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# THE BICYCLE MAN

Author: Allen Say

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## THEME:

The world is full of wheels doing all kinds of things.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

In a small village in Japan, two American soldiers do amazing tricks on a borrowed bicycle.

LeVar explores the world of wheels and sees how they keep us rolling along—from bicycles and skateboards to scooters, rollerblades, and human-powered vehicles. He talks with a freestyle bike specialist who demonstrates some stunts, and learns about skateboard features from a pro.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Invite students to tell how they learned to ride a bike. Who helped them? How did they start out (e.g., with a Big Wheel or tricycle)? Why was it important to them to learn? Extend the discussion to include roller skating, skateboarding, and similar activities.

The children in the story were having a “sportsday” at school. Compare their special day with field days or similar events in contemporary American schools. What activities do the two events have in common? What are the differences?

Why were the children in the story surprised to see the American soldiers? (Provide some background information on World War II to clarify why the soldiers were in Japan.) Discuss how the children felt about the soldiers when they first appeared compared to how they felt about the soldiers at the end of the story.

Discuss the importance of bicycle safety. Ask the students what they can do to be safe bike riders (make sure their bicycle is functioning properly, obey the rules of the road for bicyclists, wear a helmet and appropriate clothing, never ride more than one person on a bike, etc.).

After watching the program, discuss how stunts on bicycles and skateboards are for experts only.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Have the class make posters that emphasize bicycle safety. Each poster should depict one safety rule. Display the posters in hallways around the school building for all to see.

Brainstorm a list of things that have wheels. Remind the students that they might not be able to actually see the wheels in all objects. Categorize the items on the list into groups, such as “wheels that move us from place to place,” “wheels that make things work,” “wheels that are used for fun,” etc. As they classify the items, discuss any that could appear on more than one list.

Invite a police officer into the classroom to talk with the students about safe bicycling, rollerblading, and skateboarding.

Invite a person who repairs bicycles into the classroom to talk about keeping a bicycle in good condition and problem areas for young people to watch for with their bikes. After the guest has left, brainstorm a safe bicycle checklist. Duplicate the list for students to take home.

Have students use their creativity and invent a unique bicycle—one that has all sorts of special recreational adaptations attached to it, such as a television set, a case for special books, a soda fountain, a gumball machine, and anything else that is wildly imaginative. Have them draw pictures of their bicycles and write a description of its special features.

Have the class write “wheel poems.” Give each student an outline of a wheel with a center hub and about four or five spokes radiating out to the rim. They may choose any vehicle with wheels as the topic of their poem. The name of the vehicle goes in the hub. They then write descriptive words or phrases about the vehicle or riding the vehicle on the spokes of the wheel. Bind the poems into a wheel-shaped book.

Involve the students in creative role playing of different situations related to human-powered vehicles. For example, students could dramatize the following scenes: demonstrating how to skateboard; a conversation between two friends, one of whom wants the other to ride “double” on a bicycle; two friends bicycling together; public service announcements persuading people to wear bicycle helmets; teaching a younger brother or sister how to ride a bicycle, and many others. (The students will likely have ideas of their own for role playing.) The individuals involved in the scenes should have the responsibility for creating the dialog. Props should be minimal. Students may want to dramatize the same scene more than once using different children as characters.

Locate pictures that show the evolution of the bicycle. Discuss with students some of the problems associated with early models (e.g., some had no pedals, so people walked them until they came to a downhill slope). Also locate pictures of modern bicycles of different types. Discuss how technology has influenced what bicycles are now capable of doing.

Author/illustrator Allen Say often uses incidents from his own life in his stories. *The Bicycle Man*, *Grandfather’s Journey*, and *Tree of Cranes* are three examples of his personal stories. Share some of his books with the students.

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Discuss how he incorporates his two cultures, Japanese and American, into his stories.

**RELATED THEMES:**

transportation  
Japanese culture

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #63 — Tooth-Gnasher Superflash  
Program #24 — The Tortoise And The Hare  
Program #72 — The Adventures Of Taxi Dog

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Allen Say was born in Japan and moved to the United States when he was a teenager. He is the author and illustrator of several books for children including two **Reading Rainbow** review books — he illustrated *How My Parents Learned to Eat* by Ina Friedman and wrote and illustrated the Caldecott Award winning *Grandfather's Journey*. Allen Say lives in San Francisco.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

THE WHITE BICYCLE  
by Rob Lewis (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

OUR TEACHER'S IN A WHEELCHAIR  
by Mary Ellen Powers (Albert Whitman)

DELPHINE  
by Molly Bang (Morrow)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

WHAT'S THE MATTER, SYLVIE, CAN'T YOU RIDE?  
by Karen Born Anderson (Dial)

MAMA ZOOMS  
by Jane Cowen-Fletcher (Scholastic)

BICYCLE RACE  
by Donald Crews (Greenwillow)

THE MAGIC BICYCLE  
by Berlie Doherty, illus. by Christian Birmingham (Crown)

THE GREAT TOWN AND COUNTRY BICYCLE BALLOON CHASE  
by Barbara Douglass, illus. by Carol Newsom (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

ANNIE FLIES THE BIRTHDAY BIKE  
by Crescent Dragonwagon, illus. by Emily Arnold McCully (Macmillan)

BICYCLE BOOK  
by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House)

HOW IS A BICYCLE MADE?  
by Henry Horenstein (Simon & Schuster)

AMAZING BIKES  
by Trevor Lord, photos by Peter Downs (Alfred A. Knopf)

THE BEAR'S BICYCLE  
by Emilie Warren McLeod, illus. by David McPhail (Little, Brown)

BIKES  
by Anne Rockwell (Dutton)

MRS. PEACHTREE'S BICYCLE  
by Erica Silverman, illus. by Ellen Beier (Simon & Schuster)

THE RED RACER  
by Audrey Wood (Simon & Schuster)

