



Swimmy

About the story

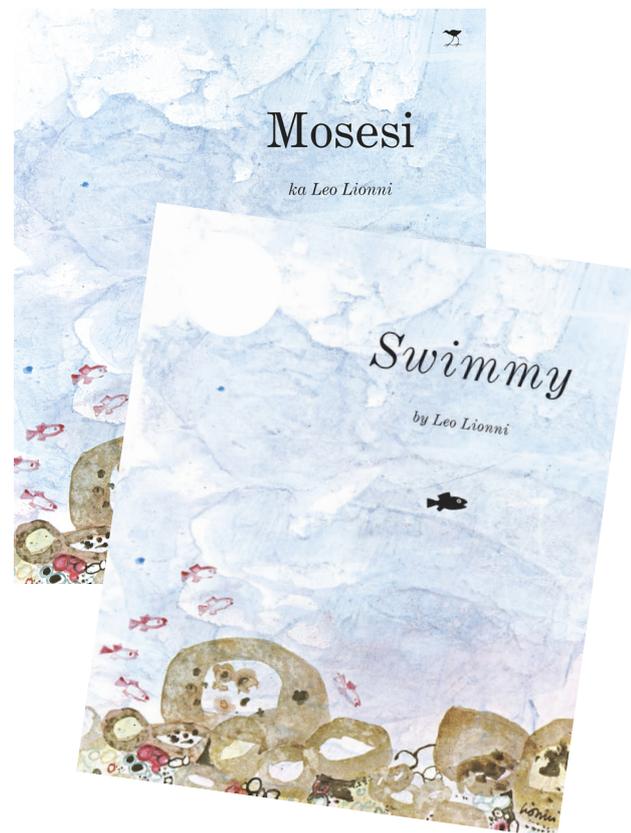
Title: Swimmy

Story and illustrations: Leo Lionni

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Available in English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho

Deep in the sea lives a happy school of fish. Their watery world is full of wonders, but there is also danger, and the little fish are afraid to come out of hiding . . . until Swimmy comes along. Swimmy shows his friends how – with ingenuity and teamwork – they can overcome danger.



Possible themes and topics

- Life under the sea
- Sea creatures
- Camouflage
- Size (big and small, making things bigger)
- Teamwork/co-operation
- Friendship
- Identity
- Feelings
- Facing danger
- Being brave
- Wonderful things

Ideas for activities

Here are some ideas for using *Swimmy* with young children aged four to six years. Choose the activities that best suit the particular ages and interests of the children in your class.

You could use the story and activity ideas to tie in with your weekly theme and/or as part of the children's afternoon free-play sessions to enhance their play and their literacy learning.

Introducing and sharing the story

Create an atmosphere of anticipation linked to the main theme of the story. Stimulate the children's curiosity. Encourage thinking and imagining.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Make something that suggests the sea. You could hang a few long pieces of sea-coloured fabric or crêpe paper from the ceiling, or along a wall, or drape them on the backs of some chairs. You could also draw big blue waves on the chalkboard. Ask the children to suggest what these could be. Encourage them to share their ideas with the group.
- ★ Place a sign on the classroom door with the words, "WARNING: dangerous fish" and a drawing of a fish on it. Ask the children what they think the sign might mean.
- ★ Read the title of the story. Invite comments about what the children see on the front cover and what the story might be about. Allow some sharing of ideas and then say, "Let's find out!".
- ★ Read the story aloud to the children, allowing them to comment if they want to, but be sure to keep the story alive all the way through to the end.

Thinking and talking about the story

Choose from the suggested discussion questions – try ones that you think best match the children's interests and add your own questions too! Only continue for as long as the children are involved.

Encourage the children to give reasons for their answers. When they aren't able to, you can help them by saying, "I wonder if..." and suggesting a reason to them. Share your own ideas with the children too. Children often feel encouraged to contribute when they also hear your thoughts.

Discussion questions

- ★ What do you think might make little fish "living in a corner of the sea somewhere" feel happy? What makes you feel happy?
- ★ How would you like to be the only little fish that was a different colour to all the other fish, like *Swimmy* was? How do you think *Swimmy* felt?
- ★ Do you think the red brother and sister fish were pleased or cross that *Swimmy* was the fastest swimmer? When do you think is it useful to be very fast? When are you fast and when are you slow?

- ★ Do you think that the big, fierce tuna fish was being bad when it ate all the little fish or was it just hungry?
- ★ Swimmy and his family had a bad day with the big, hungry tuna fish. Can you think of some things that can make a day bad for you?
- ★ When you are upset or sad, what can you do to feel better?
- ★ Swimmy liked to play and see wonderful things. What are the wonderful things that you like to look at?
- ★ What's a brave thing to do? What's something brave you have done?
- ★ Would you rather be brave with lots of your friends – like Swimmy was with his friends – or be brave all on your own?

Playing with the story

Offer different materials and ideas for the children to retell or “play” parts of the story, and/or to make up new stories that connect with their own lives. Take the opportunity to observe the children’s language and conceptual development as well as the interaction between them as they take control of their own learning.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Make playdough or clay sea creatures.
- ★ Make small underwater worlds in plastic containers using shells, pebbles and things that float or sink.
- ★ Make a huge fish by drawing lots of small fish just like the picture in *Swimmy*. Or tear up pages from old newspapers and magazines into little pieces and stick these onto a large piece of paper to create a big, fierce fish together. Don't forget the eye!
- ★ Make a mobile using words from the book. Invite children to help you choose which words should be used. When the mobile is finished, allow the children to marvel at the hanging words and talk to them about what the words mean.
- ★ Make Swimmy a safe place to live or rest in while he is all alone in the big, wide-open sea.
- ★ Recreate scenes from the book using construction toys like Lego/Duplo.
- ★ Pretend to be little fish and play the game, hide-and-seek.

Shared reading and writing

Focus children’s attention on how we compose a piece of writing and how letters and sounds combine to make words. Write on the chalkboard or on large sheets of paper with groups of children, so that they compose with you and watch you as you write. Read out what you have written to them afterwards, pointing to the words.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Together, write a list of ways we could help Swimmy feel better when he is feeling sad and lonely.

- ★ With the children, write a letter to Swimmy to warn him about the big fish.
- ★ Brainstorm and record the children's ideas for creating an underwater themed book corner. Also write a list of the things you could use or make to do this.
- ★ With the children, choose a few of the repeated or interesting sentences and words from the book. You could write these out on strips of paper. For example: "... a tuna fish, swift, fierce and very hungry, came darting through the waves", "Let's go and swim and play and SEE things!", "We must THINK of something.", "Swimmy thought and thought and thought.", "One **giant** fish ... I'll be the eye." Invite some children to choose one sentence/word. Display it for a few days at the children's eye level, and if they are interested, show the children the sentences/words in the book. Then encourage them to find these on their own or with a friend.
- ★ Write the name "Swimmy" on the chalkboard or a large sheet of paper. Read it and ask the children: Does anyone's name begin with an S or end with a Y? Can you see a letter in Swimmy's name that is also in your name? Does anyone have two M's in their name like in "Swimmy"? As the children answer these questions, write up their names, pointing to and sounding the letters as you go. When you've written up the name, read it aloud with the children.

Emergent reading, writing and drawing

Make time and space available for the children to initiate drawing and writing. Spend time sitting with them, sometimes writing and drawing too. In this way you are able to role model conventional practice and give help if the children ask for it. Show that you value the children's own attempts at reading and writing.

Activity suggestions

- ★ Offer one or more copies of *Swimmy* to the children so that they can retell or "read" it alone and/or with friends.
- ★ Invite the children to make cards with encouraging messages to help Swimmy feel better.
- ★ Ask them to create "warning" posters for little fish.
- ★ Encourage the children to draw their own pictures of the story.
- ★ Suggest that they draw maps of the sea. Invite them to decide what details to put in their maps. For example, they might want to include who Swimmy's family and friends are and where they would live.
- ★ Make blank fish-shaped books for the children to write their own stories in. These could be about Swimmy's family and friends.
- ★ Suggest that the children make drawings of sea creatures – real or imaginary – with labels to help identify the different creatures.
- ★ In the book corner, include fiction and non-fiction books that tie in with the themes of the story – information books about things that live in the sea and stories about bravery, standing up to bullies. Introduce these books to the children, read them or explore them with the children if they ask.

Dictating, scribing and acting out stories

As part of Storyplay, PRAESA offers and supports a specialised technique for dictating, scribing and acting out stories, called the magic carpet. To find out more about this, contact info@praesa.org.za and see www.praesa.org.za for training and mentoring opportunities.

Activity suggestion

- ★ Invite the children to dictate their own stories. These might relate to *Swimmy* but they don't have to. Write down the children's stories for them and make time for acting them out.

Taking the story home

Encourage the parents or other caregivers to do all or some of the activities below at home with their children.

Activity suggestions

- ★ If their child brings home a magic carpet story to share, read it to him/her or ask someone else to read it aloud.
- ★ Ask their child to retell the story or tell them about the storybook they are reading at "school".
- ★ Borrow *Swimmy* from the library. Then read it to their child or look through it together, talking about the illustrations.
- ★ Look at pictures their child draws and read any attempts at writing he/she shows them, asking, "What did you draw/write?".
- ★ Explore the life of fish with their child. Borrow information books about fish or look for information on the internet like how fish breathe underwater and where fish sleep.
- ★ Together, draw an imaginary fish and then tell a story about it.
- ★ Talk about what their child finds scary and what we can do when we feel scared.
- ★ Tell their child stories about when they were young and something scary happened to them.