

Handout: Wally and the Rug

From Paley, V. G. (1981). *Wally's Stories*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The class was about to act out "Jack and the Beanstalk" when Wally and Eddie had a disagreement about two rectangular rugs (Paley, 1981).

Wally: The big rug is the giant's castle. The small one is Jack's house.

Eddie: Both rugs are the same.

Wally: They can't be the same.

Eddie: You have to measure it. You need a ruler.

Wally: We have a ruler.

Eddie: Not that one. Not the short kind. You have to use the long kind that gets curled up in a box.

Wally: Use people. People's bodies. Lying down in a row.

Eddie: That's a great idea. I never even thought of that.

Wally announced a try-out for "rug measurers."

4 by 3 students. Everyone satisfied.

Next day, Eddie measured again. Himself, Wally, and 2 others, but it came up too short.

Wally: You're too short. I mean someone is too short. We need Warren. Where's Warren?

(Wally was told that Warren was absent.)

Eddie: Then we can't measure the rug.

Teacher: You can only measure the rug when Warren is here?

Jill: Because he's longer.

Deana: Turn everyone around. Then it will fit.

Eddie rearranged the students. Surprise...unchanged.

Eddie: No, it won't work. We have to wait for Warren.

Deana: Let me have a turn. I can do it.

Jill: You're too big, Deana. Look at your feet sticking out

Teacher: Is there a way to measure the rug so we don't have to worry about people's sizes?

Kenny: Use short people.

Teacher: And if the short people aren't in school?

Rose: Use big people.

Deana: Use rulers. Get all the rulers in the room. I'll get the box of rulers This isn't enough rulers.

Wally: Use the dolls.

Teacher: So this rug is ten rulers and two dolls long? (Silence.) Here's something we can do. We can use one of the rulers over again, this way.

Eddie: Now you made another empty space.

Teacher: Eddie, you mentioned a tape measure before...here.

(We stretch the tape along the edge of the rug, and I show the students that the rug is 156 inches long. The lesson is done. The next day Warren is back in school.)

Wally: Here's Warren. Now we can really measure the rug.

Teacher: Didn't we really measure the rug with the ruler?

Wally: Well, rulers aren't really real, are they? (Paley, 1981, pp. 13-16)