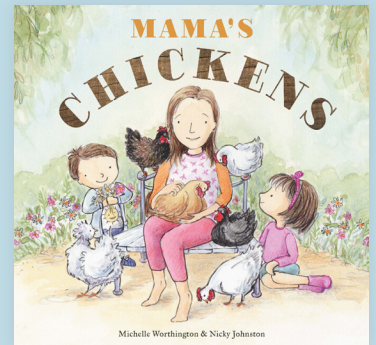




EK BOOKS TEACHER NOTES & RESOURCES

Title: Mama's Chickens
Author: Michelle Worthington
Illustrator: Nicky Johnston
Publisher: EK Books
Price: ANZ \$24.99 | USA \$19.99 | CA \$24.99 | UK £10.99
ISBN: 9781922539458
Publication date: Mar 2023
Audience age: 4-7 years
Key Curriculum Areas: English, Health and Physical Education, Science, Visual Arts, Design and Technologies



SYNOPSIS:

A sensitive, beautifully illustrated book that uses backyard chickens to give a closely observed child's-eye view of early-onset dementia. Mama didn't want chickens, but she grows to love them as her dementia symptoms increase. Her young children see that she doesn't always act like her old self anymore; this upsets both them and the chickens, but Mama always finds ways to show them just how much they are wanted and loved.

Children will relate to the endearing personalities of the chickens, while the award-winning author draws on her own experience to create an age-appropriate story about the impact of early-onset dementia. The result is a supportive, much-needed book about a reality that many families face. Dementia doesn't only affect the elderly. Like the parent in the story, people with early-onset dementia may have memory loss, difficulty thinking, trouble recognising people or confusion, or begin acting unlike themselves. Michelle Worthington has personal experience of all of these symptoms since her diagnosis with Progressive Nonfluent Aphasia (a form of dementia), and hopes her book will help children understand what dementia can look like when their caregiver suffers from it. Her wish is that the book will initiate open and honest communication and help parents all around the world recognise the symptoms while providing love and support for their children.

THEMES:

Dementia awareness. Family. Chickens. Open communication and care around difficult topics.

SELLING POINTS:

- The focus of books about dementia for children usually on grandparents, but early-onset dementia affects millions of people worldwide. This depiction of early-onset dementia is therefore badly needed by thousands of families.
- Over 5% of people with Alzheimer's show symptoms before they are 65, according to the Mayo Clinic.
- Draws on the author's personal experience to create a sensitive, supportive depiction of a parent with early-onset dementia and their symptoms.
- The number of households keeping backyard chickens continues to increase. (In 2020/2021 chickens were the fourth most popular pet in Australia over 8% of American households own chickens!).

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

Michelle Worthington has personal experience of all of these symptoms since her diagnosis with Progressive Nonfluent Aphasia (a form of dementia), and hopes her book will help children understand what dementia can look like when their caregiver suffers from it. Her wish is that the book will initiate open and honest communication and help parents all around the world recognise the symptoms while providing love and support for their children.

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

Michelle Worthington is an international award-winning author of empowering picture books for children.

Nicky Johnston is an illustrator, teacher, and presenter, aiming to inspire young children to use their imagination and develop their own ideas.

INTERVIEW:

AUTHOR

What is the inspiration for this story?

The inspiration for this story was my own chickens and my own family. In my house, the only girls are me and the chickens. All of our other pets, including my three boys are male and even though I didn't want to get chickens in the first place, I love hanging out with my girl squad. Our chickens were rescued from a farm and it took them a long time to come to trust us, and it took the same amount of time for me to get used to having them in the yard, behind the shed, pecking at the back door and generally under my feet when I was hanging out the washing. My boys can get upset when I get forgetful or frustrated, so I wrote this book for children who have a mum who gets sad sometimes.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

The most rewarding part of the project was definitely seeing Nicky bring my words to life. It always feels a bit like magic when you see the idea you had in your brain turn into actual words and pictures in a book, and Nicky gave the story the most amazingly compassionate and carefully crafted care that the characters practically jump off the page and into your heart. Illustrators are the true rockstars of picture books.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

The most challenging part of this project was getting the idea out of my head and onto paper. It just didn't sound as good once I wrote it down and because it was such an important story for me to tell, it was difficult having to rewrite it again and again until I got it right. Stories don't always come easily, even to authors. Sometimes you have to tickle them out and then pound them like playdough until they take the shape you want.

ILLUSTRATOR

What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.

The illustrations in this book are completed with watercolour and pencil. I deliberately chose a limited colour palette to work with throughout the book to use the richness of the colours of the chickens as well as purple/blue hues to give balance. My goal was to create subtle changes throughout the book with softness yet an obvious emotion rollercoaster. Some pages are deliberately simple and others extremely detailed expressing all moments of family life.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

The day I received the final book PDF was uplifting and so exciting. The illustration work flowed so easily and was not what I consider hard work and to see the beautifully, simple text with the illustrations completed my vision for the book. I am proud of this book.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

I always feel touched to be asked to illustrate books that require tender illustrations, particularly on topics that are easily relatable. Being the empath that I am, I emotionally live in my illustrations and while this can be a challenge it is also the strength that allows my illustrations to show a deep connection.

TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

N.B. These questions and activities can be adapted to suit the experience and ability of students.

DISCUSSION:**Before Reading**

- Ask students to bring in a favourite photo of themselves with their family and/or pets. Students can talk about why this memory is so special. What do they remember about that day? What is their best memory? Why?
- Do students think they have a good memory? What does this mean and why might it be important?
- What is the difference between a long-term memory and short-term memory?
- Create a table or chart of some important things we need to remember, and some less important things. What kinds of details are worth remembering, and what things are not as important? For example, people's names, birthdays, what they wore yesterday, how to count, knowing the days of the week, the weather last week, etc.
- Look at the cover of *Mama's Chickens*. Ask, what do you see? What might the characters be feeling? What does it make you wonder?
- Read the blurb. How does it make you feel? What do you think is happening to Mama? How do you think the children and the chooks might help Mama in this story?

During Reading

- Why do you think Mama changed her mind about the chickens? How do you think the chickens made her feel when they followed her around and pecked at the door at night?
- Who is Mama talking to about being independent like Chooky La La? What does 'independent' mean?
- Notice the spread of the backyard. What do you think the chooks like about Mama's backyard? What do the children like about it? What do you think Mama enjoys doing in the backyard?
- What kinds of tasks show that Mama is having trouble remembering? How are the children and the chooks helping?
- How does the story show us that even though Mama couldn't always remember their names, or sometimes got cranky, she is still being a caring, responsible mum and pet owner?
- What do you think might happen with Mama next?

After Reading

- What was the story about? What was the main idea? How did it make you feel? Do you have a part that you relate to or enjoyed the most?
- What did you learn about Mama? How did she change from the start of the story to the end? What was the thing about Mama that always stayed the same? How do you think Mama felt knowing she was losing her memory?
- Make a list of behaviours that show Mama starting to forget and not feeling herself (eg. confused about the shopping list or how to use a straw and phone, forgetting the task she was doing and names of children / chickens, feeling cranky, unable to speak).
- What did you learn about the children? How did they adapt or cope with Mama's changes? How did they help with the jobs around the house? Do you think there are any other things Mama's family could do to help her remember tasks or details?
- What did you learn about the chickens? How did they help Mama feel like she was still independent / responsible / caring?
- What do you know about chickens? What are your experiences with chooks? What do you like about Chooky La La?

- How does it make you feel when sometimes a parent, family member or teacher gets 'cranky' with you? Do you remember they still care about you?
- Do you know someone who may have memory loss (unable to remember important details like names, or has trouble recognising people or confusion)? What kinds of things could you do to help? Why might it be important to be patient and understanding, instead of scared or frustrated with them?
- What do you like about the illustrations? What do they show you about each of the characters? Has the illustrator effectively portrayed the characters' feelings? How? What kinds of media, colours and textures has she used to portray the emotions (calm, joy, sorry / confusion, loving, etc) and the setting / environment?
- Find all the different activities the family enjoys throughout the story.
- Turn and talk to a friend about how your pet or favourite toy helps you when you have sad or upset emotions.

ACTIVITIES:

ENGLISH

Vocabulary: Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives

(ACELA1437) (ACELA1452) (ACELA1454) (ACELA1468)

- Sort the nouns (names), verbs (actions) and adjectives (describing words) that relate to chickens into groups using the table provided in **BLM 3**.

Examples from the text:

Nouns – *chickens, poop, eggs, feathers, Chooky La La.*

Verbs – *poop, followed, pecked, exploring, scratch.*

Adjectives – *noisy, busy.*

- Alternatively, sort the nouns, verbs and adjectives that relate to Mama.

Examples from the text:

Nouns – *Mama, mind, names, backyard, vegetable scraps, memory, etc.*

Verbs – *changed, loved, watch, forgot, remember, search, speak, etc.*

Adverbs – *quietly, patiently, etc.*

Adjectives – *favourite, happy, safe, warm, cranky, sorry, etc.*

- Students can add their own words to these lists by referring to the illustrations.
- Students could use the above and/or their own adjectives to label / describe a diagram of a chicken (**BLM 1**), or Mama (**BLM 2**).

Memory Word Games

(ACELA1439) (ACELA1817) (ACELA1457) (ACELA1458) (ACELA1821) (ACELA1823) (ACELA1824)

Memory games are beneficial for building vocabulary, increasing concentration and improving reasoning skills.

- **Rhyming word game (oral):** With a sentence starter, students expand on it by adding a rhyming word after the previous one. For example, say, 'Chooky La La is a chook', the next person says, 'Chooky La La is a chook, look', next, 'Chooky La La is a chook, look, book', and so on.
- **Memory word game:** Write a list of words from the text in a particular order. Students need to remember the order of the words, then write these down without looking at the original list.
- **Missing item memory:** Combine pictures or items with the written word using a range of items from the book. For example, a feather with the word 'feather', 'egg', 'chicken', and so on. Place these on the table for the children to study. After a given time, cover and remove one of the items. Students need to remember which item is missing.
This can also be played by remembering the order of the items, or by matching the picture to the text.
- **Word matching game:** Write words from the text on flashcards (x2). Students play a memory matching game by turning over two cards at a time to find a match. They must remember the positions of the cards in order to score a pair. The player with the most matches wins.

Vocabulary: Spelling 'ch', 'ck'

(ACELA1437) (ACELA1454) (ACELA1470) (ACELA1439) (ACELA1438) (ACELA1817) (ACELA1458) (ACELA1778) (ACELA1455) (ACELA1821) (ACELA1822) (ACELA1474) (ACELA1471) (ACELA1472) (ACELA1823) (ACELA1824) (ACELA1825)

- Listen to and repeat the sounds in 'chicken' – 'ch' and 'ck'. On a chart, make a list of other words in the book or your own that have the same spelling patterns. Do they all make the same sound?
Eg. 'ch' in 'chicken' is different to 'ch' in 'orchestra'.

Examples from the text:

'ch' - chickens, changed, Chooky, watch, scratch, search, much.

'ck' - chickens, backyard, pecked, back.

See **BLM 1** for a chicken template to write the words.

Alternatively, students could build or make the words. For example, use leaves, flowers, vegetables, paints or blocks to write / create words; 'C-H-I-C-K-E-N', 'S-C-R-A-T-C-H', etc.

Comprehension: Story Sequencing

(ACELA1447) (ACELA1463) (ACELT1578) (ACELT1580) (ACELT1785) (ACELT1584) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670)

- Complete a story sequence showing the events that happened in the book. See **BLM 4** for an example template (to be enlarged). Use the following sentences or your own, or the pictures (**BLM 5**), to complete your sequence.
 1. Mama didn't want to get chickens.
 2. Mama liked how the chickens followed her around the backyard.
 3. Mama started to lose her memory.
 4. Mama couldn't remember their names, but she still kept them safe and warm.
 5. Sometimes Mama got cranky, but she was sorry.
 6. Mama showed them every day how much she loved them.

Comprehension

(ACELT1575) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1578) (ACELT1580) (ACELT1584) (ACELY1646) (ACELY1650) (ACELA1787) (ACELT1587) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1591) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670)

- Through writing and discussion, answer comprehension questions relating to the story, such as:
 - **Knowledge:** Who was in the story? What was the main idea / focus? Where do the events take place? What was happening to Mama? What things did Mama forget?
 - **Comprehension:** Retell the story in your own words. What were the main themes? What are the differences and similarities between Mama's actions at the start and at the end of the story? How did Mama show she cared for and loved her children and the chickens? How did the children and the chickens help Mama?
 - **Application:** How did Mama's changing memory affect her family? Why was it important for her family to be patient and helpful, and not scared or upset by Mama's behaviour? What helpful tips could you provide to someone with memory loss?
 - **Analysis:** What are some of the features of chickens? Draw a diagram with labels for the parts of a chicken. Create an infographic about the topic of dementia (or a type of memory loss), or about caring for chickens. Compare different breeds of chooks.
 - **Synthesis:** Predict how Mama and her family will manage her condition in the future. What helpful things can you do for someone you know with memory loss? What ideas can you think of for designing a chicken coop?
 - **Evaluation:** Do you agree that Mama can still be independent and care for her family? Why or why not? What is the most important thing the children can remember about their Mama? What kinds of messages are told through the story? What are the positive and negative aspects?

Narrative Writing

(ACELT1581) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1586) (ACELY1651) (ACELY1661) (ACELY1662) (ACELY1671) (ACELY1672) (ACELT1832) (ACELT1833)

Imagine you owned a pet or pets that could talk and help you with tasks you couldn't do yourself. Would the story be realistic or based on imaginary / magical abilities? Where does your story take place? What is your mission / goal? What would be the challenges / problems you face along the way? How will these be resolved? Who will help?

- Begin your narrative with a sizzling start, such as dialogue, onomatopoeia, action or scene setting. Set it out with a beginning, middle and end. Remember to include some WOW words and interesting adjectives.

Alternative ideas:

- Write the narrative from the perspective of a chicken (or another animal). How would this animal think and behave on its journey / mission? What does it do to help someone in need?
- Use the following phrase as a sentence starter and innovate on the story; 'Something they would never forget was...'

Recount / Reflective Writing

(ACELA1437) (ACELT1575) (ACELT1783) (ACELY1651) (ACELA1787) (ACELT1582)

Encourage students to think about a time when they forgot something important, or felt frustration or sorry about a difficult situation. Did they use any particular strategies to calm down or help to remember. For example, perhaps students regularly write lists or notes in their diary, or keep a calendar or chart to remember important items or events. Students should include how they felt, how they managed the situation, the challenges and outcomes.

Thinking Tools / Graphic Organisers

(ACELA1429) (ACELT1575) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1583) (ACELT1589) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670)

- **Concept Web:** Use the concept web diagram to flesh out ideas on a chosen topic, such as 'Memory Strategies', or 'Information about Chickens'. The sub-headings for Memory Strategies (things you can do to remember important events and details) could include, 'diary or calendar notes, 'shopping lists', 'daily journal', 'photo albums', 'addresses and phone numbers', 'instruction booklets', etc. See **BLM 6**.
- **Venn Diagram:** Complete a Venn Diagram to compare the similarities and differences between Mama before and after memory loss, or between two breeds of chickens. Think about their appearances, emotions, behaviours, abilities, interests, etc. See **BLM 7**.
- **Y-Chart:** Students can imagine themselves as Mama as she struggles to remember things, or as the children / chickens trying to help. Complete the graphic organiser with the headings: Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like. See **BLM 8**.
- **Memory Chart:** In the thought bubbles, students recall a memory and write descriptions about 'How I Feel', 'What I See', 'What I Touch', 'What I Smell', 'What I Hear', 'What I Taste'. See **BLM 9**.

SCIENCE / STEM

Chicken Studies

(ACSSU002) (ACSSU017) (ACSSU211) (ACSSU030) (ACSHE013) (ACSHE021) (ACSHE022) (ACSHE034) (ACSHE035) (ACSIS014) (ACSIS024) (ACSIS011) (ACSIS025) (ACSIS038) (ACSIS233) (ACSIS027) (ACSIS040) (ACSIS012) (ACSIS213) (ACSIS029) (ACSIS042)

- Research information about different kinds of chicken breeds, including Bantam, Silkie, Orpington, Broiler, Leghorn, etc. Find out about their habitat, what they eat, breeding, behaviours, predators, and other interesting facts. Write and draw / present your findings.
- Complete a life cycle poster including some details about some or all of the following stages: egg, egg embryo, hatching, chick, pullet (teenager), adult (hen or rooster). See **BLM 10**.
- Label a chicken diagram with the following labels: eyes, beak, feathers, wings, claws, breast, tail, wattle, comb.

Egg Experiments

(ACSSU003) (ACSSU018) (ACSSU031) (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) (ACSHE013) (ACSHE021) (ACSHE022) (ACSHE034) (ACSHE035) (ACSIS014) (ACSIS024) (ACSIS011) (ACSIS025) (ACSIS038) (ACSIS233) (ACSIS027) (ACSIS040) (ACSIS012) (ACSIS213) (ACSIS029) (ACSIS042)

A range of awesome egg experiments can be explored with students, including:

- The egg drop STEM experiment, using sandwich bags, a parachute or container for the egg to safely drop to the ground without breaking.
- The disappearing egg shell experiment, exposing the membrane of the egg by dissolving the calcium carbonate with vinegar (acid). After three days in vinegar, the egg should be able to bounce!
- Test the strength of the eggshell in a STEM challenge by balancing heavy items, like books, on a bridge of eggshells without breaking them.
- Explore the physics of air pressure by forcing an egg into the neck of a small bottle or jar.
- Make meringue by whisking egg whites (albumen)! The whisk creates a force that unfolds the protein molecules, which causes air bubbles to get trapped and create a foam. The foam hardens when baked, making meringue.

Instructions for these and more egg experiments can be found at:

[Awesome Egg Experiments for Kids - Science Experiments for Kids \(science-sparks.com\)](https://www.science-sparks.com).

How the Brain Works

(ACSSU002) (ACSSU030) (ACSHE013) (ACSHE021) (ACSHE022) (ACSHE034) (ACSHE035) (ACSIS011) (ACSIS025) (ACSIS038) (ACSIS233) (ACSIS027) (ACSIS040) (ACSIS012) (ACSIS029) (ACSIS042)

Mama's Chickens explores the impact of early-onset dementia. Dementia doesn't only affect the elderly. Like the parent in the story, people with early-onset dementia may have memory loss, difficulty thinking, trouble recognising people or confusion, or begin acting unlike themselves. Understanding the parts of the brain and how it works can help students with further research into forms of memory loss, and how best to look after our brains.

A video for children about brain function can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/c9HK59FaoMI>

Students could use coloured playdough to create a labelled model of the brain with its different parts (Frontal Lobe, Parietal Lobe, Occipital Lobe, Cerebellum, Temporal Lobe, Brain Stem).

Worksheet downloads can be found here: [Parts of the Brain Activity for Kids, Brain Diagram, and Worksheets for Kids \(123homeschool4me.com\)](#)

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Healthy Mind / Healthy Body Ideas:

English: (ACELT1580) (ACELT1831) (ACELT1586) (ACELT1832) (ACELT1593) (ACELT1833)

HPE: (ACPPS003) (ACPPS004) (ACPPS005) (ACPPS006) (ACPPS017) (ACPPS018) (ACPPS020) (ACPPS021) (ACPMP008) (ACPMP012) (ACPMP025) (ACPMP028)

- Mindfulness and physical activity are ideal for mental and physical health, as well as building relationships with family and friends.
 - Role play or use character stick puppets to retell the story in your own words.
 - Visit and pet / feed some chickens! Remember to keep your vegetable scraps!
 - Collect or buy eggs, and cook some yummy meals.
 - Play memory and concentration games with family and friends.
 - Tend to your garden – sweeping leaves, planting / feeding flowers and vegetables / herbs.
 - Play under the sprinklers or wading pool on a sunny day.
 - Find a peaceful spot for a picnic with your pet.
 - Listen to relaxing sounds in your garden or local park.
 - Engage in family time activities, like building blocks, colouring / painting or a craft project.
 - Create a 'memory jar' or 'memory box' to keep special trinkets / souvenirs / objects that have personal meaning.
 - Look at photos and remember special events with your family.
 - Create a scrapbook with photos and pictures / certificates, etc to remember the important highlights over the year.
 - Make a time capsule with your family and place it in a special outdoor spot.
 - Snuggle with a pet or loved one to read some favourite books.
 - Write labels and reminders on cards, calendar, phone, etc for yourself and your family.
 - Help with chores around the house.
 - Give someone in need a special gift, to say 'thank you', 'sorry', or to remind them how much you care!

THE ARTS – VISUAL ARTS

Egg Art

(ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM108) (ACAVAR109)

- Using hard boiled / papier mâché eggs and acrylic paints and/or fine liner pens, design beautiful patterns and colours to create egg art. Eggs can be rolled in paint, daubed with brushes, or intricate patterns drawn and coloured with pens, depending on the students' abilities.
- Are the designs inspired by any particular style of artwork or artist? Students might like to observe the 'Australiana' feel of Mama's backyard.

Egg Carton Chicks

(ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM108)

- Students can make adorable chicks using two cups cut from an egg carton (stuck together invertedly), painted, with cut-out eyes, beak and feet glued on, and optional feathers for wings. Be sure to give your chick a name.

Extension: Chicken Coop Engineering Challenge

Design and Technologies: (ACTDEK001) (ACTDEK002) (ACTDEK003) (ACTDEK004) (ACTDEP005) (ACTDEP006) (ACTDEP007) (ACTDEP008) (ACTDEP009)

- Use the remainder of the egg carton to design and build an attractive chicken coop for your chick. What other materials are needed? Will the chick fit inside easily? How will it stay upright? Does it have any opening doors? Does it look attractive?

Family Portrait Painting

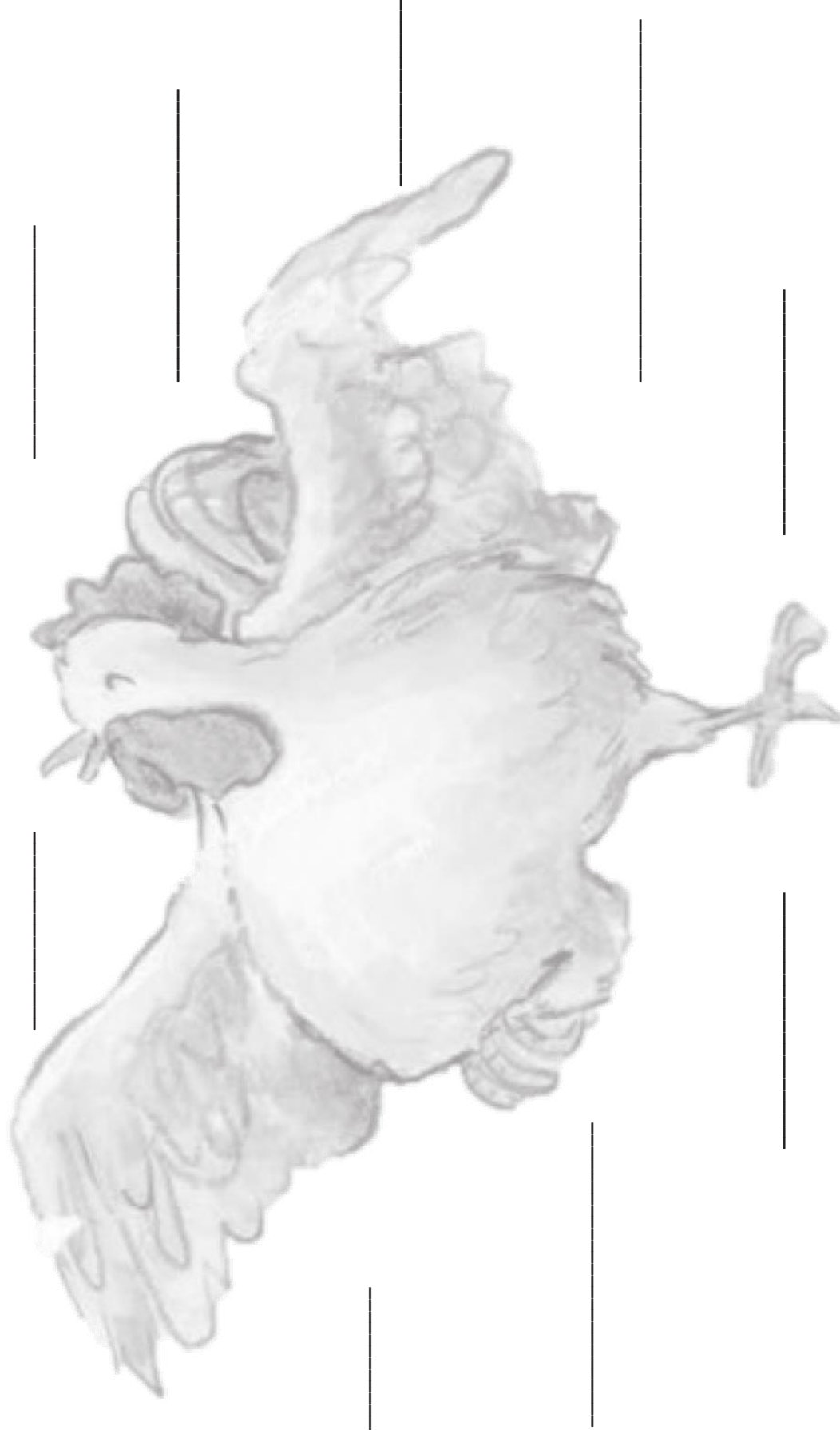
(ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM108) (ACAVAR109)

- Like the illustrator has used in *Mama's Chickens*, students use watercolour paints and pen to draw and paint a beautiful family portrait of their family and pets. There are lovely examples in the last few spreads of the book for inspiration.

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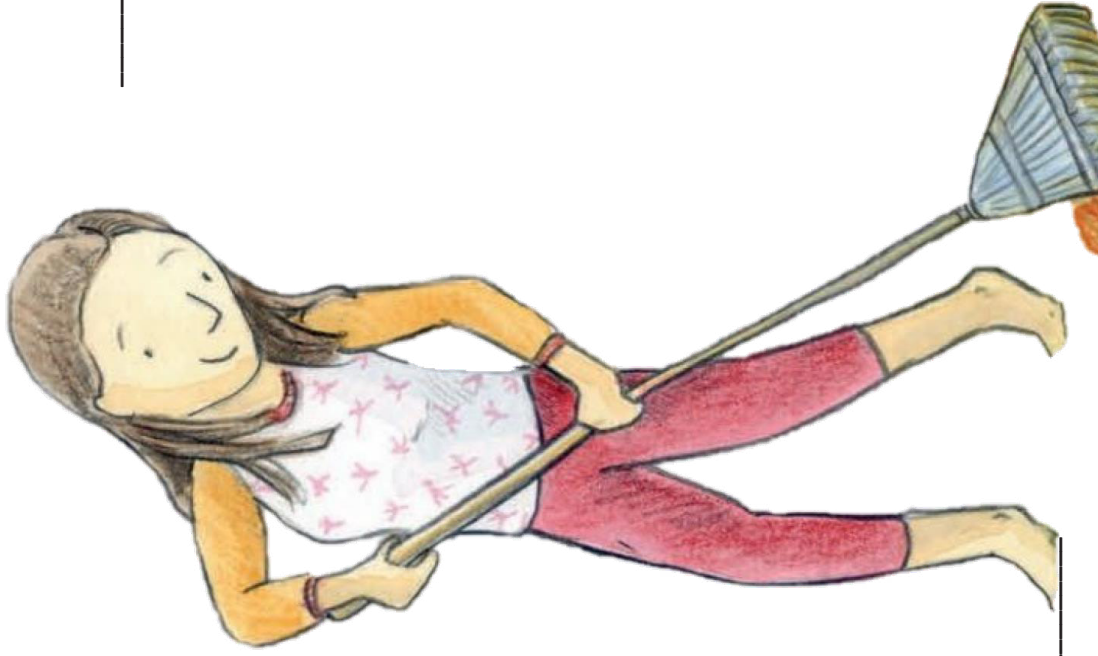
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Label and colour.



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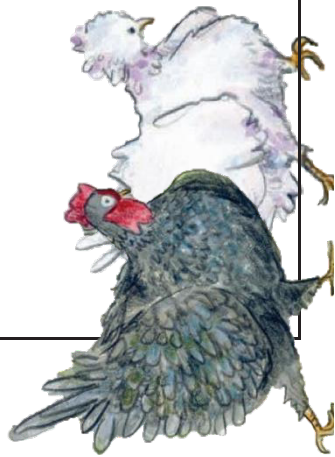
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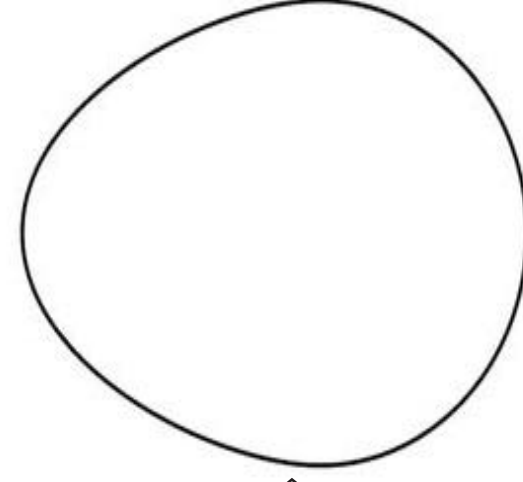
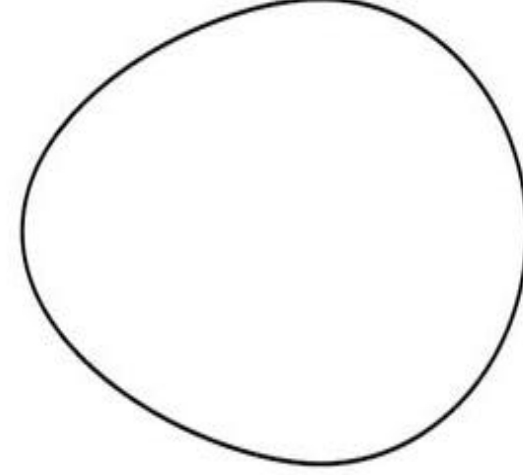
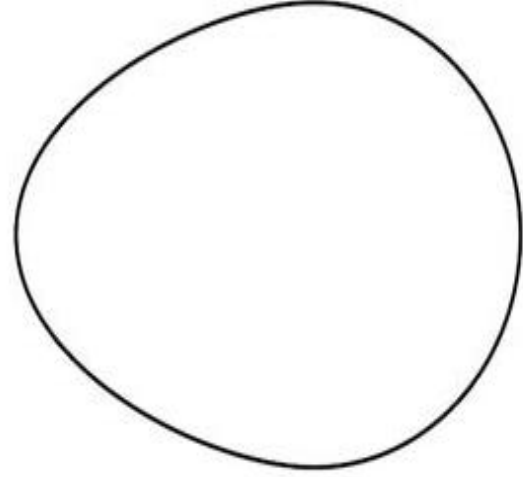
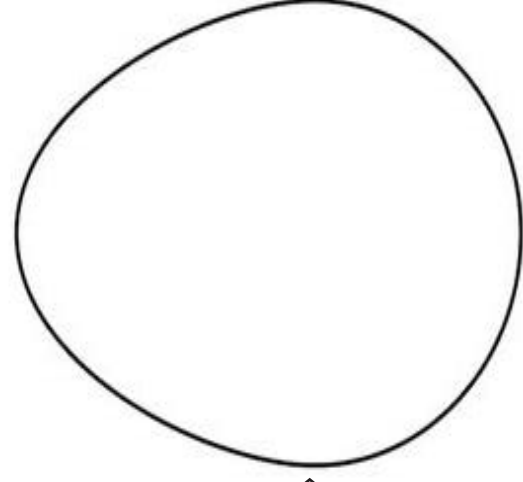
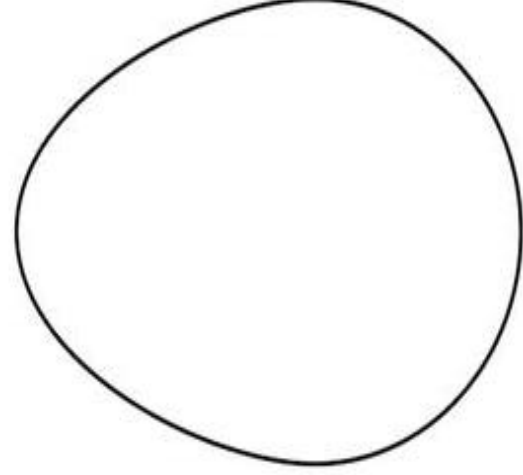
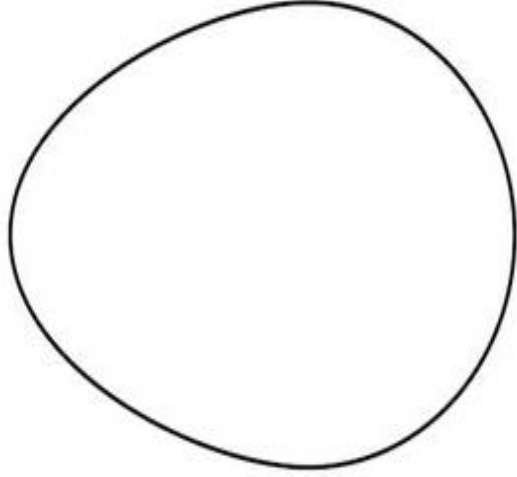
Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives



Sequencing 1

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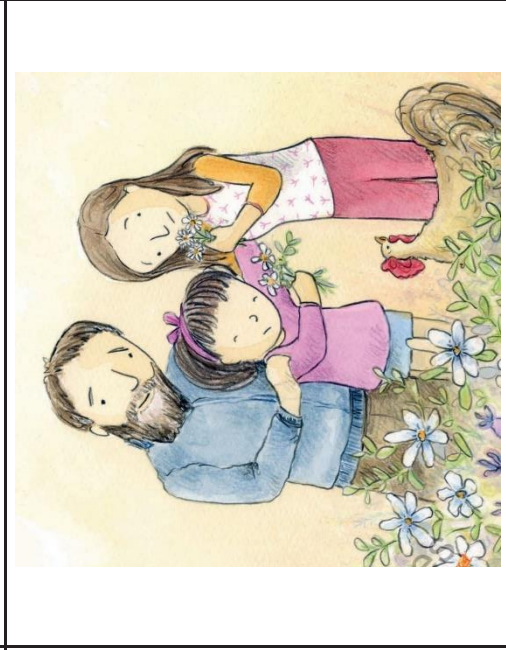
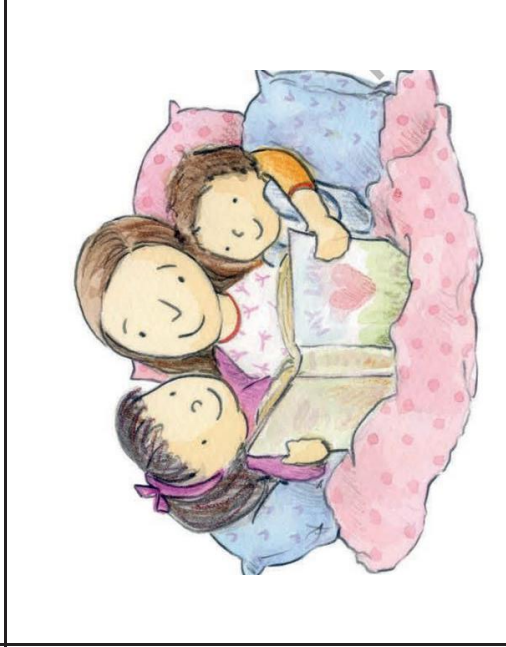
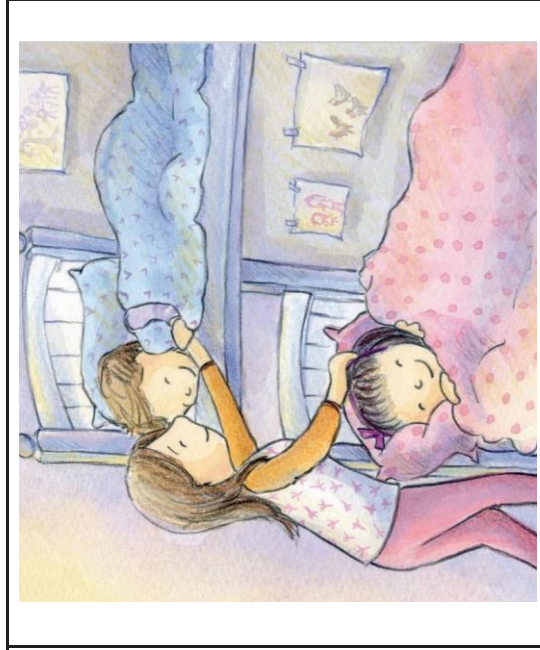
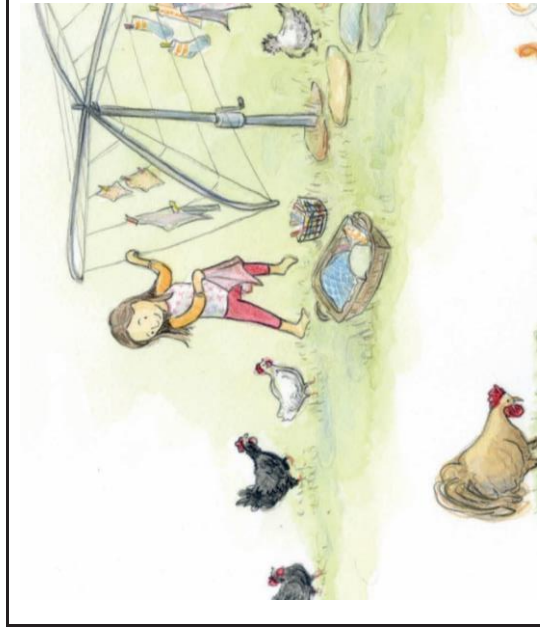
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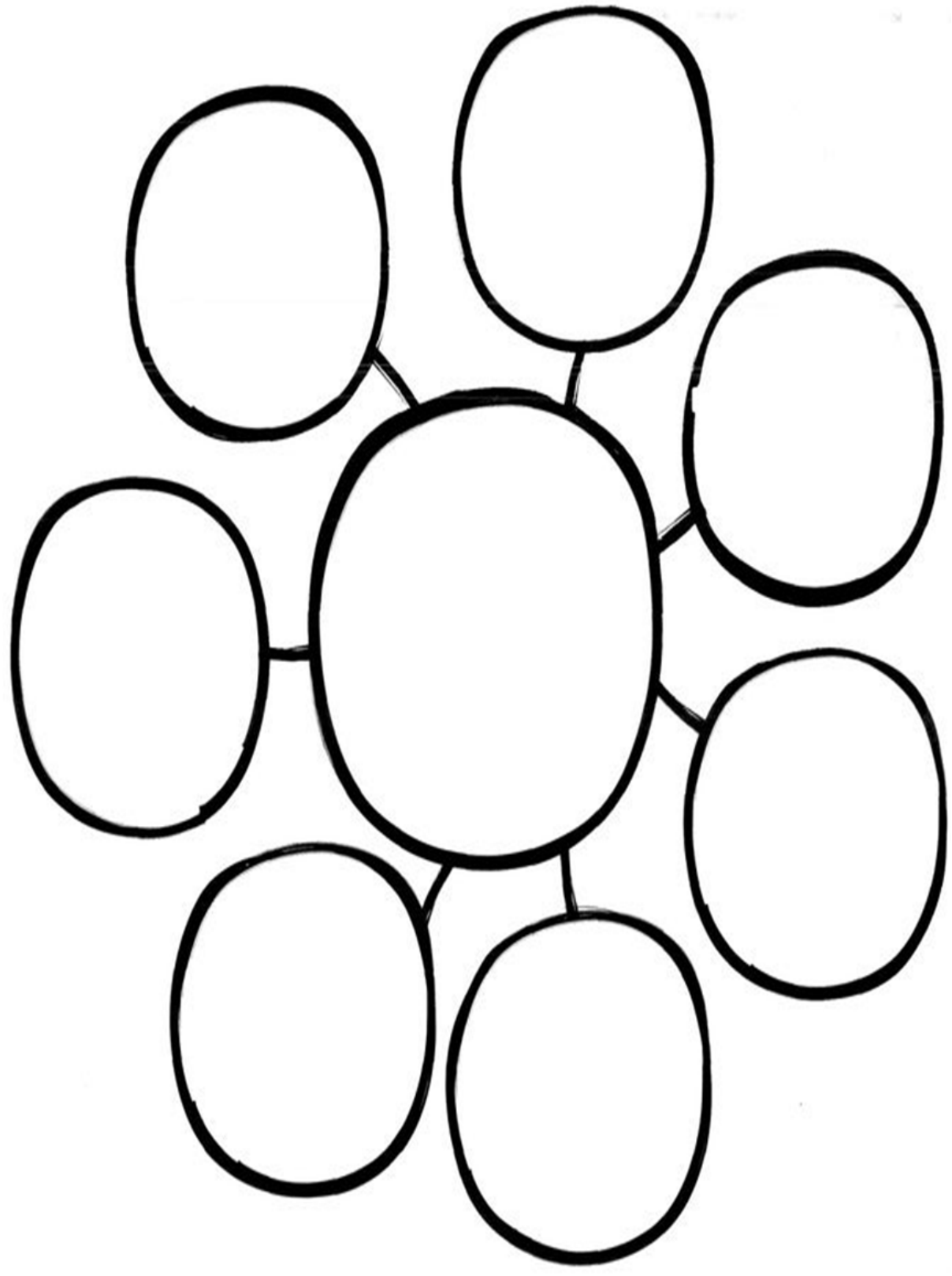
Cut and paste the pictures in the correct sequence.



Concept Web

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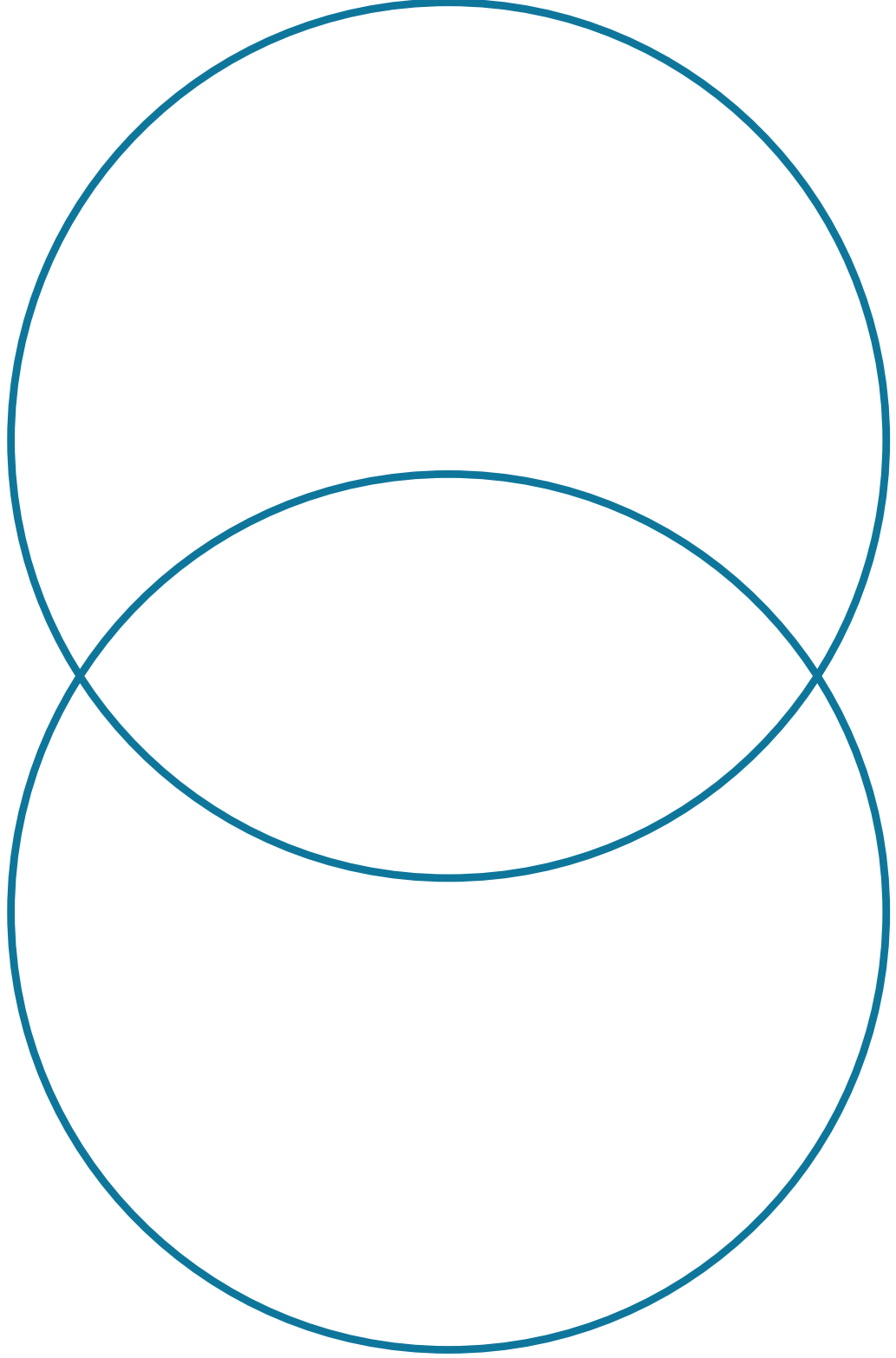
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Venn Diagram

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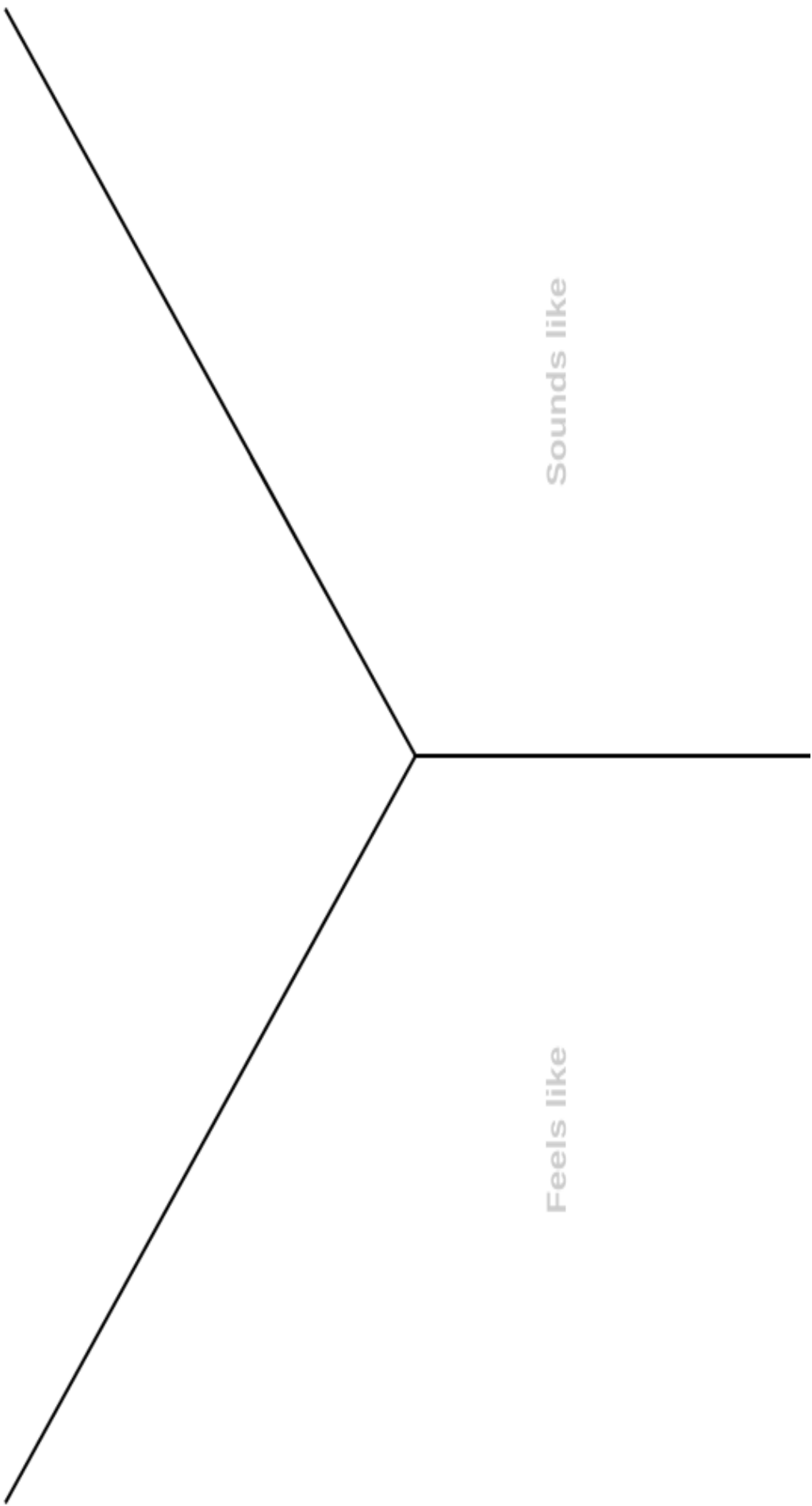


Y Chart

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DATE _____

Looks like



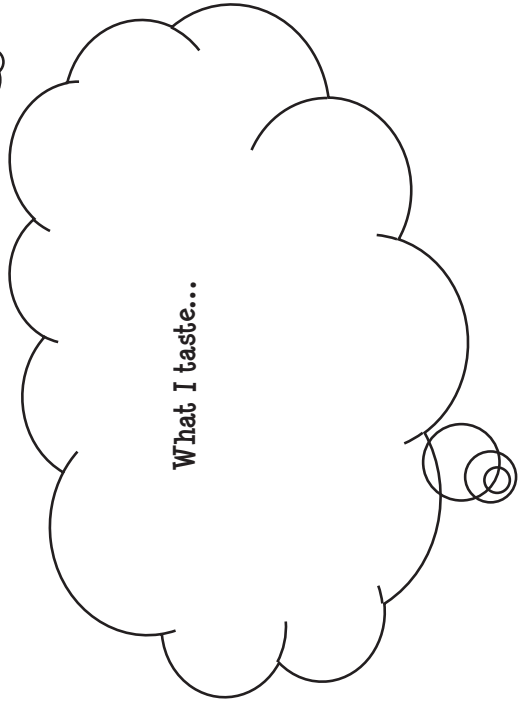
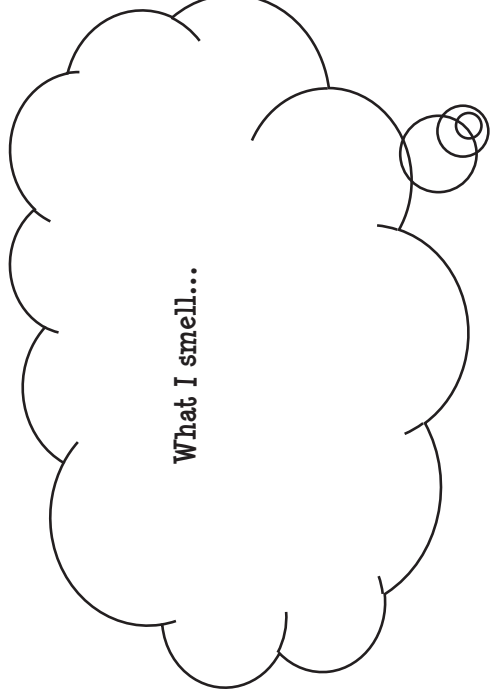
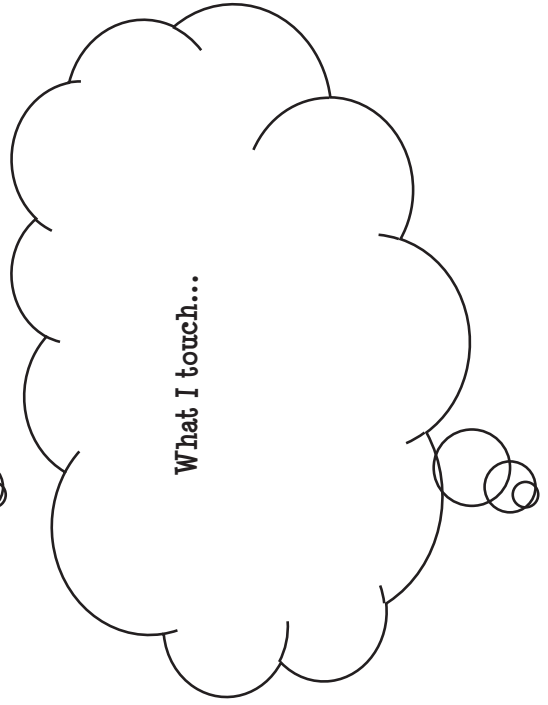
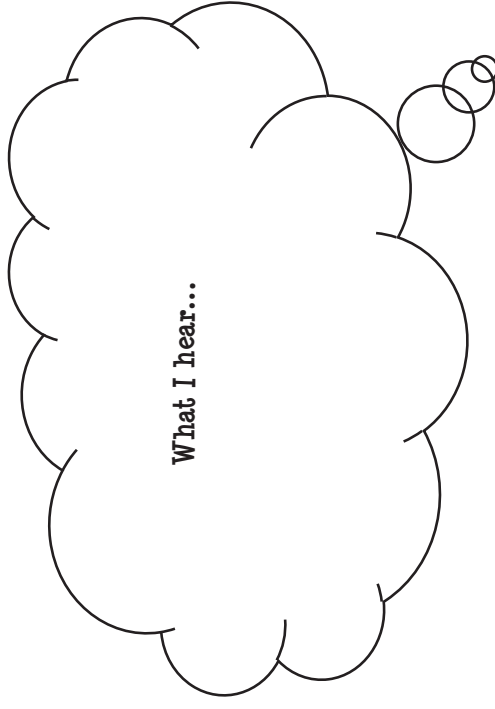
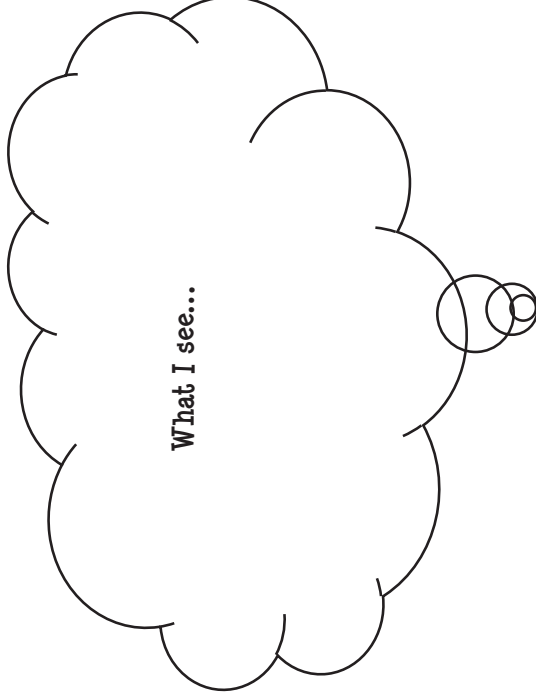
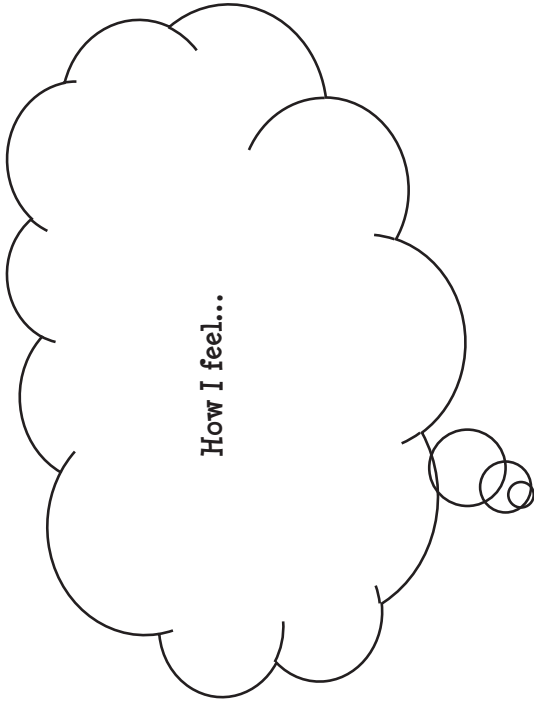
Feels like

Sounds like

Memory Chart

NAME _____

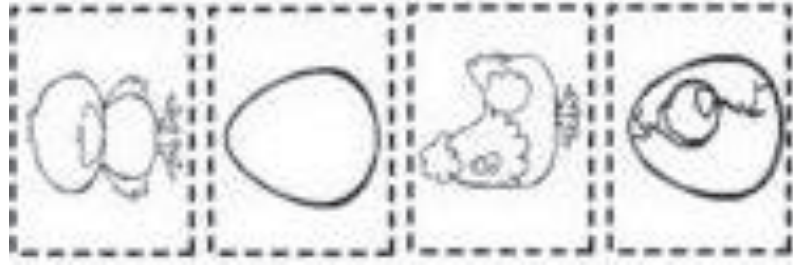
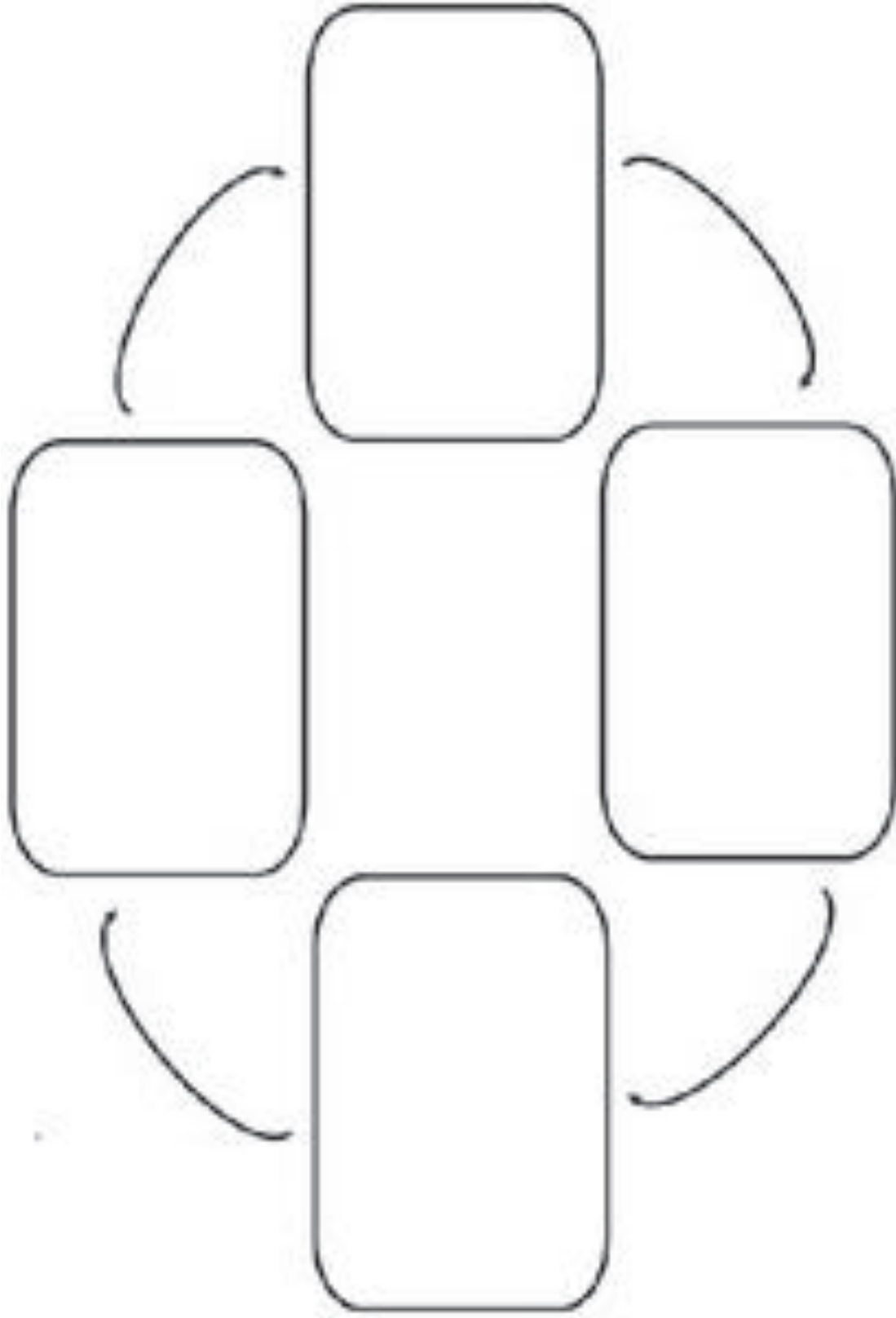
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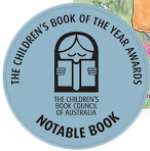
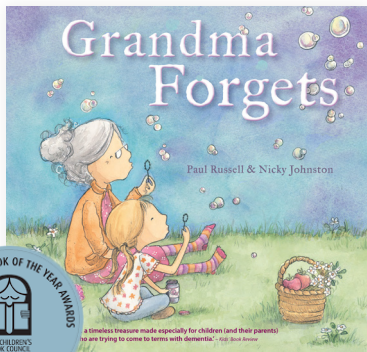
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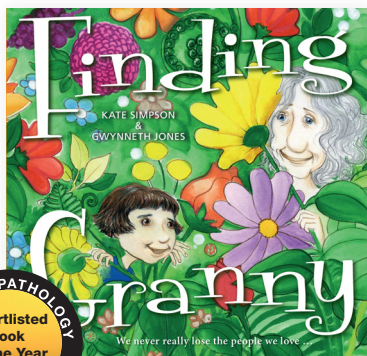
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