



## TADPOLE'S PROMISE

by  
Jeanne Willis

Where the willow tree meets the water, a tadpole met a caterpillar. They gazed into each other's tiny eyes...and fell in love. He is her "shiny black pearl", and she is his "beautiful rainbow". "I love everything about you," said the caterpillar. "Promise you'll never change." And foolishly the tadpole promised.....  
But we all know that tadpoles don't stay the same, and neither do caterpillars.

When they next meet, he has sprouted two legs. She forgives him, but after he breaks his promise twice more and now looks more like a frog than her "shiny black pearl," the lovelorn larva ends the affair and cries herself to sleep (sequestered in a cocoon). Meanwhile, the melancholy frog sulks around the pond, making heart-shaped air bubbles that rise to the surface and burst. When the caterpillar awakens, now a butterfly, she decides to forgive her beloved and flies above the water to find him. She is not even able to complete the sentence, "Have you seen my shiny black ?" when, without a thought, the frog swallows her whole, and then returns to wondering about whatever happened to his "beautiful rainbow."

This is a wonderful story to use to introduce, or reinforce, the concept of life cycles. But, **WARNING**, this may not be suitable to read to younger children. We recommend fifth (maybe fourth) grade or higher. Although the ending is a wonderful and certainly realistic twist, it might be a little harsh for younger children.

To transition to this activity, review with your students the life cycles of frogs and butterflies. Talk about the metamorphosis which occurs and the various stages of development. If desired, re-read the book and highlight the various stages. (Note: The first stage (egg) is actually on the title page.)

**MATERIALS:** Science journals, pencils, crayons or colored pencils.

**ACTIVITY:** Have your students describe and depict the life cycles of these two organisms in their science journals (or on paper if you do not have them keep

science journals). This is a good sequencing activity; encourage them to use ordinals numbers and/or terms such as "next", "then", or "finally". Talk with them about the differences and similarities between the two cycles. Butterflies go through four stages: egg, larva, pupa, adult. Frogs go through five (scientists will often say four) stages, egg, tadpole, tadpole with legs, tadpole with legs and arms, frog (adult). In either case it is considered complete metamorphosis which occurs when the adult has a totally different appearance than the "infant."

**TEACHER NOTES:** Here are two additional books that could be used also.

Cain, Sheridan. Look Out For the Big Bad Fish. Illus. by Tanya Linch. Little Tiger Press, c1998. ISBN#1-8884-4427-4. In his journeys around the lily pond, Tadpole meets other star jumpers--Lamb, Rabbit, and Grasshopper, but has no luck with his leaps until he encounters the notorious Big Bad Fish; he is so scared that he leaps all the way back home.

Carle, Eric. The Very Hungry Caterpillar NY: Philomel, c1994. ISBN#0-3992-2690-7. A small caterpillar eats his way through a variety of foods on his way to becoming a butterfly.

**STANDARDS:**

**BSL:** 1.2, 1.5, 1.11, 4.1, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 9.3, 9.7, 12.3

**NCTM:** 2a, 3b, 4d, 6a, 6b, 6c, 9b, 13a, 13b

**SCS:** C1, C2, C3

Willis, Jeanne. Tadpole's Promise. Illus. by Tony Ross. NY: Simon & Schuster, c2003. ISBN# 0-6898-6524-4.