

LESSON PLAN • TEACHER NOTES

Belonging in the Early Years

The Great Harvest Maze | Pumpkin | Ages 3–5 | Belonging

At a glance

Book	*The Great Harvest Maze* (Pumpkin's Patch)
Character	Pumpkin, who has “the biggest welcome in the whole wide patch”
Ages	3–5
Focus	Belonging: everyone is welcome, everyone plays, nobody gets left out
Time	30–40 minutes (can be split over two days)
You need	The book, a basket of real pebbles, the “My Pebble Belongs!” sheet (one per child), crayons, the “Every Pebble Belongs!” display poster
Big idea	“We didn't win because we're all the same. We won because we're all different, and nobody got left out.”

Learning goals

By the end of the lesson, children will be able to:

- Say or show one way Pumpkin made his friends feel welcome
- Notice that the friends in Pumpkin's Patch are all different, and that each one helped
- Name one thing that makes them special
- Practice one welcoming action: a smile, a wave, “Come and play!” or making room in a circle

Meet Pumpkin



Pumpkin isn't the biggest pumpkin. He isn't the roundest pumpkin. And his stem is a little bit wonky. But Pumpkin has the biggest welcome in the whole wide patch. “Come in, come in!” he calls. “There's always room for one more!”

In *The Great Harvest Maze*, Zuki wants to take only the fastest friends to the maze. Pumpkin smiles his big, wonky smile and says, **“In Pumpkin's Patch, everybody plays. From the very start.”** Every friend ends up helping in their own way, and Sammy, who remembers patterns, leads them to the Golden Bell. That evening every friend adds a pebble to Sammy's row. “Every pebble was different. And every pebble belonged.”

What belonging means for 3–5s

Young children feel belonging through everyday experiences, long before they can talk about it. They belong when:

They are expected. Their name is said with warmth, their peg and photo are there, and someone notices when they arrive.

They are included from the start, not added on later. Just like Pumpkin's rule: everybody plays.

Their differences are seen as gifts. Bea rolls, Della signs, Sammy notices patterns, Tully speaks more than one language. Each one helps.

They can contribute. Having a job and being needed matters, like every friend helping in the maze.

Say it simply: “Belonging means you are part of the group, just the way you are. In Pumpkin's Patch, everybody is welcome. In our class, everybody is welcome too.”

The lesson

Before you start

- Put the “Every Pebble Belongs!” poster (page 6) up at children's eye level, with space underneath for the class pebble row.
- Print one “My Pebble Belongs!” sheet (page 7) per child, plus a few spares, so any child who arrives late still gets one.
- Fill a basket with real pebbles, all different shapes, sizes and colors. Have enough for every child and every adult.

1 Welcome circle (5 min)

Greet each child by name with Pumpkin's welcome: “Come in, come in! There's always room for one more!” Wave, smile or sign hello. Make the circle bigger whenever someone joins, so children can see what making room looks like.

2 Read the story (10 min)

Read *The Great Harvest Maze*. Stop at three moments:

- **Page 10:** Zuki says, “We should only take the fastest.” Ask: “How do you think Sammy feels?” Then read Pumpkin's answer: “Everybody plays. From the very start.”
- **Page 15:** Everybody helps. Point to each friend: “What did Bea do? What did Dot do?”
- **Page 21:** Every pebble belongs. Pause on the picture of the pebble row.

3 Pebble passing (5 min)

Pass the pebble basket around the circle. Each child picks a pebble. Ask: “Is your pebble the same as your friend's?” Notice together that every pebble is different: big, small, smooth, bumpy, speckled. “Every pebble is different, and every pebble belongs. Just like us!”

4 My Pebble Belongs! (10–15 min)

Children draw themselves inside the big pebble and color it any way they like. An adult writes each child's name and their words for “I am special because…” (for example, “I give good hugs,” “I can jump,” “I speak two languages”).

5 Add your pebble (5 min)

Cut out the pebbles. One at a time, each child adds their pebble to the class pebble row under the poster, just like the friends add their pebbles to Sammy's row. The group says together: **“Welcome, [name]! You belong!”** Adults add a pebble too. Keep the row up all year. When a new child joins, they add their pebble on their first day.

Talk about it

What does Pumpkin say when a friend arrives? Can we say it together?

Zuki wanted only the fastest friends. What did Pumpkin say? Was that kind?

How did each friend help in the maze?

How do you feel when someone says, “Come and play”?

What can we do when we see someone playing alone?

Belonging every day

Belonging grows from small things done every day, not from one lesson. Try these:

- **Pumpkin's welcome:** Greet every child by name at the door. Use their home-language greeting too (see Tully's “Say Hello in Six Languages” poster).
- **Everybody plays from the start:** Set up games so no one has to ask to join. Say “Let’s make room!” when a circle needs to grow.
- **Room for one more:** Keep a spare chair at each table so a new friend always has a place.
- **Class jobs for everyone:** Give every child a way to help, sized to what they can do, just like every friend helped in the maze.
- **See yourself:** Make sure books, dolls, pictures and food in play areas show many kinds of families, skin colors, bodies and abilities.
- **The pebble row:** Add a pebble for every new child and every visitor. Count the row together sometimes: “Look how many of us belong!”

Tips for every child

- **Shy or new children:** Let them add their pebble with a buddy or an adult. Watching first counts as joining in.
- **Children who don't speak yet, or are learning English:** They can point, nod, sign or hold up their pebble. Accept every way of answering.
- **Children who find drawing hard:** Offer stickers, stamps, a photo of themselves, or finger paint inside the pebble.
- **Children with sensory needs:** Keep circle time short. Offer a quiet spot nearby, like the shady spot Della and Pumpkin found for Sammy.
- **Children with physical disabilities:** Bring the pebble basket and the poster to the child. Make sure the class row is at a height every child can reach.
- **When a child says “You can't play”:** Respond calmly with Pumpkin's rule: “In our class, everybody plays.” Then help the children find a way in together.

Check understanding

Child's name	1	2	3	4	5

1. Child can say or show Pumpkin's welcome ("Come in, come in!")
2. Child notices that the friends (or the pebbles) are all different
3. Child names one thing that makes them special
4. Child adds their pebble to the class row
5. Child shows a welcoming action without a prompt (a wave, a smile, "Come and play!")

✂ cut here and send home



TAKE-HOME NOTE

Dear families,

This week we read *The Great Harvest Maze* and met Pumpkin, who has the biggest welcome in the whole wide patch. In Pumpkin's Patch, "everybody plays, from the very start."

Each child picked a pebble, drew themselves in a big pebble, and added it to our class pebble row. Every pebble is different, and every pebble belongs, just like every child in our class.

At home, you could look for pebbles together on a walk and talk about how each one is different. Ask your child: "What makes you special?" and "How can we make someone feel welcome?"

There's always room for one more!

Every Pebble Belongs!

In Pumpkin's Patch, everybody plays from the very start.



Our class pebble row

“Nobody got left out.” • Add your pebble to our class row!

My Pebble Belongs!



Draw yourself inside the pebble. Color it any way you like!

My name is .....

I am special because .....