EK BOOKS
TEACHER NOTES & RESOURCES

Title: Toy Mountain
Author: Stef Gemmill
Illustrator: Katherine Hall
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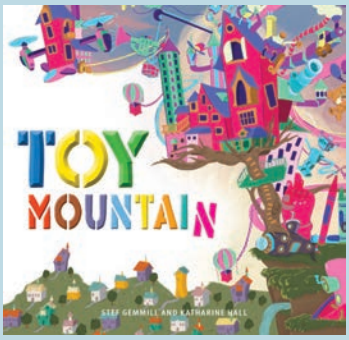


SYNOPSIS:

Sam is tired of his toys. Why would he want his Grandma's old trainset and teddy when there's a toy factory high up in the clouds that makes rumbly red toys, grumbly green toys and so much more? In this important story about reducing waste and taking responsibility for the environment, Sam is about to find out.

Toy Mountain is a quirky story about 5-year-old Sam's chance to become a toy tester for the Tiny Hands Toy factory. After Sam signs up for his exciting new task, he quickly accumulates a pile of plastic, clunky toys, discarding the well-loved toys handed down to him from his Grandma. But one by one and plonk! by plonk!, his shiny new toys start to break. Soon enough, Sam has a mountain of broken toys that just won't stop growing!

This colourful and whimsically illustrated story highlights the waste that results from 'consumer culture', and the value of looking after our belongings. Inspired by the author's childhood of hand-me-down toys, it empowers children to take sustainability into their own hands through their toy purchases. This is a vitally important message in a world where we generate 6.3 billion tonnes of plastic each year, 79% of which goes into landfill.

Children and adults alike will find themselves cheering Sam along as he rescues his treasured old toys from being lost under a growing mound of broken plastic, and realises why they're so special after all.

THEMES:

Sustainability/Waste/Environment. Responsibility. Consumerism.

SELLING POINTS:

- Outlines the plastic waste crisis in a way that is simple for children to understand, and shows them how they can help.
- Whimsical illustrations depict this playful and imaginative story.
- Will encourage children to take more responsibility for looking after the environment.
- Appeals to a generation of children who are already passionate about sustainability.

TEACHER NOTES: Toy Mountain

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

Each day I try to make a small difference to ensure our planet can be a green and beautiful place for my children to grow up in. I am surrounded by oceans and forests where I live. But I know that what we are doing to stop pollution, alleviate climate change and reduce waste is not enough. I wanted to write a story that motivated children to make a change by considering how some of their choices are damaging the planet.

WRITING STYLE:

Most of the storyline in *Toy Mountain* focuses on the short-lived attraction of throwaway toys that end up in landfill, adding to the waste pile that is impacting our planet. The attraction of many toys often lies in their shiny boxes, their movements and sounds they make. Through my word selection, I recreated the snip and rip of the toy package being opened and the whiz and whir of the wheels on a shiny new toy. Through onomatopoeia, repetition and active language, *Toy Mountain* is intended to immerse children on a roller coaster ride with Sam as he is torn between the attraction of new toys and the loss of his worn but treasured ones.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

My intent while creating these illustrations is to take you into a fun, wondrous world. I have created colourful and vibrant illustrations that bring atmosphere, joy and adventure to the story. I particularly wanted to depict the wonders of childhood and create a window into the world as a child sees it: bright colours and an innocent sense of fun. The soft touch to these illustrations is meant to express the intended mood whether it be tranquillity, fun or an abundance of energy.

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

Stef Gemmill is a children's author and former technical writer, teacher, and freelance music journalist. After becoming a Mum, she swapped the mosh pit for toys and tantrums and became an author of children's picture books. She won the children's category of the International Rubery Book Awards with her picture book A Home For Luna in 2020.

Katharine Hall is an illustrator who tells stories that translate across languages, specialising in ink work and digital design. Her lively, happy-go-lucky style is inspired by a few simple loves: intricate details, fluffy cats, funny stories, bright colours, and nature.

INTERVIEW:

AUTHOR

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

Most stories start as a spark of an idea, and nothing can be more rewarding than seeing your story, and in particular your characters, come to life in a picture book. Katharine's vibrant colours and whacky toys in a magical land brought my vision to life and will be incredibly appealing to children.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

The story hovers between our real world and a fantasy world and this created some challenges. I wanted to build a world which was creative and magical, but believable too. We know that the Tiny Hands Toy factory up in the clouds is not real, but children are smart and can see the destruction other factories cause to our environment, and how much landfill can damage and pollute our planet. I hope they will be inspired too act on this through their own decisions.

What is the inspiration for this story?

As a child I had just a handful of hand-me-down toys. I loved them so much, in particular Jan the blonde doll and a green soft toy I called Cookie. There were many outdoor picnics, tricycle rides and bedtime cuddles and kisses with those two. As a result, they were quite tattered and raggedy. As Cookie's seams started to fall apart and with Jan losing an eye, my mother suggested we take them to the Toy Hospital. After a short stay at the toy shop hospital, the toys returned repaired and the picnics were on once more. Never did it cross my mind that we would discard these treasured toys for new ones. On having my own children I discovered how 'disposable' and short lived 21st century toys are and wanted to capture the nostalgia associated with the quality toys of past times.

ILLUSTRATOR

What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.

I create all of my illustrations digitally. First, I work with shapes and I collage bits together to create characters and environments. Once I have had a play and explored different options, I refine these sketches.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

I thoroughly enjoyed creating the colourful, fun world that this story is based in.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

Depicting the correct mood of the illustrations through colour.

TEACHER NOTES: Toy Mountain

TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

N.B. These questions and activities can be adapted to suit the experience and ability of students.

Before Reading

- Show children your favourite childhood toy, or prior to reading, ask them to bring their favourite toy to show. Discuss why this one is special to you. Does it matter if it's old and tattered? Share a story about an experience with your favourite toy.
- Now show children a new, popular toy, or the latest toy catalogue. What is the appeal of the new toy/s? Do you think the toy/s will last a long time? What is it made of?
- Is it important to have lots of toys? Why or why not?
- What happens to toys and other things that people don't want anymore? Where do you think they go?
- Look at the cover of Toy Mountain. What do you see? What do you think this story might be about? What does the title tell you about this story?

During Reading

- How is Sam feeling about his old toys?
- How do you think Grandma feels about Sam wanting to be a toy tester?
- What does it mean when the toys go 'plonk!'?
- Does Sam still enjoy receiving and testing the toys? What do you think he will do next?

After Reading

- What was the story about?
- What did you learn about the value of old toys versus the value of new ones?
- How did this story make you feel? Have you changed your thinking about toy ownership in any way?
- How did Sam's feelings about receiving the new toys change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- What do you like about the illustrations? What do you notice about Sam's facial expressions and body language throughout the story? Can you tell what he is feeling in those moments? How does the illustrator use colour and perspective to add to the feelings towards the toys?
- How would you feel if boxes of toys turned up at your door?
- How did Grandma describe Sam at the beginning of the story? Why do you think the way he shared with his brother changed? How might Max have felt about Sam's unwillingness to share the new toys?
- Why do you think Mum thought Sam would enjoy the toy testing? Would she have been happy with the end result? Why or why not?
- Why didn't Grandma feel happy for Sam? Why were the old toys important to her?
- Why did the toys go 'plink!' and 'plonk!'? What made them break? Was Sam not being careful or were the toys built badly?
- What do you think Sam and his family might do with the mountain of broken toys?
- What is landfill? How is the story Toy Mountain similar to real-life landfill?
- How do you think nature and the environment might be affected by this 'rubbish'?
- In what ways can we reduce the amount of rubbish being wasted?
- What is 'consumerism'? Discuss its implications.
- What was the most important thing Sam learned from his toy testing experience?
- What kinds of words has the author used to describe the sounds and actions in the story? Which words reflect a positive tone and which are negative in meaning?

ENGLISH

Vocabulary: Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives

(ACELA1437) (ACELA1452) (ACELA1454) (ACELA1468) (ACELA1470) (ACELY1649) (ACELY1651) (ACELY1659) (ACELY1661)

- Find words in the text that describe the names, actions and appearances of the toys and Sam's feelings towards them. Separate these into three columns: nouns, verbs and adjectives.
    - Nouns include: *Tiny Hands Toy Factory, Sam, Ted, Grandma, wheels, tracks, flaps, knobs, toys, horns, boxes, mountain, drum, duck, train…*
    - Verbs include: *rumbled, grumbled, plinked, sighed, snipped, ripped, popped, flopped, dreamed, pinged, hooted, tested, tumbled, spilled, teetered, tottered, hugged, smiled…*
    - Adjectives include: *busy, old, new, little, wobbly, silver, big, wide, high, special…*
- Write a sentence using nouns, verbs and adjectives from the list. Draw a picture to match.

Vocabulary: Onomatopoeia

(ACELA1439) (ACELA1823) (ACELT1579) (ACELT1585) (ACELT1592)

Onomatopoeia is the formation of a word from a sound associated with the name.

- Find the 'sound words' in the text, and write these in a 'mountain' or 'toy' shape of your choice (Templates provided. See BLM 1, 2, 3.).
    - Examples include: rumbled, grumbled, plinked, ding-dong, clickety-clacked, plonk, pinged, hooted, honked, beep, bang, tap, tap-a-tapped, quack, wheeze, crash, toot…

Comprehension: Story Sequencing

(ACELA1447) (ACELA1463) (ACELT1578) (ACELT1785) (ACELT1584) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670)

- Complete a story sequence mountain. Start with the top, or first sentence, to sequence the story in order.
    - *Easy*:
        1. Sam wants to be a toy tester.
        2. Sam plays with his new toys over and over again.
        3. The toys begin to go plonk.
        4. Max and Grandma help Sam save his old toys.

    - *Advanced*:
        1. Busy hands made toys in the Tiny Hands Toy factory.
        2. 'I only have old ones', Sam said to his Grandma. He sighed.
        3. Ding-dong! One big box arrived.
        4. Sam snipped and ripped. 'Don't touch, Max. They're mine!'
        5. As Sam tested his toys, they began to go plonk.
        6. He tossed the toys high. Piling up, up, up on top of a toy mountain.
        7. Ted was stuck. The toy mountain teetered and tottered… CRASH!
        8. Sam's special toys were home.

TEACHER NOTES: Toy Mountain

Comprehension: Understanding the Text

(ACELT1575) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1578) (ACELT1580) (ACELT1581) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1584) (ACELT1586) (ACELT1591) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670)

- Through writing and discussion, answer comprehension questions relating to the story, such as:
    - Knowledge: Who was in the story? What was the problem? Why did Sam become a toy tester? Where did the toys come from? How did Sam test the toys?
    - Comprehension: Retell the story in your own words. What was the main idea? Write down five new toys that Sam played with.
    - Application: Sam was a good toy tester because _____. Why was sharing toys with brother Max important? Why was it significant that Sam learned about the value of his old toys?
    - Analysis: Sort the toys into categories (i.e. vehicles, soft toys, battery-operated, action figures, sports equipment, etc). Draw a diagram of the parts of one of the toys. How do the new toys compare with the quality of Sam's old ones?
    - Synthesis: Predict how Sam might think about buying new toys in the future. What are the differences between needs and wants? What other ideas can you think of to help and teach others about sustainability and not being wasteful?
    - Evaluation: Do you agree with Sam giving up toy testing? What do you think about the way the toy testing affected his relationship with his brother? What is the most important thing the story is teaching us? How would you choose which toys are worth buying or not?

Reading

(ACELA1450) (ACELA1453) (ACELT1575) (ACELT1577) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1785) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1584) (ACELT1589) (ACELT1590) (ACELT1591) (ACELY1645) (ACELY1648) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1655) (ACELY1659) (ACELY1665) (ACELY1669) (ACELY1670)

- Read other books and texts about toys; lost or loved toys, toy history, toy production, toy catalogues, etc. These can be both fiction and non-fiction.

Narrative Writing

(ACELT1581) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1586) (ACELY1651) (ACELY1661) (ACELY1662) (ACELY1671) (ACELY1672)

- Imagine you were a toy tester or a toy maker for the Tiny Hands Toy factory. What kinds of toys would you see in the factory? What would your job be? What things could go wrong? How will the problem/s be resolved? Begin your narrative with a sizzling start, such as dialogue, onomatopoeia

Creative Writing: Innovation on Text

(ACELA1435) (ACELA1451) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1831) (ACELT1582) (ACELT1832) (ACELT1833)

- Brainstorm ideas about what makes your favourite toy/s special. Begin with the sentence, 'My favourite toy is special because…' or 'I like to play with… because…'. Illustrate.

Letter Writing

(ACELA1430) (ACELA1437) (ACELA1439) (ACELA1460) (ACELA1447) (ACELA1463) (ACELT1585)

- Write a letter to a toy company (real or imagined) with feedback on their products. Think about what kinds of toys are working well, and which ones are not, and why. Can you make suggestions to the company for improvement? How can they consider becoming more environmentally sustainable? Is there a need to modify the materials they use?

Thinking Tools

(ACELA1429) (ACELT1575) (ACELT1783) (ACELT1583) (ACELT1589) (ACELY1650) (ACELY1660) (ACELY1670) (ACELT1783)

- *Venn Diagram*: Complete a Venn Diagram to compare the similarities and differences between Sam's old toys and his new toys. Think about their durability, 'fun' factor, appearances, what they were made from, and how they operated. See BLM 4.
- *Mind Map*: Brainstorm and map out different topics, including:
    - Toys (types, materials, purpose, cost, durability, etc.).
    - Reducing Waste (ways to re-use or recycle, buying sustainable products, impacts of waste, making donations, attitudes towards consumerism, etc.).
- *PMI Chart (Plus, Minus, Interesting)*: Complete the PMI chart with the title 'I'm a Toy Tester'. What are the positives? What are the negatives? What are the interesting aspects or consequences for this situation? See BLM 5.

MATHEMATICS

Number: Stacking Boxes / Blocks

(ACMNA001) (ACMNA002) (ACMNA004) (ACMNA012) (ACMNA013) (ACMNA015) (ACMNA029) (ACMNA030)

'One big box arrived.' 'Two big boxes arrived.'

- Use boxes or blocks to create a 'toy mountain' by counting, adding on and/or subtracting 'boxes'. Write a number story, demonstrate with blocks, and record the equations. For example, 'One big box arrived, then three more boxes arrived at Sam's door. How many boxes of toys are there altogether? 1 + 3 = 4.'
- Extend beyond 10, 20, 50, 100, etc., depending on the students' level.

Measurement – Location and Transformation: Toy Prepositions

(ACMMG010) (ACMMG023) (ACMMG044)

- Using real toys or pictures of toys, or by identifying those in the book, follow instructions to position the toys in a location using prepositional language such as, '*the train is **on** the tracks*', '*the duck is **next** to the drum*', '*the toys are **in** the box*', '*the clown is **behind** the skateboard*', '*the teddy is **under** the mountain*', and so on.
- Extension: Create a map / floorplan (on grid paper) of the Tiny Hands Toy factory, each room for particular toys. Students direct each other to various spaces in the factory to find specific items, using language like ***'turn left'***, '***half turn to the right***', '***move forward 3 spaces***', and so on.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Healthy Mind / Healthy Body Ideas:

(ACPPS003) (ACPPS004) (ACPPS005) (ACPPS006) (ACPPS017) (ACPPS018) (ACPPS020) (ACPPS021) (ACPMP008) (ACPMP012) (ACPMP025) (ACPMP028)

- Sharing toys and games with family members and friends
- Skittles/bowling
- Roller-skating
- Kite/drone flying
- Throwing/chasing aeroplanes and race cars/motorbikes
- Throwing and catching ball games
- Water/pool play
- Skateboarding
- Gardening
- Trampoline jumping
- Dramatic role play
- Playing musical instruments
- Painting

STEAM – SCIENCE / ARTS

Sustainable Toys

Design, create and evaluate your own hand-made toy from re-useable or recyclable materials, including cereal boxes, bottles, lids, repurposed household items, old fabrics, paper products, etc.

Rainbow Paper Spinners:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) (ACSHE013) (ACSIS012) / Technology (ACTDEK002)

- Attach different coloured strips of paper to a wooden skewer. As it twirls, it spins out into a ball shape. Optional: add your own (paper) toy factory at the top of the rainbow!
- Instructions can be found here: https://teachbesideme.com/twirligig-rainbow-paper-spinner-toy
- Science involved – physical forces. The energy produced by the wind as the spinner rotates catches the air and lifts the strips of paper on its axle.

Toy Mountain Climber:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) (ACSIS024) (ACSIS038) / Technology (ACTDEK002)

- Using one of the toy templates (robot, teddy, or other) on cardstock, coloured pencils / markers, a straw and string, children can climb their toy up a 'mountain' by pulling on the strings.
- Instructions can be found here: https://buggyandbuddy.com/robot-craft-for-kids-free-printable-gliding-robot
- Science and engineering involved – physics, mechanics and pulleys, making predictions. Using a pulley, the toy is moved in a different direction (upwards) by force over a distance.

TEACHER NOTES: Toy Mountain

Clothes Peg Aeroplane:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033)

- Make your own flying aeroplane by hot gluing pop sticks to the top and bottom of a clothes peg, a smaller pop stick on the rear for the tail wing, and optional smaller pieces at the front for the propellor. Use coloured markers or paint to decorate.
- Instructions can be found here: https://onelittleproject.com/clothespin-airplanes/
- Science involved: forces and flight. Air moving over and under the wings provides an upward lift force on the plane. Air pushing back against the plane creates a drag force, slowing it down.

Skittles / Bowling:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) (ACSIS011)

- Decorate your own plastic bottles (6 – 10) with paper, paint or washi tape, and line them up in a triangular formation. Using a tennis ball (or other ball), play skittles and see how many bottles can be knocked over at once.
- Science involved – physics and Newton's law of motion. The rolling ball unbalances the forces of friction (moving ball) and gravity (pins/skittles staying on the ground) to knock down the pins.

Kites:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) / Technology (ACTDEK002) (ACTDEP007)

- There are many variations on kite-making. Create a kite shape of your choice, or a dragon kite like in the book, using coloured cardstock and string. Kites can also be made from plastic bags and straws, or paper plates, fabric or newspaper.
- Science involved – forces and flight. Lift is the upward force that pushes the kite into the air. This is stronger than the pull of gravity and air resistance (or drag).

Balloon-powered car or train (or rocket):

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) (ACSIS014) (ACSIS024) (ACSIS026) (ACSIS042) / Technology (ACTDEK002) (ACTDEP007)

- Design and build a balloon-powered LEGO or paper roll car or train that will be propelled by the air from the balloon. You will need LEGO bricks with wheels, or a paper roll attached to bottle lids on skewers. Blow up the balloon and hold the end shut while you attach it to the car / train. Let go and see how far it goes! Use a measuring tape and record multiple events.
- Alternatively, make a balloon rocket by attaching a blown-up balloon to a long piece of string (through a straw), held up (e.g. by doorknobs) over a distance, then releasing the balloon to propel it across the string.
- Science and engineering involved – physics of force and motion. The external force of the air pushes the car forward.

Paper Roll Toys:

Technology (ACTDEK002) (ACTDEP007)

- Paper rolls and cardboard tubes can be repurposed to become any toy with coloured paper, craft items and creativity. Ideas include space rockets, robots, trains, animals, ball game, puppets, musical shakers, binoculars, etc.
- Engineering involved – understanding of simple mechanics by adding moveable parts such as hinges, elastic bands and split pins.

DIY Drum Kit:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSIS011) (ACSIS024) (ACSSU020) / Music (ACAMUM080) (ACAMUM082)

- Using graduating sized tin cans or paper cups, explore the different notes heard when tapping on the drums. You will also need balloons and elastic bands to stretch over and secure to the cans. For drumsticks, use dowels and beads with a hole the same size, to glue on top.
- Science involved – Striking the drum changes the shape and compresses the air inside the can, which transmits to the can and reflects back, creating a vibration.

Pull-Along Duckie Toy:

Science (ACSSU005) (ACSSU033) / Technology (ACTDEK002)

- Pull your own quacking duckie (or toy of your choice) wherever you go! You will need a toy duck (or make your own), a wood block or small cardboard box (for the toy to sit on), buttons/beads or lids (with a hole in the centre) for the wheels, skewers (to insert through the wheels), string, glue and decorative papers/paint.
- Science and engineering involved – simple mechanics and the physics of motion. The wheel and axle system uses momentum and torque against the force of gravity. A pull is when you force an object closer to you, creating motion.

VISUAL ARTS

Sew / No-Sew Stuffed Animals

(ACAVAM107)

- Depending on the ability of the students, create a stuffed teddy (or animal of your choice), like Sam's Ted. A simple toy can be made by gluing two pieces of felt together with stuffing placed in the centre. Alternatively, extend students' fine motor skills with easy sewing loops through two pieces of felt or other fabric. Students can either draw or trace their pattern onto the fabric. Add details such as eyes and other body parts with your choice of materials. Don't forget to leave a hole to push the stuffing into before closing it all up!

Recycled Paper Collage / Painting

(ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM108)

- Use a range of recycled paper and materials to create a collage, including old magazines, newspaper, coloured and patterned paper, cardboard, and so on. Overlap your collage background with a painted picture. Recreate a page from the book, or design your own scene featuring your favourite toys.

Toy Mountain Activity Sheet

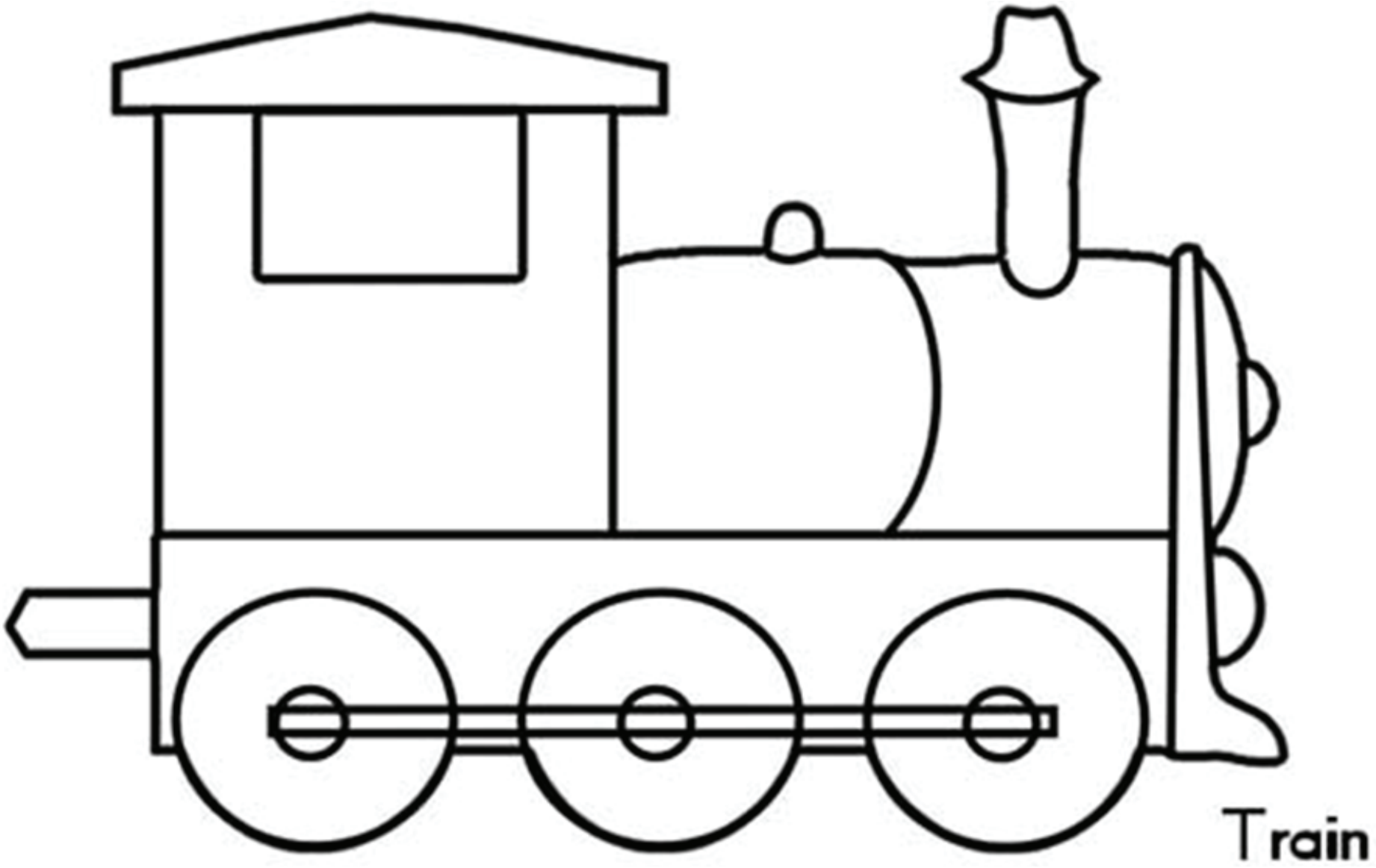
BLM 1

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Toy Mountain Activity Sheet

BLM 2

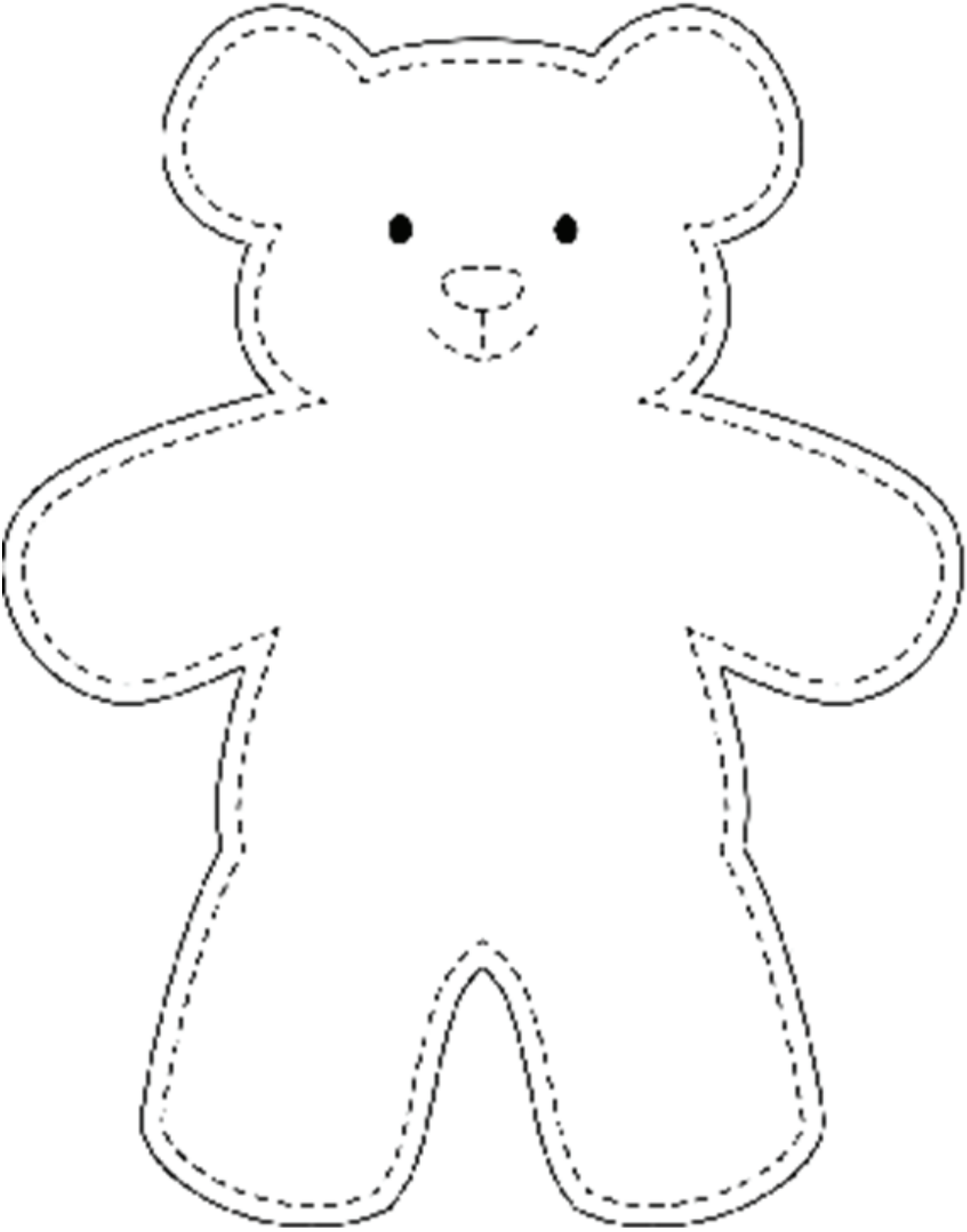
Name: _____ **Date:** _____



Toy Mountain Activity Sheet BLM 3

Name: _____

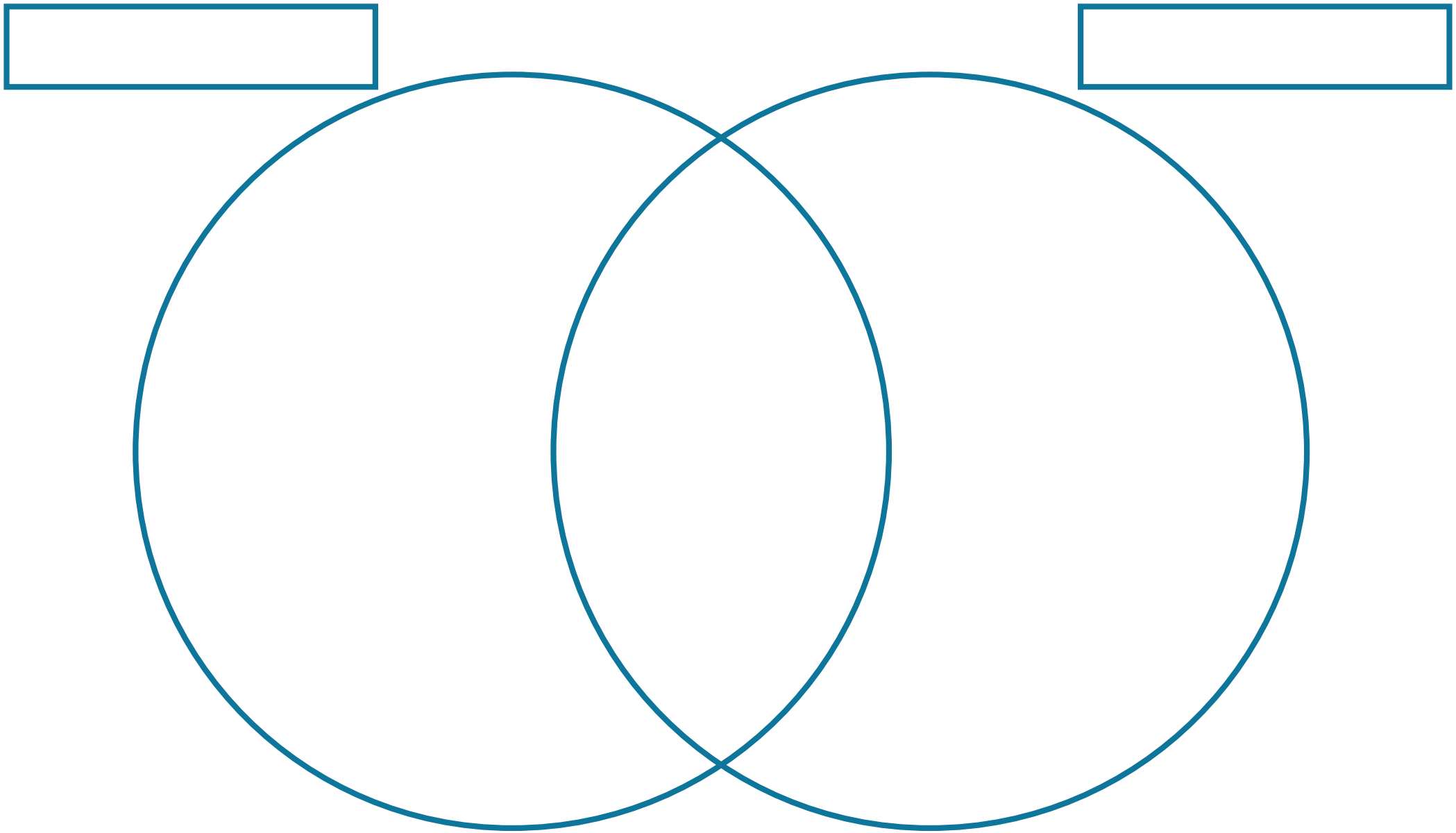
Date: _____



Toy Mountain Activity Sheet

BLM 4

Name: _____ **Date:** _____



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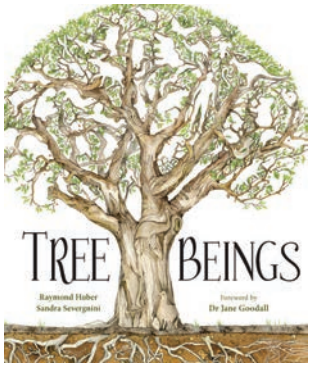

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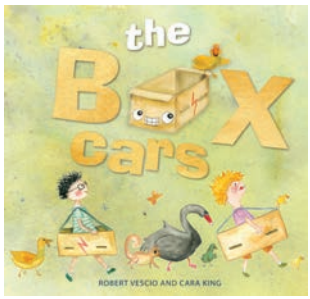

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