



Lesson 1: The Soil Neighborhood

Grade Level: Kindergarten

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 key ideas 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 events, and Kansas connections through soil knowledge.

Kansas Academic Standards:

Kansas ELA Standards

SL.K.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults.

SL.K.1.a Follow discussion rules (listening, taking turns).

SL.K.1.b Extend conversations through multiple exchanges.

SL.K.2 Ask/answer questions to confirm understanding and sequence events.

SL.K.3 Ask/answer questions to seek help, get information, or clarify.

RI.K.13 Engage in group reading with purpose and understanding.

RI.K.5 Identify front cover, back cover, and title page.

RI.K.6 Name author/illustrator and define their roles.

RI.K.7 Describe how illustrations relate to the text.

RI.K.8 Identify reasons an author gives to support ideas.

Objectives:

English Language Arts Objectives

Students will be able to:

- identify the front cover, back cover, title page, author, and illustrator of *The Soil Neighborhood*.
- describe the role of an author (writes the words) and illustrator (creates the pictures).
- ask and answer questions about key details in the book and request clarification when confused.
- participate in structured turn-and-talks using agreed-upon rules (listening and taking turns).
- use the illustrations to explain what is happening in the soil neighborhood underground.
- identify the reasons the author gives for why soil is important.

- sequence three major events or ideas from the story (first–next–last).
- make connections to their own rural experiences with soil, gardens, farms, ranching, and land stewardship.

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:
 - Front cover
 - Back cover
 - Title page
 - Author/Illustrator and roles
 - b. Prompt students:
 - “The author writes the words.”
 - “The illustrator creates the pictures.”
 - “The pictures will help us understand what’s happening underground.”
3. Setting the Purpose for Listening
 - a. Explain to Students: “Today is our first read of the book. The first time we read a story, our job is to listen and understand what is happening. 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, brief stops to maintain flow):
 - i. Stop #1 Vocabulary: Soil / Neighborhood
Ask students: “What clues do the pictures give us about what a ‘soil neighborhood’ means?”
 - ii. Stop #2 Characters (Soil Friends):
Ask students:
 - “Who do we see helping the soil here?”
 - “What are they doing?”

- iii. 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.”
 - 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. Possible kindergarten responses:
 - First: “We met the soil neighbors.”
 - 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?”
 - “Who do you see in the soil neighborhood on this page?”
 - 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?”
 - b. Students may respond:
 - “So plants can grow.”
 - “So people can eat.”
 - “Because it has lots of helpers in it.”
 - c. Record responses.
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:

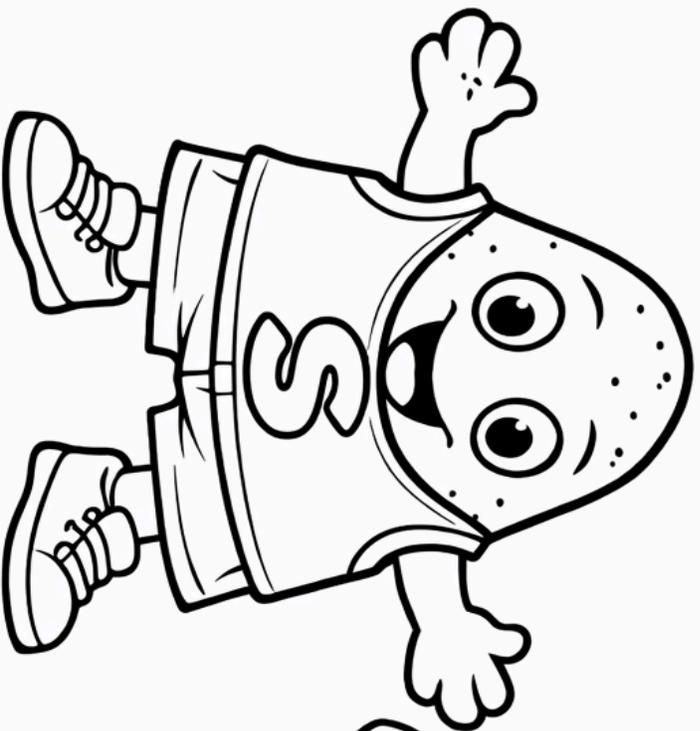
Student understanding is assessed through ongoing formative and observational measures embedded throughout the lesson, including participation in collaborative discussions, identification of book features (front cover, title page, author, and illustrator), use of soil-related vocabulary, sequencing of key events from the text, and verbal responses that demonstrate comprehension of the text, illustrations, and 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

