the text.
9. What do you think makes it so hard to let go of favorite possessions? Create a comic strip about a character who is having trouble letting go of something. Use speech bubbles and thought bubbles to explain the conflicting emotions the character experiences.
10. What emotions might someone experience in a surprising situation, like when the skunks came to the campsite? What are some strategies for managing a surprising or scary situation? Would you have reacted the same or differently than the the boy and his friend reacted?

Multilingual Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners. The book language used may differ from children's oral language. Comparing any differences will help children read and understand the story. Words can hold different meanings in other types of Spanish around the world.

1. Assign Multilingual Learners to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about their favorite story from the book and why they liked it.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Students can begin with one to two pages and gradually increase to a chapter(s) where students highlight true cognates and determine the meaning to the word if they do not already know it. This can also be a great opportunity to also discuss false cognates with students. If time allows, have students reflect on the cognates that they found. Did they know the word in English? Did they know the word in Spanish? If it was an unknown word in English, did the identification of the Spanish cognate help them define the word? Consult ¡Colorin Colorado! for more ideas on how to use cognates in the classroom with ELs: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/using-cognates-ells>.
7. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>.
8. Have students act out some of the key scenes in the story to support comprehension (e.g., the boy and his mom talking about getting rid of the sneakers, the boy and Billy camping, the scene with the skunks, etc.)

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills does the boy exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does the boy demonstrate these skills?
2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions. Using the illustrations to recognize and label emotions, talking about different characters' perspectives on holding onto favorite items, or managing a surprising situation, would be especially appropriate for this book.
3. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *The Lovesick Skunk*.
4. Do you think the author wants the boy to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?
5. Host a classroom debate: Should you get rid of something exceptionally smelly? Why or why not?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Talk about what students can learn from this book about narrative writing.** Highlight or make a list of craft moves and favorite phrases to use as examples of effective storytelling. In particular, help students notice the use of using anecdotes to help characterization, and how the author stretches out a scene using many details.
- **Read other tall tales by Joe Hayes, such as *The Gum Chewing Rattler* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler>), *Grandpa's Hal-La-Loo-Ya Hambone!* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandpa-s-hal-la-loo-ya-hambone>), and *My Pet Rattlesnake* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/my-pet-rattlesnake>).** Make connections between texts. Talk about how the stories are tall tales, and what common elements of a tall tale they are missing (such as a larger-than-life character).
- **Analyze the story structure with students as a way to help them plan their own tall tales.** For instance, create a chart or graphic organizer that lists key elements, such as “Narrator has a problem,” “Narrator has a run-in with an animal,” “Unbelievable events happen with the animal that resolve the problem.” Have students plan and write their own tall tales inspired by this story structure. It might also help to read Joe Hayes’s response about “fun writing topics” in this Q & A (<https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com/adult-q-a>), in which he refers to a tall tale as a “what if?” story.
- **Talk about the power of oral storytelling.** Show students Joe Hayes’s oral version of this story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P406XFLDBeU>). Compare the book format to the oral version; how does each help readers/listeners appreciate the story in different ways?
- **In small groups, have students read the Q & A with the author found on his website** (<https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com/kids-q-a>). Have each group prepare a short presentation to explain what the author’s answer to one of the questions in their own words, and make connections between the answer and the book.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

- **Find Arizona on a map.** Learn about the climate of the Southwest US and look at real photos of typical Arizona landscapes. Make connections to the book illustrations and the

desert plants and animals mentioned in the text. Also look at a map of where skunks live (e.g., at <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/facts/skunk#:~:text=Skunks%20are%20most%20active%20at,horned%20owl%20prey%20on%20skunks>). Brainstorm how this story may have been different if it was set in a different climate or habitat.

Science/STEM

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students make a two-column list of facts and non-facts about skunks portrayed in the story.** Then have them research skunks and add more true facts to their list.
- **Have students research advice for people who encounter skunks (e.g., how to avoid getting sprayed, how to get rid of the smell, etc.)** Have them make brochures or posters with tips.

Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

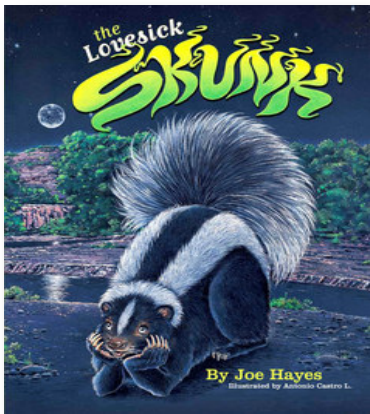
- **The illustrator used photos of people to inspire his illustrations.** Have students work with partners to stage photos depicting different emotions or reactions to events. Then print the photos and have students use them as inspiration for drawings, paintings, or illustrations for their own narrative or tall tale writing.

Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

- **Work together to develop a set of interview questions for students to ask an adult at home about their experiences growing up.** For instance: Where did you grow up? Did you have a memorable experience with a pet or other animal? What happened? Share and compare responses at school.




Ordering Information


General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/the-lovesick-skunk

 **By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

 **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Hayes is one of America's premier storytellers. He grew up in a small town in southern Arizona where he started learning Spanish from his classmates. As Joe got older, he began reading the work of folklorists and anthropologists and gathering the old stories from the Southwest region. His books have received the Arizona Young Readers Award, two Land of Enchantment Children's Book Awards, the Texas Bluebonnet award, and the National Storytelling Network Talking Leaves Award. He lives in New Mexico. Learn more about him at johayesstoryteller.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Antonio Castro Lopez (L.) was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and has lived in the Juarez-El Paso area for most of his life. He has illustrated dozens of children's books including *Barry, the Bravest Saint Bernard* (Random House), *Pajaro Verde*, *The Treasure on Gold Street*, *The Day It Snowed Tortillas* and *The Gum-Chewing Rattler* (Cinco Puntos Press). His artwork for *My Tata's Remedies/Los remedios de mi tata* won a Pura Belpré Honor for illustration

Reviews

"Joe Hayes's books are always delightful, perhaps because, as I read them, I can almost hear the warm, inviting voice of this professional raconteur. . . This story celebrates the best of childhood: playful adventures, best friends, and unlikely tales that parents just never understand." – *Kirkus Reviews*

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