

The Borrowers: Engineering a Tiny World

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will dive into the miniature world of Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*. They will explore the concepts of perspective, resourcefulness, and "upcycling" by looking at the world through the eyes of Pod, Homily, and Arrietty Clock. Students will transition from readers to "Borrower Engineers" as they design their own miniature inventions using everyday household items.

Materials Needed

- The book *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton (or a summary of the first three chapters)
- "The Scavenger Hunt" list (provided in the lesson)
- Assorted household "junk" (e.g., bottle caps, paper clips, rubber bands, toothpicks, safety pins, old buttons, string)
- A small notebook or "Field Journal"
- Drawing materials (pencils, colored pencils)
- Glue or tape

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Analyze** how the author uses perspective to make ordinary objects seem extraordinary.
- **Define** the difference between "borrowing" (as defined by the Clocks) and stealing.
- **Design and Build** a functional miniature tool or piece of furniture using repurposed materials.
- **Communicate** the purpose and "engineering" behind their creation.

1. Introduction: The Giant's Perspective (The Hook)

The Scenario: Imagine you have suddenly shrunk to the size of a pencil. You are standing on the kitchen floor. The refrigerator is now a skyscraper. A spilled drop of juice is a sticky pond. To survive, you can't go to a store; you have to find things "giants" (humans) have lost or forgotten and turn them into what you need.

Discussion Questions:

- If you needed to climb up to the kitchen counter, what item in this room could you use as a ladder?
- What could you use as a bed? A shield? A bathtub?

The Goal: Today, we aren't just reading about Borrowers; we are becoming them. We will learn how to see the "extraordinary" in the "ordinary."

2. Content & Practice: The Art of the Borrow (I Do / We Do)

The Borrower Philosophy (I Do)

In the book, Pod Clock says, "*Human beans are for Borrowers to live off of.*" Discuss the three main rules of being a Borrower:

1. **Don't be seen:** If a human sees you, your life is in danger.
2. **Only take what won't be missed:** A single safety pin is a treasure; a whole box is a risk.
3. **Use everything:** Nothing is "trash." A postage stamp is a framed painting; a cigar box is a master bedroom.

Analyzing the Text (We Do)

Read a passage describing the Clocks' home under the floorboards. Identify three items they repurposed. For example:

- *Item:* Thimble. *New Use:* Cooking pot.
- *Item:* Blotting paper. *New Use:* Rug/carpet.
- **Activity:** Look at a common paperclip. Together, brainstorm five different ways a Borrower might use it (e.g., a door latch, a meat hook, a structural beam, a tool for picking locks, a hair clip).

3. The Scavenger Challenge (Guided Practice)

Before building, the student must "borrow" their supplies. Give the student 10 minutes to find the following items around the house/classroom (with permission!):

- Something shiny that is not jewelry.
- Something stretchy that is not a toy.
- Something wooden that is smaller than a finger.
- Something round that used to be part of a container.
- Something "fuzzy" or "soft" that is a scrap of something else.

4. Independent Project: The Borrower Blueprint (You Do)

The Task: Create a "New Invention" for Arrietty. She is tired of staying under the floorboards and wants a tool to help her explore the garden or the high shelves in the kitchen.

Step 1: The Blueprint. In your Field Journal, draw your invention. Label the parts based on what they **originally** were. (Example: "The High-Climber 3000" made from a fork, a rubber band, and a spool of thread).

Step 2: The Build. Use your scavenged materials to build a prototype of your invention. It doesn't have to work for a "giant," but it must look like it would work for a Borrower!

Step 3: The Pitch. Prepare a 1-minute explanation of your tool. Explain:

- What is it called?
- How does it help a Borrower stay safe or find food?
- Why won't the "human beans" miss the items you used to make it?

5. Conclusion & Recap

Summary: Today we explored how Mary Norton uses tiny details to build a huge world. We learned that resourcefulness means seeing the potential in things others throw away.

Reflective Check:

- What was the hardest part about thinking "small"?
- How does Arrietty's desire to see the world change the way she "borrows" compared to her father, Pod?
- **Takeaway:** Next time you lose a sock or a button, don't just assume it's gone—maybe it's just been "borrowed" for a very important purpose!

Assessment

Formative Assessment: Observe the student during the "We Do" brainstorming session. Can they identify creative uses for a paperclip? Check the "Scavenger Hunt" results for engagement.

Summative Assessment: Evaluate the "Borrower Blueprint" and Prototype based on the following Success Criteria:

- **Creativity:** Did the student repurpose at least 3 different types of materials?
- **Perspective:** Is the invention scaled appropriately for a 4-inch tall person?
- **Communication:** Did the student clearly explain the "borrowing" logic behind their invention?
- **Connection:** Does the student's journal entry reflect an understanding of the book's themes?

Adaptability & Differentiation

- **For the Reluctant Writer:** Allow them to record their "Pitch" as a video or voice memo instead of writing a long journal entry.
- **For the Advanced Learner:** Ask them to write a "User Manual" for their invention from the perspective of Pod Clock, including safety warnings about avoiding the cat or the "human beans."
- **For the Kinetic Learner:** Build a 1:1 scale "Borrower Room" inside a shoebox using only the scavenged items.
- **Digital Option:** If materials aren't available, use a digital design tool (like Tinkercad) to model the invention, or create a digital collage of "borrowed" items found in online photos.