



Lesson 1: The Soil Neighborhood

Grade Level: 1st Grade

Time: 40–45 minutes

Subject: ELA

Overview: This lesson is Lesson 1 of 5 in *The Soil Neighborhood* unit within the *Growing Readers* micro-curriculum, based on a series of books written by Kansas author Dan Yunk. Lesson 1 serves as an ELA-only anchor lesson focused on a first read of the text through an author read-aloud. Students build comprehension by exploring book features, vocabulary, illustrations, and the main topic and key details while engaging in structured discussions and drawing on their experiences with soil, land, and agriculture. This lesson establishes a shared understanding of the text, supporting deeper learning and cross-curricular connections in subsequent lessons.

Skillset: Book orientation, comprehension during initial reading, vocabulary, illustrations/text connections, discussion norms, sequencing key ideas, identifying the main topic and author's reasons, and Kansas connections through soil knowledge.

Kansas Academic Standards:

Kansas ELA Standards

SL.1.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about topics and texts with peers and adults in small and large groups to expand language comprehension.

SL.1.1.a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

SL.1.1.b Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.

SL.1.1c Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

SL.1.2 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud, information presented orally or through media.

RI.1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

RI.1.2 Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

RI.1.3 Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas or pieces of information in a text.

RI.1.5 Know and use various text features (e.g., headings, tables of contents, glossaries, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text.

RI.1.7 Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.

RI.1.8 Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.

Objectives:

English Language Arts Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Use text features in *The Soil Neighborhood* (such as the title page and illustrations) to locate information about soil and the soil neighborhood.
- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud.
- Ask questions to clear up confusion about the text during discussion.
- Participate in collaborative conversations by following agreed-upon discussion rules (listening to others, taking turns speaking).
- Build on a partner’s ideas by responding with a related comment or question during turn-and-talk or whole-group discussion.
- Use illustrations and details in the text to describe key ideas about what is happening in the soil neighborhood.
- Identify the main topic of the text and retell key details using first–next–last language.
- Describe connections between ideas in the text, such as how soil helps support soil or how soil supports plant growth.
- Identify the reasons the author gives for why soil is important.

Materials Needed

- Book: *The Soil Neighborhood* by Dan Yunk
- Smartboard/projector
- Chart paper titled: “What Lives in the Soil?”

Lesson Procedures

1. Building Background Knowledge
 - a. Explain to students: “Today, we are going to read *The Soil Neighborhood*! Before we start, think about all the times you’ve seen soil or touched soil, maybe on your family’s ranch, in a garden, in a pasture, near cattle tanks, or along the driveway. Soil is a big part of our lives here in Kansas.”
 - b. Ask students:
 - “Where have you seen soil around your home or your family’s land?”
 - “What grows in our soil here, grass, crops, gardens?”
 - “Why is soil important to people who live in places like ours?”
2. Book Orientation
 - a. Using the physical book or the video preview frame, have students identify:
 - Title page
 - Illustrations
 - b. Explain to students: “We can use the title page to help us understand what this book will be about. We can use the illustrations to find information about what is happening underground.”
 - c. Prompt students:
 - “What information can we learn about soil by looking at the pictures?”
 - “What does the title tell us about the topic of this book?”
3. Setting the Purpose for Listening
 - a. Explain to Students: “Today is our first read of the book. The first time we read a text, our job is to listen carefully and understand the main topic and important details. Later this week, we will reread it to learn even more.”
 - b. Prompt students to encourage thinking:
 - “Who are the soil neighbors?”
 - “What do they do?”
 - “Why is soil important?”

4. First Read: The Soil Neighborhood
 - a. Read the book or play the author read aloud.
Pause only strategically for best-practice comprehension moves
Stopping Point Suggestions (2-3 total, briefstops to maintain flow):
 - b. Stop #1 Vocabulary: Soil / Neighborhood
Ask students: "What clues do the pictures give us about what a 'soil neighborhood' means?"
 - c. Stop #2 Characters (Soil Friends):
Ask students:
 - "Who do we see helping the soil here?"
 - "What are they doing to help?"
 - d. Stop #3 Clarification:
Explain to students: "If something is confusing, it's okay to ask. What questions do you have about what we just heard?"
5. Turn-and-Talk: Following Discussion Rules
 - a. Teacher pairs up students and explains while modeling rules:
 - "Face your partner."
 - "Listen quietly."
 - "Take turns."
 - b. Prompt students: "Tell your partner one thing you learned about the soil neighborhood. Then respond to what your partner said."
 - c. Example teacher follow-up: "I heard you say worms help the soil. Can you tell me more?" (Extending the exchange)
6. Checking Comprehension & Sequencing Key Ideas
 - a. Ask the whole group:
 - "What happened first in our book?"
 - "What happened next?"
 - "What happened last?"
 - b. Record student ideas in a simple three-step chart labeled First/Next/Last using student language. Possible student responses:
 - First: "We learned that soil is like a neighborhood."
 - Next: "We learned what each neighbor does."
 - Last: "The author told us how soil helps crops grow."
7. Text-Illustration Connection
 - a. Display a selected page.
 - b. Ask students:
 - "What does this picture show?"
 - "How does the picture help us understand the words the author wrote?"
 - "What information does this illustration give us?"
 - c. Guide students to see that illustrations reveal what is underground, which we cannot see above ground.
8. Author's Reasons
 - a. Ask students:
 - "Why does the author think soil is important?"
 - "What reason(s) did the author give about why soil is important?"
 - b. Students may respond:
 - "So plants can grow."
 - "So people can eat."

- “Because it has lots of helpers in it.”
 - c. Record responses on chart paper.
9. Kansas Connection
- a. Explain to students: “In Kansas, especially in our rural communities, soil is part of our lives every day. Farmers, ranchers, and gardeners depend on healthy soil so crops, grass, and pastures can grow for livestock and families.”
 - b. Ask students:
 - “Why do YOU think soil matters to the people who live here?”

Encourage ranch/garden/farm stories; these deepen comprehension by attaching new information to familiar contexts.

Assessment:

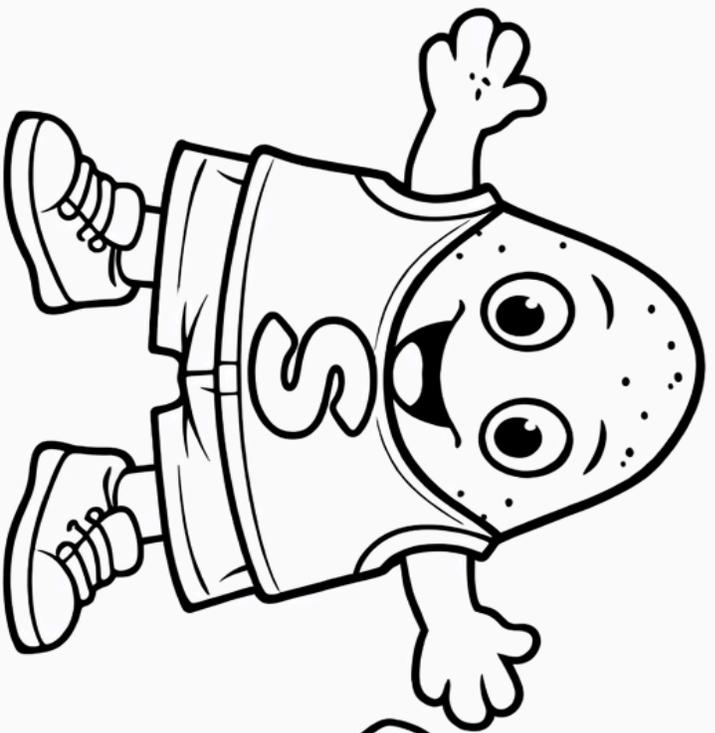
Student understanding is assessed through ongoing formative and observational measures embedded throughout the lesson, including participation in collaborative discussions, use of text features to locate information, responses to questions about key details and the main topic, sequencing of key ideas, explanation of connections between ideas, and identification of the author’s reasons for why soil is important.

Supplemental Activities:

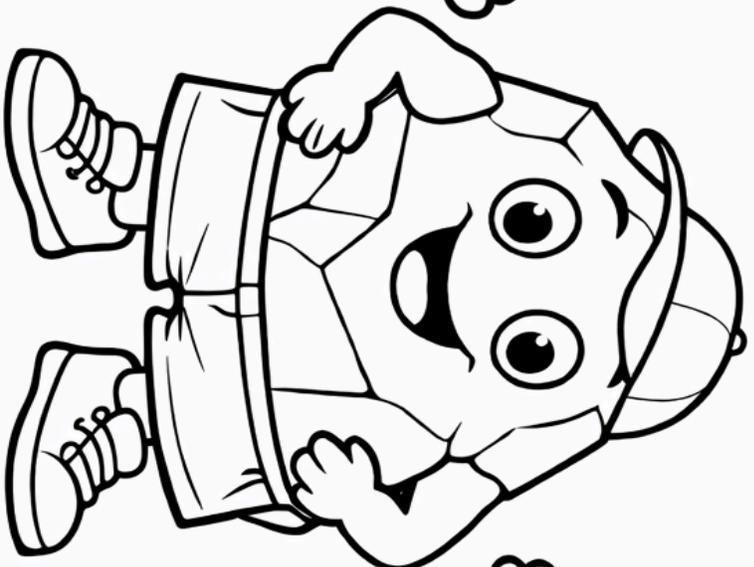
Have students color the coloring sheet with Sandy, Rocky, and Clay provided below.

Author: Kelsy Sproul, Literacy Specialist, 2026 KFAC Teacher of the Year, KFAC Curriculum Advisory Council, Former Elementary Teacher.

Sandy



Rocky



Clay

