**Teaching Activities to go with Anna Smucker’s book, *Outside the Window***

* **Younger students create their own picture books.** Fold three pages of copy paper in half and staple. It will give you 12 pages.
* **Create a group book modeled on *Outside the Window.* A two-day process**
  + Read the book aloud, then go back and point out that the picture takes up most of the page, and each page has a few paragraphs on it that talk about what’s in the picture.
  + In *Outside the Window*, little birds ask questions about a little boy. Ask students to choose two species who might be looking at each other. Imagine their questions. Then brainstorm (a few pages at a time) what might happen on the next page. Try to get some words down for each page, then assign kids to create pictures.
* **Individual stories.** Ask a group of students to list windows they actually look through in their lives: schoolbus, bedroom, kitchen, classroom, etc. Each student chooses a window. Write a story about something they see happening outside the window. It can be real or made up. On the first page, write a sentence about something they see happening. On the next page, tell what happens next. Leave room at the top of the page to draw a picture of what happened.
  + Create a class book with each student supplying one page from their individual books.

**Older students: Children’s books make good exercises in plot development.** This is a child’s book with a very simple story arc: a day in the life of the baby birds and the little boy. Ask students to write their own text for each of 12 pages. Some pages might have just one sentence or one paragraph!

**Younger students: Involve other arts:**

* Have young students dramatize the story, taking the parts of the five little birds, mother bird, and a narrator. Alternative: Choose another species: dogs, cats, bears. Write a play that shows them talking with each other. Some children may want to choose their pets.
* Make paper bag puppets and use them to act out the story.

**Understanding literary elements:**

* **PLOT:** Chart to show how the two parallel stories (the mother bird answering her baby birds’ questions and the mother of the little boy getting her son ready for bed) converge at the end with the little birds and the little boy finally sound asleep.
* **CHARACTER:** How do the words of the little birds show their characters?
* **SETTING:** Contrast the two settings (outside and inside) of the story.
* **STYLE:** Note the repetition of the tiniest bird’s questions.
* **POINT OF VIEW:** What do we imagine through the imaginations of the little birds?

**ART:**

* Study the artist Stacey Schuett’s illustrations for *Outside the Window.* How does she use the first and last pages of the book to extend the story into the past, before the birds have hatched and then into the future: the empty next after the birds have grown up and flown away.
* Examine the endpapers (first and last pages) of other books. Most are plain or have some sort of designs. Create your own endpapers to go with the story in one of your favorite books.
* Look at the title, *Outside the Window*, on the cover of the book. The artist used a special color blue. It’s called “Robin’s Egg Blue.” Why do you think she used that color of blue?
* Look at the artist’s illustration on the page where the mother is reading a story to the little boy. Do you recognize the book she’s reading? (It’s *Outside the Window*!)