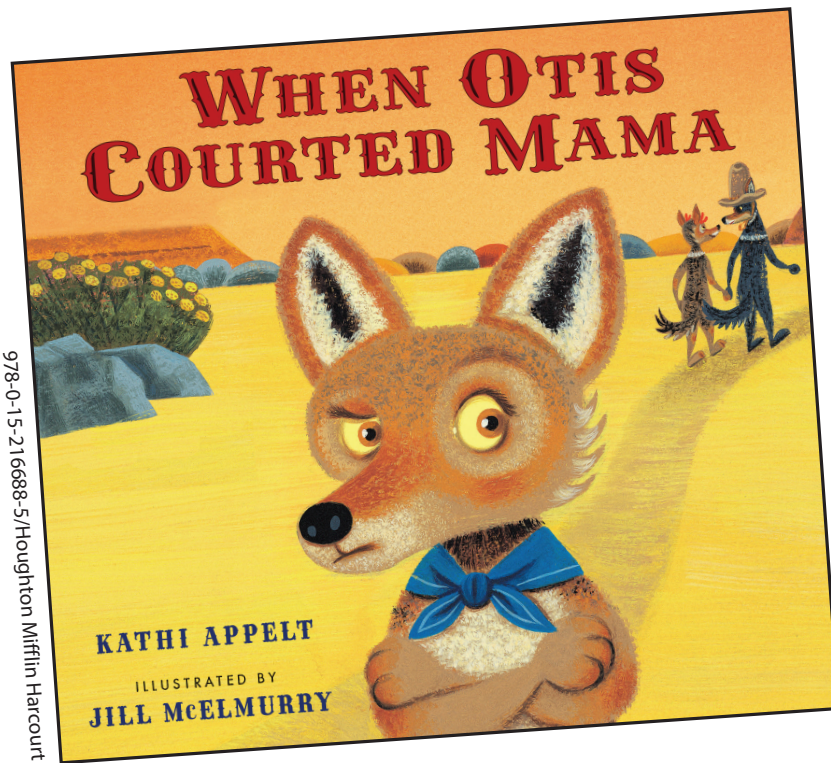


# CURRICULUM GUIDE



## WHEN OTIS COURTED MAMA

by

**KATHI APPELT**

Illustrated by

**JILL MCELMURRY**

Apart from sticker burrs and sand fleas, Cardell's life is mostly wonderful. He knows he's loved through and through by his perfectly good mama and his perfectly good daddy. They live in different parts of the desert, but that's okay—Cardell is mostly used to it.

Then Otis comes calling, and Cardell feels a *grrr* form in his throat. Otis can't make jalapeño flapjacks or play Zig-the-Zag anything like Cardell's daddy. And so Cardell waits for Mama to say “*Adiós, Otis.*” But what will happen if she doesn't?

Award-winning author Kathi Appelt's gentle story about accepting a change within a family will resonate with young readers. Jill McElmurry's charming desert landscapes and Southwestern details add a delightful dimension.

★ “This excellent take on modern, blended families melds a believable, resonant story arc and winsome, child-appealing illustrations.” —KIRKUS REVIEWS, *starred review*

★ “This adorable, humble tale of how a young coyote copes with divorced parents will win children's hearts.” —SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, *starred review*

[kathiappelt.com](http://kathiappelt.com) • [jillmcelmurry.com](http://jillmcelmurry.com)



Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

# BEFORE READING

Discuss what it means to be a family. Generate a list of the students' definitions and examples of what constitutes a family.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the setting of the story? How does the illustrator show where this story takes place?  
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7**
- What information does the author share about the main character Cardell at the beginning of the story?  
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3**
- Cardell describes his life as “mostly wonderful.” What is the problem that Cardell faces in the story?  
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3**
- Cardell’s mama has had several suitors and Cardell did not care for any of them. Why do you think that Cardell was so picky about the suitors interested in his mama?  
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3**
- At first, Cardell doesn’t like Otis when Otis comes to give ocotillo flowers and cactus candies to Cardell’s mama. Why do you think Cardell changed his mind about Otis?  
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3**

## ACTIVITIES

- What is Cardell’s definition of a family? Add his ideas about family to the list you generated before reading the story. How are your definitions the same as Cardell’s? How are your definitions of family different?
- Create an illustrated glossary for the “desert” words the author used in this story. First, list the words you find, such as “cactus,” “ocotillo,” and “saguaro,” in alphabetical order. Work with a partner to find definitions for each word in your glossary. Create a small illustration to go with each definition.
- Cardell changes over the course of the story. Draw a picture and write a caption to show how Cardell felt at the beginning, middle, and end of the story about his “mostly wonderful” life.
- Cardell says that his mom is special because she is a champion scout, a master artist, and has a smile that makes the moon, stars, and planets glow. Cardell loves the jalapeño flapjacks his dad makes and the way his dad plays Zig-the-Zag. Think of an important person in your life—mother, father, grandparent, etc. Design a thank you card for this person that describes what makes him or her special to you.



# WHO ARE MAMA'S SUITORS?

Before Otis, three suitors were interested in Cardell's mama. Complete the chart by listing why Cardell and his mama thought each one wasn't a good fit for the family.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1

<b>SUITOR</b>	<b>WHY HE WASN'T A GOOD FIT FOR THE FAMILY</b>
<b>Cleburne</b>	
<b>Pierre</b>	
<b>Professor Coot</b>	



# SEQUENCING THE STORY

Read the story events in the list below. Decide the order in which they occurred in *When Otis Courted Mama*.  
Number the story events from 1 to 8 in the correct order. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2**



Professor Coot knew everything and was constantly correcting Cardell.



Otis told Cardell and his mama funny stories about horned toads, chapparals, and little coyotes with big *GRRRs*.



Pierre played the accordion so sweetly that scorpions swooned.



Otis came to the door bringing Mama a handful of ocotillo flowers and some cactus candies.



Mama smiled and said yes to Otis.



Cleburne was quite the dancer but he slobbered when he danced.



Otis asked Mama to marry him.



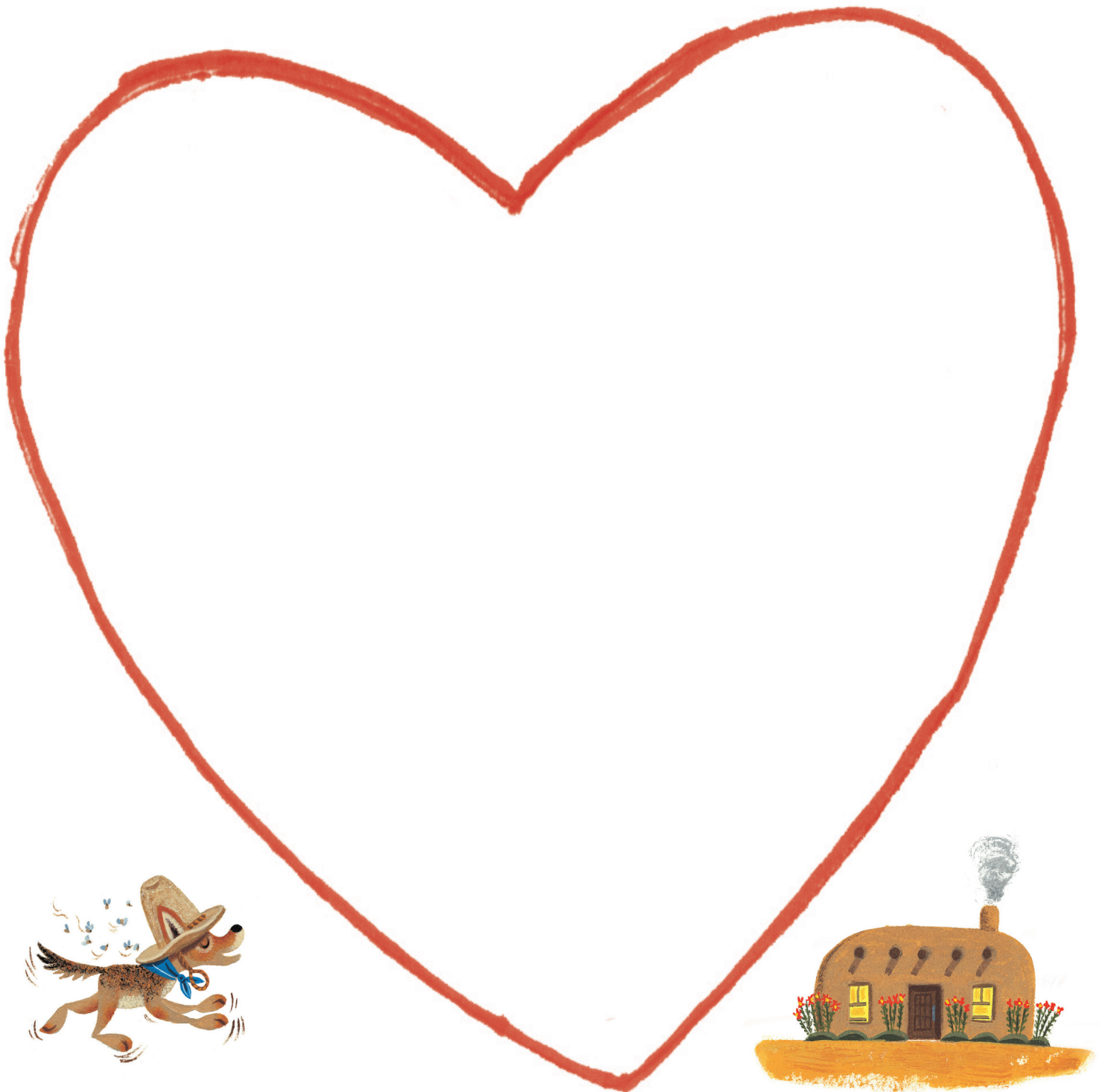
Cardell felt a *grrr* in his throat and Mama seemed delighted when Otis came to visit.



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Cardell loves his mama, his daddy, his stepmama, Lulu, and his perfectly cute stepbrother, Little Frankie. Does he have enough room in his heart to love one more? Draw pictures within the outline of Cardell's heart showing those he loves and what he loves about each. Then add Otis. What will you include about Otis, the newest member of Cardell's family? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3**





# ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR



**KATHI APPELT'S** perfectly wonderful stepfather was a terrific storyteller, and she grew up to become a teller of stories, too. She is the *New York Times* best-selling author of more than forty books for children and young adults. Her picture books include *Oh My Baby, Little One*, illustrated by Jane Dyer, and the Bubba and Beau series, illustrated by Arthur Howard. Her novels for older readers include two National Book Award finalists: *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* and *The Underneath*, which was also a Newbery Honor Book. In addition to writing, Ms. Appelt is on the faculty in the Masters of Creative Writing for Children and Young Adults program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She lives in College Station, Texas. Visit her website at [kathiappelt.com](http://kathiappelt.com).



**JILL MCELMURRY** grew up in the Southwest in a family of artists and musicians. She loves to paint New Mexico's cholla cactus and prickly pear. She is the illustrator of the best-selling Little Blue Truck series by Alice Schertle and many other favorite picture books, several of which she also wrote. She divides her time between the wide golden landscape of New Mexico and a small green island in Minnesota. Visit her website at [jillmcelmurry.com](http://jillmcelmurry.com).



The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.