Alexander, Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday
By Judith Viorst
Illustrated by ray Cruz and Robin Preiss Glasser (in the style of Ray Cruz)
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Introduction:
Students will be introduced to Alexander as a character. He is a boy close to their age (we don’t know his actual age but we’re assuming he’s an average child that most children can relate to without knowing the actual age) the teacher will begin by asking students if they have ever had a hard time saving money. A mini discussion about the types of things students save money to buy and how they have gone about saving money will take place. The teacher will wrap up discussion and begin reading the story.

Plot summary:
Alexander is a little boy who always seems to be doing things wrong. In this story he receives a dollar from his grandparents. As the story progresses we watch as Alexander tries in vain to save his money but always finds a way to spend it. In the end Alexander has no money, just bus tokens.

Math Activities
1. Extension of the Story. After reading the story completely the teacher hands each child or each group of children a play dollar and a bank with change in it. As the teacher reads through the story again, more slowly this time, the children subtract money from a dollar at the same time as Alexander does in the story. One child is asked to map the calculations on the board for everyone to watch and follow along. Later, the teacher will ask students to think of other combinations that would spend a dollar.

   Materials needed: Set of play money.
   (Dollars, nickels, dimes, quarters and pennies)

2. Graphing. Put the students into groups. Ask each group to represent a character in the story. They can be Anthony, Nick or Alexander. Then ask the children to go back through the story and record how much money each character earns and spends using a table and a graph. Separate the story into equal sections so that the class will have the same time periods to plot. For example: group one records Anthony’s earnings and spending on pages 35-47. Group two would track Alexander for those same pages while group three would record Nick for pages 35-47 as well. When graphs are completed they will be posted on a bulletin board and the teacher will point out the differences found in the graphs. One graph can then be constructed with different colors or symbols to represent each boy’s money.

   Materials needed: Graph paper
   Individual copies of the book
   Markers of Crayons
3. **Probability.** Alexander makes bets with his brothers and his mother to try and earn more money. Take the betting situation between Alexander and his mother and figure out the probability of Alexander winning the bet. Pair the students and have them act out the betting scene while recording the number of possibilities. This will start out a lesson of probability with equally likely outcomes. Each pair of students should record 25-30 trials of the bet as described in the book then talk about the results.

   *Materials needed:* Marbles  
   Scratch Paper for computations  
   Overhead sheets from the book that show betting scene, page 48.

4. **Writing Number Puzzles.** Alexander’s story is an example of a number story. Point out the different components of Alexander’s story. Map out his total and add and subtract from it as the story is read through a second and third time. Have students follow along in their books. As a group, invent a character that spends and loses money similar to the way Alexander did in the story. Write the story on the board. Ask students to get in pairs and write their own number puzzle stories. They must have a minimum of six different values to be subtracted from a set mount of money depending on the type of lesson. Large and small values can be used for subtraction and addition practice.  

   *NOTE:* Since this activity does involve writing it could be extended as a language arts project where students write drafts of the story and turn in a formal copy. It could even be blended with an art assignment where children illustrate parts of the story to make their own storybooks.  

   *Materials needed:* Individual copies of the book  
   Large Piece of Paper in front of room to record class number puzzle  
   Scratch paper for computations

5. **Spinner Money.** Students work in pairs with each pair having a spinner. The spinner will have amounts of 1¢, 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, and 50¢. Each student will have a scratch paper to keep track of their total. Students take turns spinning and adding the amount they spun to the previous amount. The game is over when one student reaches $1.00. Variations: Money amounts could be written in words, as decimal amounts or as pictures of coins. Start with one dollar and subtract.  

   *Materials needed:* Spinner  
   Scratch paper for computations