Identifying the difference between odd and even numbers is essential to understanding our number system.

B'rrrr. It's a cold snowy day and Farmer Bill is missing one of his mittens. The cow, three chickens and two horses are in the same pickle. Instead of having an even 2, 4, 6 or 8 mittens for their hands, hooves and feet, they've got 1, 3, 5 and 7. How odd! Can you guess who the barnyard mitten thief is? Illustrated by G. Brian Karas.

DC Standard 4.1, Number Concepts: Children demonstrate a beginning understanding of number and operations and how they relate to one another.

- Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On one side represent some even numbers by drawing pairs of small objects. On the other, show odd numbers by drawing pairs of objects, plus one more. Have your child or students tell you how the even numbers are alike and how the odd numbers are alike.

- Reread the story together and count the number of mittens in each picture. Point out that the animals all need one more mitten than they each have. Talk about why the animals need an even number of mittens, and why they always have an odd number.

- Place a small pile of buttons on a table. Is there an even or an odd number of buttons in the pile? Place a second pile on the table. Is there an even or an odd number of buttons in that pile? Add them together. Is that number even or odd? Make new piles and try the activity many times. Do you get an even or an odd number when you add the two evens together? Two odds? And odd and an even?

■ TEACHER IDEA! I use Stuart's books all the time. So many of the newer teachers feel very bottled down into the textbook, so I always bring in some MathStart books to show them other ways of introducing concepts. For example, I use "Missing Mittens" with first graders to introduce the concept of odd and even numbers. I have them create different scenarios of mittens. The book is so comically illustrated — they came up with all kinds of scenarios of animals and where mittens could be on them. They loved the cow and the cow's udders and the mittens. That really inspired them to do peacocks with mittens on the feathers. And they had to identify what happened, whether it was an odd number of mittens or an even number. When one mitten is missing, what happens? It was wonderful. They created their own books. And it was very exciting to see the different things the students learned to do. Thank you Debbie Abrams, Sayville School District, Sayville, NY!

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"Storybooks that make math fun!"

Stuart J Murphy