

Substitute Groundhog

• Reader's Theater •

by | Pat Miller

Explain the significance of the Groundhog's appearance on February 2, Groundhog Day. Folk wisdom says that if the groundhog sees its shadow on February 2, winter will last six weeks longer. No shadow—spring is on its way. This tradition seems to have derived from one that originated in Germany and was brought to them by the ancient Romans. February 2 is Candlemas Day, formerly the pagan holiday called Imbolc. On Candlemas, priests blessed candles were lit and placed in every window during the darkest days of winter, midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. Germans used hedgehogs as predictors of whether the second half of winter would be mild or hard.

When Germans settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s, they found an abundance of groundhogs and an absence of hedgehogs, so the tradition made a quick transition. On February 4, 1841, storekeeper James Morris of Morgantown, Pennsylvania, wrote in his diary... "Last Tuesday, the 2nd, was Candlemas day, the day on which, according to the Germans, the Groundhog peeps out of his winter quarters and if he sees his shadow he pops back for another six weeks nap, but if the day be cloudy he remains out, as the weather is to be moderate."

—quoted in Stormfax Groundhog History, www.stormfax.com/ghogday.htm

Because February 2 is the middle of winter, early American farmers had a saying, "Groundhog Day, half your hay." Farmers who had less than half their hay left by then would cause their animals to go hungry before the spring grass came in.

To find out the official American groundhog verdict, go to the Web site of America's expert, Punxatawney Phil who lives on Gobbler's Knob in Pennsylvania. A venerable succession of

chubby, sleepy Punxy Phil's have been predicting the end of winter since 1887 (www.goundhog.org). Read about all the past predictions and the current celebratory activities.

Not to be outdone, Canadians have looked since 1956 to an albino groundhog named Wiarton Willie to make his prediction. Willie comes out of his hole near the forty-fifth parallel by Lake Huron. This location is exactly half-way between the North Pole and the equator. For more information about Wiarton Willie and his celebration, visit www.wiarton-willie.org/index.cfm.

Sharing the Book

Substitute Groundhog tells the tale of what might happen if Groundhog was sick for Groundhog Day and had to recruit a substitute. Before performing the reader's theater, read the book aloud. Students will benefit from hearing your expression and pacing, especially to bring out the humor in the story.

Because Groundhog has the largest part in this script, you might want to appoint several Groundhog readers. If you want to split his part, look for "Groundhog 2" to start the second reader. Each will have half the lines. To include one more reader, divide Groundhog's lines into thirds. Look for "Groundhog B" and "Groundhog C." Be sure to highlight their scripts appropriately and apprise the audience that the voice of Groundhog may change, but there is only one Groundhog in this story.

To help the audience know which animal is speaking, use the patterns at www.librarysparks.com. You can make them into transparencies and project them onto sheets of fun foam to trace, or simply duplicate them on card stock. Make headbands or attach them to wooden sticks that students hold up like stop signs while reading their

lines. Duplicate the appropriate number of scripts, including one for yourself and one for the teacher if she stays for the lesson. Highlight the character in the list of parts, and then in the script.

To choose parts, you can have the teacher decide; you can number the chairs students sit in and randomly select numbers from a jar (use bingo numbers to save time); or choose all animals except Groundhog and let the audience participate by chorally reading his part (you will need highlighted scripts for students to share).

Roles

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Narrators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Dr. Owl

**Groundhog [Groundhog 2] /
[Groundhog B, Groundhog C]**

Bear

Mole

Eagle

Squirrel

Armadillo

Badger

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Substitute Groundhog

Narrator 1: The day before Groundhog Day, Groundhog woke up sick.

Narrator 2: His muscles ached and his throat hurt.

Narrator 3: Groundhog felt so awful he went to see Dr. Owl.

Dr. Owl: You have a bad case of flu, you do. You need bed rest for two days.

Groundhog: *How many?*

Dr. Owl: Two, two, two.

Narrator 4: But Groundhog Day is tomorrow!

Narrator 5: Groundhog couldn't let everyone down because he was too sick to do his job.

Narrator 6: He tried to think of something.

Groundhog: What am I going to do?

Narrator 1: On his way home, Groundhog passed the Hidey Hole Diner.

Narrator 2: He saw want ads from neighborhood animals tacked to a nearby tree.

Narrator 3: They gave Groundhog an idea.

Groundhog: I'll advertise for a substitute groundhog.

Narrator 4: By 10:00, a line of animals waited to try out.

Groundhog: *(Sneezing.)* Great! Surely one of you can do Groundhog Day for me.

Narrator 5: Mole was first.

Groundhog: You have to go down in my hole. It's pretty dark in there.

Mole: No problem. My own hole is even darker.

Narrator 6: Mole got comfortable underground.

Groundhog: Now come up and look for your shadow!

Narrator 1: Mole peeked over the edge. His eyes squinted.

Mole: Is that you, Groundhog?

Groundhog: This won't work. I need someone who sees well.

Eagle: I can see from high in the sky!

Narrator 2: Groundhog looked up and saw Eagle.

Groundhog: Great! Climb down in the hole and let's practice.

Eagle: Climb down? Will there be enough room for me to stretch my wings?

Narrator 3: Eagle stretched his wings VERY wide.

Groundhog [B]: *(Rubbing throat.)* This won't work. I need someone who sees well and is not bothered by small spaces.

Narrator 4: Bear stepped up next.

Bear: My own cave is snug and cozy.

Groundhog: Great. Climb down and let's practice.

Bear: This is even more comfy than my own cave.

Groundhog: Come out and take a look.

Narrator 5: There was no answer.

Narrator 6: Groundhog poked his head below ground.

Groundhog [2]: Bear, come look for your shadow.

Narrator 1: The only answer was a deep, slow snore.

Narrator 2: Groundhog was frustrated.

Narrator 3: The substitute must see well, not be bothered by small spaces, and won't fall asleep.

Squirrel: I can do it, I can do it. Let me try!

Groundhog: OK. Go down in the hole, come back up, and look for your shadow.

Squirrel: (*Popping up.*) Wheee! This is fun.

Groundhog: Did you see your shadow?

Squirrel: Oops! I forgot to look.

Narrator 4: Squirrel dropped down.

Narrator 5: Squirrel popped up.

Narrator 6: Down. Up. Down.

Groundhog: I need someone who will pop up and stay up. Will I ever find a substitute?

Armadillo: Howdy, Groundhog. How about giving me a chance?

Groundhog [C]: Who are you?

Armadillo: I'm Armadillo, up from Texas to visit my cousin, Badger.

Groundhog: Do you think you can do the job?

Armadillo: I can. I live in a hole. I like small spaces. I see my shadow just fine. And I will pop up and stay up.

Groundhog: All right. Let's see how you do.

Narrator 1: Armadillo climbed below ground.

Narrator 2: She poked her head up and looked around.

Narrator 3: Sure enough, she saw her shadow.

Groundhog: If you see your shadow tomorrow, spring will come early.

Armadillo: Got it!

Narrator 4: Groundhog headed to bed.

Narrator 5: He sipped warm clover soup.

Narrator 6: He tucked his sore self under the flannel quilt.

Narrator 1: The next morning, the animals gathered to see what Armadillo would say.

Badger: I served hot chocolate.

Squirrel: I bounced and cheered for Armadillo. You go, girl!

Eagle: I flew high above the trees to see if Armadillo would see her shadow.

Mole: I felt sleepy, but at least I was there. Bear was still in bed.

Armadillo: When I peeked out over the edge of Groundhog's hole, I could see the shadow of my ears. Six more weeks of winter!

Groundhog: Oh no! More winter? I'd feel a lot better if it was spring already.

Armadillo: Spring already? That gives me an idea.

Narrator 2: Armadillo found Groundhog's suitcase.

Armadillo: Get your gear, Groundhog. You can come home with me to Texas. It is already spring there.

Narrator 3: Groundhog grabbed his teddy bear and his toothbrush and threw them into his suitcase.

Groundhog: I've always wanted to see Texas. Do you think they have cowboy hats in my size?

Armadillo: Sure as Texas has a Lone Star!

Narrator 4: Together, they walked through the cold to the bus station.

Narrator 5: And their shadows followed them all the way there.

Narrator 6: The End.

Substitute Groundhog Patterns



