

## Yertle the Turtle

by Dr. Seuss

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### Overview

Yertle's story leads off with his attempt to build a bigger kingdom on the backs of his loyal subjects (literally). King of everything he can see, Yertle orders his turtles to stack up under him to build a towering throne. ("He made each turtle stand on another one's back and he piled them all up in a nine-turtle stack.") But a plain little turtle named Mack--stuck at the bottom--decides he's had enough. ("I know up on top you are seeing great sights, but down on the bottom we, too, should have rights!")

### Grade 3

#### LEARNING TARGETS

- ✓ I can identify how Mack made a difference in his community.
- ✓ I can explain how Yertle rejected civic discourse, and the negative effect this had on the community.
- ✓ I can explain how majority rule would have resulted in more freedom for the turtles.

#### STANDARDS

##### 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Civics

**3.1.1.1.1** Identify ways people make a difference in the civic life of their communities, state, nation or world by working as individuals or groups to address a specific problem or need.

**3.1.2.3.1** Explain the importance of civic discourse (including speaking, listening, voting and respecting diverse viewpoints) and the principles of majority rule and minority rights.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Grade  
Language  
Arts**

**3.1.1.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

**3.1.3.3** Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

## GUIDE

**Begin by reading to the page where Mack says, “Your, Majesty, please... I don’t like to complain, But down here below, we are feeling great pain...” Stop at this point for discussion based on the following discussion questions:**

The turtles in this book have a problem in their community? What is it? (They have to pile up in order to let their king be higher.) Why does Yertle want to be higher? (He feels it makes him more powerful – king of more things.) Do you think Yertle is a good king? Why or why not? Why don’t the turtles want to help Yertle be king of more things? (They are getting squashed and hungry.) Is Yertle helping or hurting the turtle community through his actions? (hurting)

Civics Standards	<b>3.1.1.1.1</b>	
Language Arts Standards	<b>3.1.1.1</b>	<b>3.1.3.3</b>

Yertle is a king. In the United States we don’t have kings. Ask the class what kind of leader we have instead? (President) Ask if they know about any other government leaders in the United States? (Governor, Mayor, Senator, Representative, School Board Member etc.) What makes these leaders different than a king? (Students may have many answers that are correct. Focus should be on elections and terms of office.) As a king, do you think Yertle will listen to what Mack is telling him? (No) Should a president or other elected official listen to what the community is telling him or her about their problems? Why? (they won’t get reelected if they ignore the voters)

Civics Standards	<b>3.1.2.3.1</b>	
Language Arts Standards	<b>3.1.1.1</b>	<b>3.1.3.3</b>

Mack seems to be the only turtle that speaks up to Yertle. Maybe it is because he is on the very bottom of the pile! Do you think Mack is doing the right thing when he speaks up? Why or why not? (he is helping

the whole turtle community by voicing their objections) Do you think Mack is brave? Why or why not? (he is questioning the king, he is the only one objecting, Yertle is angry with him) Telling government leaders about community problems is called Civic Discourse. Mack is engaging in Civic Discourse. What do you think Yertle is supposed to do when Mack talks to him? (listen) Why do you think Yertle doesn't listen to Mack? Sometimes it is hard to listen to someone that you disagree with because it might mean you can't do what you want to do.

Civics Standards **3.1.2.3.1**

Language Arts Standards **3.1.1.1** **3.1.3.3**

**Let's see what happens, read the remainder of the story.**

Does Mack make a difference to the turtle community? (Yes) What does he do? (topples the tower by burping) How are things different for the turtles after that? (they are free)

Civics Standards **3.1.1.1.1**

Language Arts Standards **3.1.1.1** **3.1.3.3**

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

As a class, or individually, have students choose a community problem they are concerned about. Have students write letters to a public official expressing their concern.

If the turtles could have voted, would they have elected Yertle to be their leader? Have students write a paragraph about what they think would have happened if there had been an election. How would Yertle have acted? Who would have won?

Mack is an example of someone who uses civic discourse to make a difference in his community. Have students research some real people who have made a difference. Make a bulletin board highlighting these civic leaders. Examples could be Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, Thomas Jefferson, Nelson Mandela, Helen Keller, Gandhi.

## NOTES