The Great Harvest Maze: Classroom Discussion Guide

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



At a glance

Children learn that everyone belongs, and that a team wins together when nobody is left out.

Book	The Great Harvest Maze (Pumpkin's Patch)
Ages	3–5
Theme	Belonging
Length	25 story pages, about 10–12 minutes read aloud
Best for	Circle time over one or two sessions

The story. Pumpkin's Patch has never won a ribbon. When the Great Harvest Maze comes to the fair, Zuki wants to take only the fastest friends, but Pumpkin says everybody plays. Inside the maze each friend helps in their own way. They stop to help Little Bean, who is lost, because kindness comes first. Then Sammy, who remembered the map's pattern, leads them to the Golden Bell. Back home, every friend adds a pebble to Sammy's row.

The big idea. "We didn't win because we're all the same. We won because we're all different, and nobody got left out."

Children will practice:

- naming ways people are different, and ways they are the same
- noticing what each friend is good at
- choosing kindness, even when it is hard
- including others in play

Before reading

Warm up with the cover: it shows everyone the book is about, and every friend is different.

Cover walk (3 minutes)

1. Hold up the cover. "Who do you see? How many friends can you count?" (There are 8 friends.)
2. "Look at their shapes and colors. Are any of them exactly the same?"
3. Point to the corn behind them. "This story has a maze. A maze has lots of paths, and some lead nowhere. Have you ever been lost?"
4. "What do you think the friends are going to do together?"

Warm-up questions

- What does it feel like to be left out of a game?
- What does it feel like when someone says, "Come and play with us!"?
- Is everyone in our class good at the same things?

Get ready: put a small bowl of pebbles or buttons near you for the activity after the story.

During reading

Pause at these 10 pages for one quick question each; keep the story moving and let 2 or 3 children answer.

Page	What happens	Ask
1	Welcome to Pumpkin's Patch	"Everybody is welcome here. What makes a place feel welcoming?"
3–8	Meet Bea, Hubert and Dot, Della, Tully, Zuki and Sammy	"What is special about this friend?" (one per page)
9	The poster for the Great Harvest Maze	"Pumpkin's Patch has never won a ribbon. How do you think they feel?"
10	Zuki wants only the fastest; Pumpkin says everybody plays	"Who is right? Why?"
12	The fair is very loud; Sammy squeezes his leaf-muffs	"How did Della and Pumpkin help Sammy feel better?"
13	Everyone chatters; Sammy looks at the map	"Sammy is quiet. What is he doing?"
16	Everybody helps in their own way	"Point to each friend. How are they helping?"
17–18	Little Bean is lost; "Kindness first"	"Should the friends stop, even if they might lose?"
19–20	Sammy remembers the pattern and leads the way	"Why did Sammy know the way?"
22	The silent cheer for Sammy	"Let's all try it: leaves up high, and wiggle!"



Page 10: "In Pumpkin's Patch, everybody plays. From the very start."



Page 16: so everybody helped.

After reading

Choose 4 or 5 questions; for ages 3–5, short talks often work better than one long one.

Belonging

- At the end, every friend added a pebble. Why did every pebble belong?
- How do we show someone they belong in our class?

Everybody plays

- Zuki wanted only the fastest friends. What would have happened if they had left Sammy at home?
- Who has a special job when we play together? What could you do?

Kindness first

- The friends stopped to help Little Bean. Was that the right thing to do? Why?
- Tell about a time someone was kind to you.

Being different

- What made each friend different? What was each friend good at?
- How are you the same as your friend? How are you different?

Feelings

- Loud noises feel like thunder to Sammy. What sounds are too loud for you?
- Zuki said sorry to Sammy. How do you think Sammy felt? How did Zuki feel?



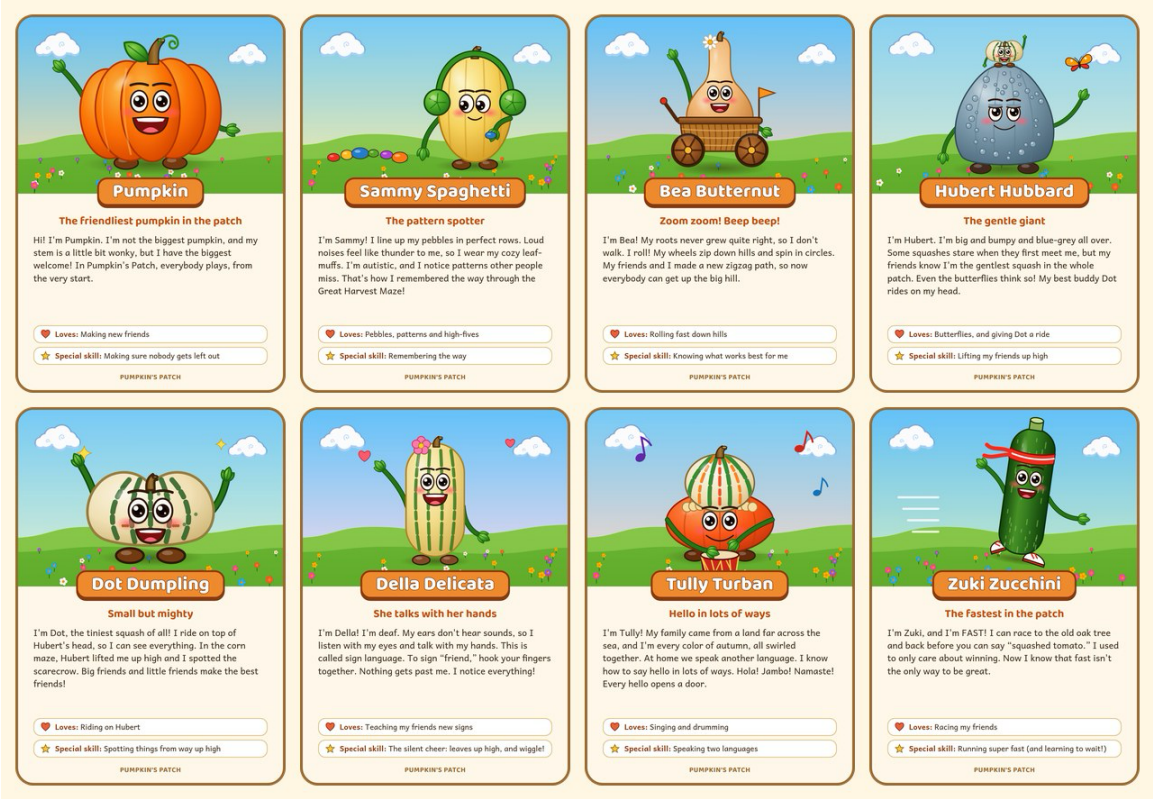
Page 21: DING! Pumpkin's Patch won for the very first time.



Page 25: every pebble was different, and every pebble belonged.

Meet the friends

Each friend is different in a way children may meet in real life; the right column gives simple, true words to use if children ask.



Friend	In the story	If children ask, you can say
Pumpkin	Makes sure everybody plays; says "kindness first"	"Pumpkin's stem is wonky, and that's fine. He has the biggest welcome."
Sammy Spaghetti	Lines up pebbles; remembers the maze pattern	"Sammy is autistic. His brain works in its own special way. Loud sounds can hurt his ears, so he wears leaf-muffs."
Bea Butternut	Rolls in her wheeled cart; leaves tracks in the maze	"Bea doesn't walk. She rolls! Her wheels help her go places."
Hubert Hubbard	Big, bumpy and gentle; lifts Dot up high	"Some people stare at Hubert because he looks different. His friends know he is gentle."
Dot Dumpling	The tiniest squash; spots the scarecrow	"Dot is small, and she still has a big job."
Della Delicata	Deaf; talks with her hands; spots Little Bean	"Della's ears don't hear sounds. She listens with her eyes and talks in sign language."
Tully Turban	Says hello in lots of ways; sings a brave song	"Tully's family came from far away. At home they speak another language."
Zuki Zucchini	The fastest; learns that fast isn't the only way to be great	"Zuki made a mistake, said sorry, and changed."

Mayor Buttercup starts the race, and Little Bean from the Bean Team is the friend who gets lost.

Activities

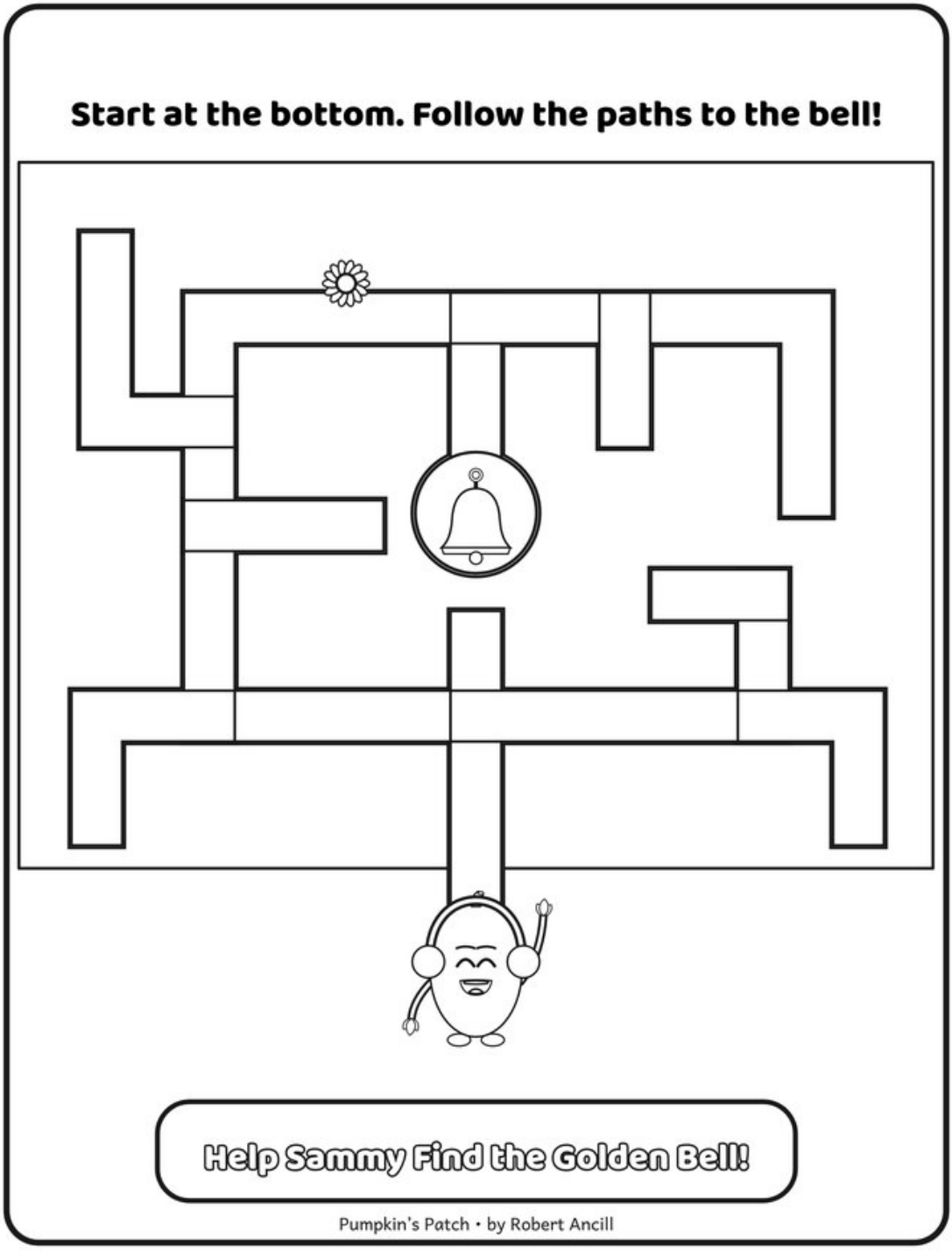
Six hands-on activities, each 10–20 minutes, that turn the story's big idea into play.

1. Our class pebble row (belonging) Give each child a pebble or large button to decorate with paint or stickers. One by one, children add theirs to a long row on the floor, saying one thing they are good at. Finish with Pumpkin's words: "Every pebble is different, and every pebble belongs." Keep the row on a shelf or windowsill.

2. Sign "friend" like Della (communication) Hook your index fingers together, then swap which one is on top. Practice it at the start of the day as a class greeting.

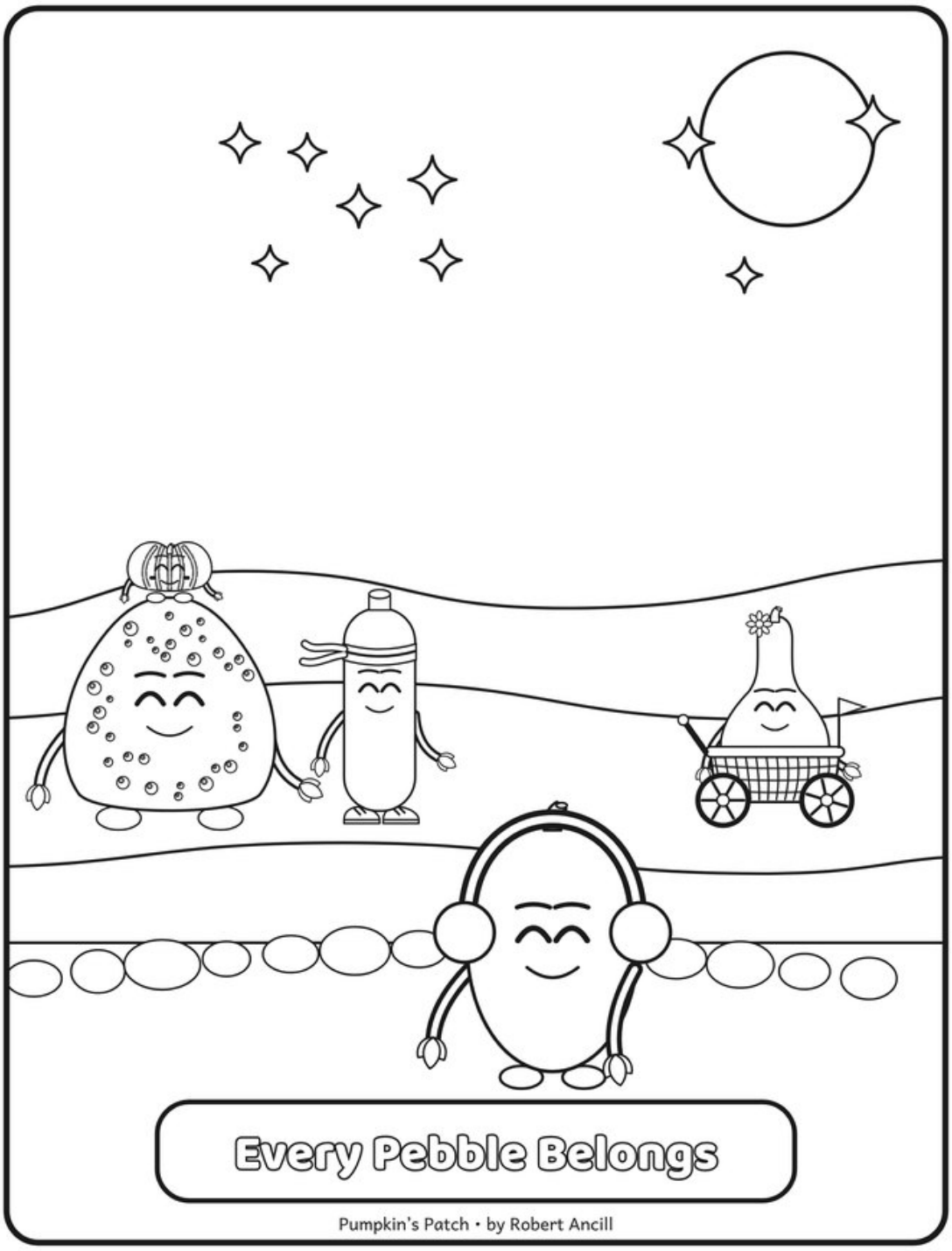
3. The silent cheer (empathy) Raise both hands high and wiggle them. This is how deaf people clap, and it is kind to anyone who finds noise too loud. Use it all week instead of loud clapping.

4. Help Sammy find the Golden Bell (patterns) Print the maze coloring page. Children trace the path with a finger, then a crayon. Older children can say Sammy's pattern out loud: left, right, right, past the sunflower, right.



5. Everybody helps obstacle course (teamwork) Set up a simple course with cushions and hoops. Children go through in pairs, and each pair must help each other: one gives directions, one moves. Then swap.

6. Kindness ribbon board (kindness) Pin a paper "ribbon board" on the wall. Each time a child includes someone or helps a friend, add a paper ribbon with their name. Like Pumpkin says: "There's room for everybody."



All 20 Pumpkin's Patch coloring pages can be printed for quiet time after the story.

Words to know

Word	Kid-friendly meaning
belong	To be part of a group, and to know you are wanted there
include	To ask someone to join in
maze	A puzzle made of paths, where some paths lead nowhere
pattern	Something that repeats in the same order, like left, right, right
kindness	Doing something to help or care for someone else
different	Not the same, like every pebble in Sammy's row
sign language	Talking with your hands and face instead of your voice
deaf	When your ears don't hear sounds
autistic	When your brain works in its own special way; some sounds can feel too loud
ribbon	A prize for doing something special

Tips for teachers

Keep the tone warm and matter-of-fact: differences are simply part of who the friends are.

- **Answer questions simply and truthfully.** Use the words in "Meet the friends." "Sammy is autistic" is fine; avoid words like "wrong" or "broken."
- **Focus on what friends can do.** Each friend helps in the maze because of who they are, not in spite of it.
- **Be ready for personal stories.** A child may say, "My brother has wheels like Bea" or "My grandma is deaf." Thank them and let them share.
- **Don't single anyone out.** Never ask a child with a disability or a different home language to explain themselves to the group.
- **Keep it short.** Read the story one day and do the questions and an activity the next. Stop while children are still interested.
- **Let them move.** Use the silent cheer, the "friend" sign and Zuki's running on the spot as wiggle breaks.
- **Mind loud sounds.** Like Sammy, some children find noise painful. The silent cheer is a gentle choice for any celebration.

Take-home note for families

Copy this note into your class newsletter or send it home.

> ***This week we read The Great Harvest Maze!***

> *In this Pumpkin's Patch story, eight very different friends enter a corn maze together. Sammy is autistic, Bea rolls on wheels, Della is deaf, and Tully speaks two languages. Each friend helps in their own way, and they win because nobody was left out.*
>
> ***Ask your child:***

- Who was your favorite friend? Why?
- Can you show me how to sign "friend"?
- Can you do the silent cheer?

> ***Try at home:*** *make your own family pebble row. Everyone picks a pebble and says one thing that makes them special.*
>
> *"Every pebble was different. And every pebble belonged."*



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