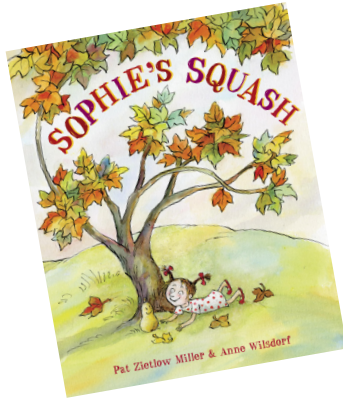


Reading with children can improve their language, literacy, and social-emotional skills, increasing their knowledge of the world around them. With the right book choices, reading can introduce children to healthy eating habits too!



### SOPHIE'S SQUASH

by Pat Zietlow Miller and Anne Wilsdorf

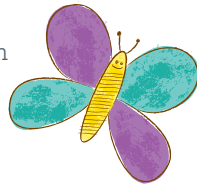
#### What It's All About

Sophie has an unusual best friend: Bernice the Squash. Join Sophie and Bernice on their adventures and find out what happens when Bernice starts to get a little mushy.

#### Dig into the Story

Develop children's comprehension of the story by discussing higher-level information (e.g., link characters' feelings to their actions and/or events in the story, predict what might happen, summarize chunks of text). Use prompts throughout the story, such as:

- *Sophie's parents would like her to pick a new toy to be her friend. They suggest she plays with trucks or dolls. Why do you think they want Sophie to play with something new?*
- *When Sophie takes Bernice to the library, the other children ask her questions about Bernice. She does not look happy. How do you think she feels when her mom suggests that Bernice stays home next time?*
- *When Sophie sees the small green sprout in her garden, she is very excited. She is even more excited when she meets Bonnie and Baxter. What do you think will happen when Bonnie and Baxter start to get mushy, like Bernice did?*



#### Discover a World of Words

Throughout the story, introduce new vocabulary words using gestures, tone of voice, pointing to illustrations, or providing brief explanations.

Examples include:

- *clutched*: to hold tightly
- *rot*: to slowly decay or spoil
- *freckles*: small spots on the skin
- *soil*: earth
- *superb*: very fine, excellent
- *familiar*: well known

#### Make Connections Beyond the Book

After reading the story, make connections to an aspect of the child's real life by:

- Writing a story about a squash best friend! Encourage children to write about what adventures they would go on together. Where would they go and what would they see?
- Visiting a local farmer's market or grocery store. Sophie first finds Bernice at her local farmer's market with her parents. What sort of vegetables can you find at the farmer's market or grocery store? Talk to a vendor or grocer about when squash grows in the area!
- Going to story time at the local library, just like Sophie and Bernice. Be sure to bring a friend (person or toy) along too!

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Some definitions taken from Biemiller, A. (2010). *Words worth teaching: Closing the vocabulary gap*.

**Jumpstart**

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working toward the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

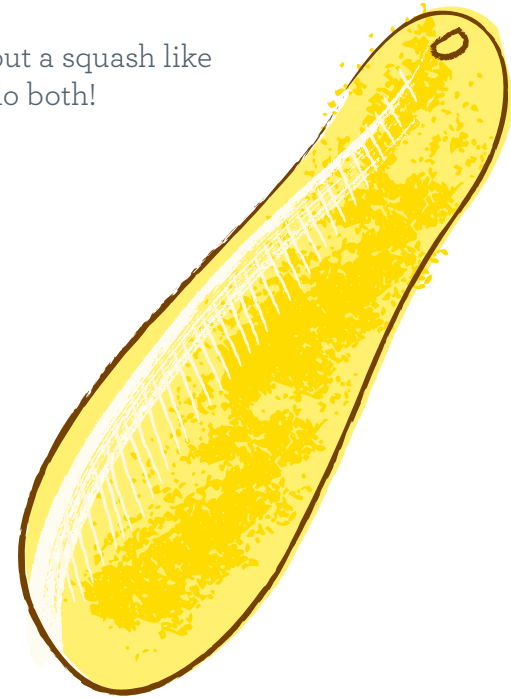
Learn more at [jstart.org](http://jstart.org).

Together Time Activity

PICK YOUR OWN SQUASH FRIEND

Visit your local farmer’s market or grocery store and pick out a squash like Sophie’s, then cook it or plant it—or buy two and do both!

- 1 **Pick a squash.** You may find that there are many types of squash available, including butternut, acorn, spaghetti, summer, and others.
- 2 **Investigate it.** Find out where your squash grows and whether it is considered a “winter” or “summer” variety, even though some of them grow year-round. Does it need to be peeled before cooking? Can you eat the seeds? A quick online search can help you find this information.
- 3 **Make a meal with it.** Find ideas in Better Bites "Eat More Squash!" available on the Whole Kids Foundation website under Kids Club EAT: Better Bites.
- 4 **Plant it.** Bury the entire squash in some potting soil in a container or in your backyard garden in full sun, and see what grows. Most squash will grow a pretty vine. Some squash plants may produce fruit like Sophie’s does in the story (did you know squash is a fruit?) but some may not.



**Fun Fact:** Even if a squash vine produces flowers, those flowers need to be pollinated in order for the plant to produce baby squash.



Talking Points:

Look up the nutrients in different squash and compare. Notice the different colors too. Is there a connection between the colors and certain nutrients they contain?

- Talk about how squash plants reproduce. Most of the time, flowering and fruit plants, like squash, require pollination to produce the part of the plant we like to eat. When the flowers bloom, they need to be pollinated by bees or birds before the squash fruits will grow.
- Discuss the role of pollinators, which help to provide about a third of our food supply, and learn more about how you can help the honey bees by visiting the School Programs section on [wholekidsfoundation.org](http://wholekidsfoundation.org).