

# NINE

# WORDS

# MAX



**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS



TUNDRA BOOKS

written by **Dan Bar-el**

illustrated by **David Huyck**

# DEAR EDUCATOR

*Nine Words Max* is a sharp and humorous tale of a prince who talks too much and his brothers' misguided solution. A funny, quirky and madcap story by Dan Bar-el with fantastic illustrations from David Huyck, your students will love this sly satire of our modern world's obsession with media.

You can use the text in a number of ways, including:

- Exploring conceptual and thematic connections such as family, humor, text structure, communication, satire
- As a tool for inquiring into the elements of narrative
- As a funny and engaging read-aloud experience

The activity guide includes discussion questions, writing activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text. Where applicable, activities have been aligned with Common Core State Standards and all activities can be adapted to suit your students' age levels and needs.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Maximilian is a prince who loves to talk: No topic is too small, no story too boring. Max's brothers are the opposite — the less said the better. When the king and queen go on a trip and leave the brothers alone, the three princes put a spell on Maximilian that limits him to speaking only nine words at a time. The brothers are delighted: peace and quiet at last! But when a fearsome dignitary arrives, they realize the true value of their brother's insatiable need for information.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DAN BAR-EL** is an award-winning children's author, educator and storyteller. His writing includes chapter books, picture books and, most recently, a graphic novel. For the past twenty years, Dan has been working with children ages 3 to 13. He's been a school-age childcare provider, a preschool teacher, a creative drama teacher and creative writing teacher. These days, when not writing, travelling around the country presenting his books, storytelling or leading various workshops at schools and libraries, he teaches creative writing courses to children with the organization CWC. Dan lives in Vancouver, BC, and shares his life with artist and goldsmith Dominique Bréchault, and Sasha, the most adorable cat in the known universe. Like Maximilian, Dan is not a man of few words, but no one has had to put a spell on him ... yet.



© Photo by Dominique Bréchault



© Photo by David Huyck

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**DAVID HUYCK** grew up outside the kingdom of Chicago where he watched gobs of puppet shows, but they were mostly on TV. He lived half a block from the candy store in one direction, and half a block from the playground in the other. Along with a limitless supply of Legos, cartoons and all genres of books, the resulting high-fructose queasiness is the source for everything he has made since. David makes books, comics, and prints, and he loves to make illustrations for children and their grown-ups. The first book he illustrated is *That One Spooky Night*, also written by Dan Bar-el. He always keeps a pencil handy so he can capture hiding frogs and silly faces on paper. David lives with his family in Northfield, MN, where his daughter is trying to teach herself how to put a spell on her little brother.

# PRE-READING DISCUSSION / ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, make a list of familiar and popular fairy tales. If possible, gather a selection of well-known fairy tales from the school library and give students the opportunity to browse. Discuss what makes a fairy tale unique from other types of stories. What are the common elements of a fairy tale (royalty, happy ending, good and evil characters, magic, lesson)?
2. Introduce the front cover and title of the book. Ask for predictions as to what the story will be about. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
  - What characters are in the story?
  - What is the setting of the story?
  - What do you think might happen?
  - What do you think the problem will be in the story that needs to be solved?
  - What do you think the title means?
3. Look up the meaning of the word “maximum” in the dictionary. Write a definition in your own words. “Max” can be used as a short form or slang for the word maximum. Does this change any of your predictions about what the story is about?

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### 1. Sequence

- Cut out the sentence strips. As a class, in small groups, or individually, arrange the sentence strips in the correct sequence. Draw a picture to match each sentence strip.

**The wizard cast a spell on Maximilian so he could only speak nine words at a time.**

**Queen Spark arrived at the castle.**

**The king and queen announced they are going on holiday.**

**Maximilian saved the day by entertaining Queen Spark.**

**Tripp, Kurt and Wilt wiggled the wrong body parts.**

**The three princes were happy that the spell worked.**

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

## 2. What makes up a story?

- Create a class book, individual student booklets, or posters outlining the different parts of a story. Use one page or poster for each of the following:
  - Purpose (the reason the story was written)
  - Orientation (setting, time, minor/main characters)
  - Events (at least six major events, in sequence)
  - Problem
  - Solution

Draw and/or write the purpose, orientation, events, problem, and solution in *Nine Words Max* on the respective page or poster.

- Is there one element that is more important than the others or are they all equally important?

*(RL.K.3, RL.1.3, RL.2.1, RL.2.5)*

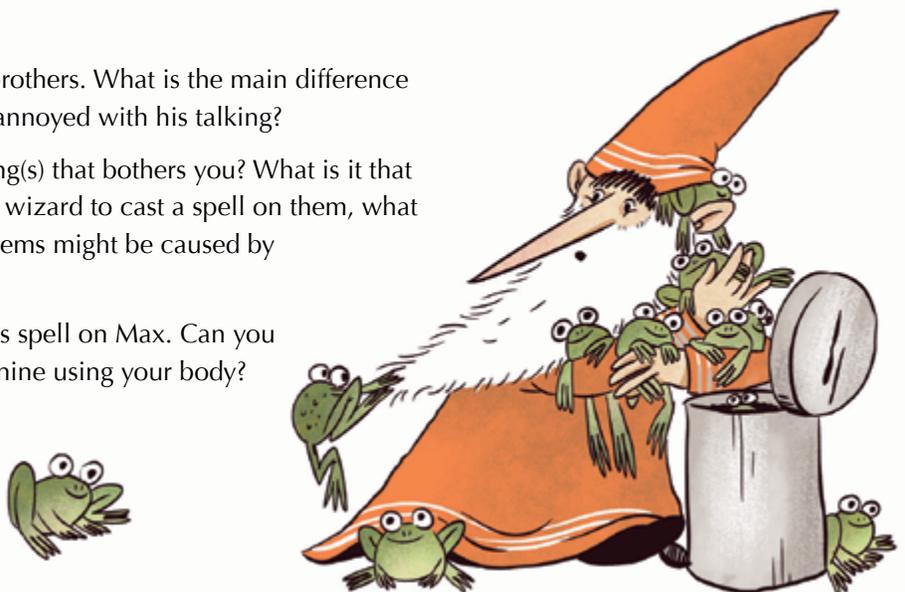
## 3. Nine words, Max

- What is the short form of the name Maximilian? Is there a short form for your name? Review the definition of “maximum” from the pre-reading discussion. Do you have a new understanding of the title?
- Maximilian’s brothers thought they had solved all their problems by asking the royal wizard to cast a spell on Maximilian. How did this end up causing more problems for the brothers and the kingdom? What do you think they could have done instead of asking the wizard to cast a spell?
- Imagine you can only speak nine words at a time. What would some of the challenges be? Would there be any advantages? Would there be any disadvantages? Try to have a conversation about something that happened at school today with a partner, but only speak in nine word segments.
- As a class or in small groups, sit in a circle and create a story with each student contributing no more than nine words at a time.

*(RL.2.3)*

## 4. Family

- Maximilian is very different from his three brothers. What is the main difference between them? Why do Max’s brothers get annoyed with his talking?
- Do you, or anybody you know, have a sibling(s) that bothers you? What is it that they do that bothers you? If you could ask a wizard to cast a spell on them, what kind of spell would you ask for? What problems might be caused by such a spell?
- Look at the pictures of the wizard casting his spell on Max. Can you think of a way to show the numbers one to nine using your body?



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

## 5. Character

- Using the illustrations as a guide, write a short description of each of Max's three brothers. What can you tell about them from the pictures?
- What do we know about Maximilian from the story? Write a brief character sketch. Include the following details:
  - What does he look like?
  - How does he act?
  - What does he like?
  - Who is in his family?
  - What do they like to do?

(*RL.1.7, RL.3.3, RL.3.7*)

## 6. Fairy Tale

- Review the common elements of a fairy tale from the pre-reading discussion. Show in words and/or pictures how *Nine Words Max* has many similarities to a traditional fairy tale.

<b>Royalty</b>	<b>Magic</b>
<b>Good Characters</b>	<b>Evil Characters</b>
<b>Happy Ending</b>	<b>Lesson</b>

- Is *Nine Words Max* a fairy tale? Why or why not?

(*RL.K.5*)

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

## 7. Satire

- What do the following remind you of in your modern day world?
  - The three princes hanging around the covered market (hanging around the mall)
  - The three prince brothers sending out unimportant messages to their friends all day (social media)
  - The three princes sitting silently, watching hours of puppet shows (TV)
- Do you think the author is trying to teach the reader a lesson? If so, what is the lesson?

*(RL.1.2)*

## 8. Hospitality

- “You call this hospitality?” Queen Spark yelled. What does the word “hospitality” mean? Make a list of what Queen Spark considered good hospitality.
- If you were royalty, visiting another kingdom, what kind of hospitality would you demand and why? Make a list of your demands.

*(RL.K.4)*

## 9. Making Amends

- Maximilian asked Queen Spark, “How does one make amends to a great queen?” What does the phrase, “make amends,” mean? Was Maximilian able to make amends with the Queen?
- Have you ever had to make amends with somebody?

*(RL.K.4)*

## 10. The King and Queen

- “But many years later, when it came time to crown a new king, the three brothers did manage to pause and ask themselves, ‘who should mother and father choose?’” List three reasons why Maximilian would be the only sensible choice for king.
- Where do you think the king and queen went on holiday? Write a postcard from them to their four sons telling them about their holiday.

# LINKS

<http://danbar-el.com/>

<http://davidhuyck.com/>

## PRAISE FOR *NINE WORDS MAX*

“Vancouver author Dan Bar-el and Idaho illustrator David Huyck bring young readers aged five to nine a fun, but cautionary tale about today’s obsession with media, fascination with speaking in 140 characters or less and the importance of conversation.”

– *The Cambridge Times*

“In this satirical comic fable, Max is the quintessential ‘mouth in search of an ear’ . . . His slapstick panel styled scenes are visually dense with humorous details – the pictorial equivalent of Max’s minutiae-saturated monologues. Bar-el’s mockery of the brothers’ texting and tweeting mode of communication is clever and apropos.”

– *The Ottawa Citizen*

“This is a great book for kids to grow up with.”

– *Ten Best Kids’ Books, Together Families*

“Award-winning author Dan Bar-el creates a charmingly sweet story that makes readers laugh. David Huyck’s illustrations are amusing and engaging. The pictures and the words work well together to make a wonderful story come to life. Children and adults of all ages will enjoy looking at the pictures and be captured by the tale. Great for a classroom read or a bedtime story, it would suit children in Grades 2, 3, or up, if reading independently.”

– *Canadian Children’s Book News*

## APPENDIX: COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.3** With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.4** Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.5** Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.2** Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3** Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.7** Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.3** Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.5** Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3** Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7** Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).