

About This Module

Overview	<p>“Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” by author and illustrator Mo Willems is a charming tale about Wilbur J. Mole Rat, a unique creature with a flair for fashion. Journey with Wilbur as he learns the value of courage in this week-long module packed with activities that engage our youngest members and encourage them to be brave.</p>
Guiding Questions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are naked mole rats? • What does it mean to be courageous? • What are different ways I can show courage? • How can I support others who are being courageous? <p>*Guiding questions are not specifically asked in the sessions themselves but are meant to guide your preparation and facilitation of the module. Keep these questions top of mind so you can help youth make connections and capture key takeaways relating to the topic.</p>
Session 1	<p>What’s That? A Naked Mole Rat!</p> <p>Youth will read and discuss the story “Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” by author and illustrator Mo Willems. They will learn about naked mole rats and create a “naked mole rat tunnel.”</p>
Session 2	<p>What Do You Love?</p> <p>Youth will recap “Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” and explore one example of courage from the story: sharing what you love. They will also create trading cards to share with peers.</p>
Session 3	<p>Facing Fears</p> <p>Youth will recap “Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” and explore one example of courage from the story: facing challenges. They will also participate in a group challenge game.</p>
Session 4	<p>Doing the Right Thing</p> <p>Youth will recap “Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” and explore one example of courage from the story: doing the right thing. They will also finish writing a story that will help them consider how to make good choices.</p>
Session 5	<p>You Can Count on Me!</p> <p>Youth will recap “Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” and practice supporting others who are being courageous by creating sock art for Wilbur J. Mole Rat.</p>

Key Terms

Rodent	Mammals that have front teeth that never stop growing.
Fossorial	Having a body that is suited for digging and living mostly underground.
Herbivore	An animal that eats plants.
Colony	A group of animals that live and work together.
Courage	The ability to be brave when facing challenges or trying something new, even when others do not support you.

Supplies

Session 1: What's That? A Naked Mole Rat!	Handouts	
		None
	Supplies Needed	
	Optional	Computer or projector to display video
	1 book	"Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed" by Mo Willems
	1 per pair	Extra-large cardboard boxes
	1 per pair	Markers
Session 2: What Do You Love?	Handouts	
	1 copy per four youth	Trading Cards Template
	Supplies Needed	
	Optional	Computer or projector
		Drawing materials for youth to share
	1 pair	Scissors
Session 3: Facing Fears	Handouts	
	1 copy, optional	Puzzle Race Game
	1 copy, optional	Shrinking Boat Game Setup
	Supplies Needed	
	4, optional	Long ropes or long pieces of string
	4, optional	Puzzles, each with the same number
	4, optional	Quart-size zipper bags

Supplies (cont'd.)		
Session 4: Doing the Right Thing	Handouts	
	1 copy for each pair of youth	Finish the Story
	Supplies Needed	
	Assortment for each pair	Colored pencils, crayons and/or markers
		Wall-safe tape
Session 5: You Can Count on Me!	Handouts	
	1 for each youth	Sock Template
	Supplies Needed	
	Assortment for each participant	Colored pencils, crayons and/or markers
	1 pair per participant	Child-safe scissors
		Wall-safe tape

Background Information

The Story

“Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed” by author and illustrator Mo Willems is a charming tale about Wilbur J. Mole Rat, a unique creature with a flair for fashion. When Wilbur boldly declares his passion for attire to the rest of the colony, he’s ridiculed and mocked until a new proclamation encourages everyone to consider what it means to be kind and accepting.

The Author

Author and illustrator Mo Willems has been dazzling the world for decades with fun stories that entertain and inspire. Not only has he introduced the world to beloved characters like Wilbur J. Mole Rat, Pigeon and Elephant, he has also written for acclaimed youth TV shows such as “Sesame Street” and “Elmo’s World.” Check out the [Mo Willems Workshop page](http://mowillemsworkshop.com) (mowillemsworkshop.com), which shares his collection of work and features activities for kids.

The Mammal: Naked Mole Rats

Naked mole rats are small, pink and mostly furless rodents from Eastern Africa. They are fossorial, meaning they dig and spend almost their whole lives underground. Using their impressive front teeth (that can move independently) and tiny feet, naked mole rats build massive tunnels housing an average of 70 colony members, with colonies of over 200 members observed. These tunnels give way to chambers, or rooms, that are designed for different purposes: waste rooms, nurseries and even food storage. Due to a lack of great vision and hearing, and the ability to survive in low-oxygenated spaces, these mighty animals are well-suited to fossorial life. While these unique features alone make them interesting, continue to study them and you’ll find they are downright fascinating.

When most people think of eusocial animals (those that have a specialized reproductive social structure), bees and ants come to mind. This social structure is usually characterized by having one female and several males responsible for reproducing. The other members are responsible for caring for the young and protecting the group. Naked mole rats can be added to this list, making them only one of two known mammal species that display eusociality (the other species being the Damaraland mole rat). At the head of their colony is the queen. She is essential to the colony due to her sole responsibility of producing offspring. The queen can have over 20 pups in a litter and can produce a new litter every 80 days. Because naked mole rats can live to be quite old for rodents (20+ years), the queen’s reign may last awhile. When her sun sets, another female ascends the throne. The females in the colony begin to compete and may physically fight for the role. The fiercest champion reigns supreme, and her reproductive cycle will kick in. The more pregnancies she has, the longer and larger she grows, allowing her room to have more pups in subsequent pregnancies.

Herbivorous in nature, naked mole rats are adapted to eating roots and tubers growing under the earth. However, these amazing animals sometimes add a secret ingredient to their diet: poop! Yes, we’re talking about coprophages, or organisms that consume feces. This sounds totally gross but is an adaptation of many in the animal kingdom. Eating feces can aid in the digestion process, allowing animals to maximize their nutrition intake. Some scientists speculate that eating the queen’s feces allows her to pass on hormones that encourage others in the colony to care for the young pups.

Beyond their incredible features and resiliency surviving in extreme conditions, these creatures remind us of the magic that awaits us if we simply peel back the layers of life on Earth. It is with hope that once we do, we continue to take more moments to observe, learn and appreciate the world around us. You may be surprised at the complex beauty surrounding you ... even, maybe especially, if it comes in tiny, pink packages.

Background Information (cont'd.)

The Theme: Courage

Sessions 2, 3 and 4 explore ways to be courageous. The following are examples of courage depicted in this book.

- **Sharing What You Love:** Wilbur loves clothes, but he lives in a colony where clothes are not acceptable. He knows he is not causing anyone harm; he just likes to wear clothes and decides to continue to do so even when the other naked mole rats tease him.
- **Facing Challenges:** Wilbur must face Grand-pah after he decides he wants to wear clothes. He is unsure how Grand-pah will react, but he faces him anyway and even chooses to show up to the colony meeting wearing socks.
- **Doing the Right Thing:** Grand-pah may be the oldest naked mole rat in his colony and the one in charge. Even so, Grand-pah still shows courage by supporting Wilbur. The rest of the colony could have gotten angry at Grand-pah, but he chose to embrace and support Wilbur anyway. He chooses to support Wilbur after listening to him and considering his question: “Why not?”

Resources

For information on naked mole rats, please visit:

- **Naked Mole Rat | Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute**
(nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/naked-mole-rat)
- **“Naked and Unafraid: The Secret Lives of Naked Mole Rats” | NPR**
(npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/08/21/751532220/naked-and-unafraid-6-wild-facts-about-naked-mole-rats)
- **“What Naked Mole Rats Can Teach Us About Treating Cancer” | BBC**
(bbc.com/future/article/20221206-what-naked-mole-rats-can-teach-us-about-treating-cancer)

Skills

Academic Skills	Social-Emotional Skills
Literacy	Communication
Creativity and Innovation	Collaboration
	Self-Awareness
	Inclusion

Extension Activities

- **Story Celebration:** After implementing this Summer Brain Gain: READ module, celebrate by throwing a story party. Check out the [Bonus Session: Story Celebration](https://clubprograms.org/programs/summer-brain-gain/summer-brain-gain-read-naked-mole-rat-gets-dressed-ages-6-9/bonus) (clubprograms.org/programs/summer-brain-gain/summer-brain-gain-read-naked-mole-rat-gets-dressed-ages-6-9/bonus) to help plan your event. You can either facilitate the Bonus Session instead of Session 5 or in addition to it on a separate day or days.
- **Create a Story:** Direct youth to think about what it means to be courageous. Encourage them to write and illustrate their own stories to share with others.
- **Courage and Kindness Chart:** Capture and track the instances when participants and staff showed courage or kindness. Positively reinforce these skills by implementing a fun weekly or monthly incentive.

Career Connections

In this module, youth read a story and learn about naked mole rats. Below are a few aligned careers.

- Librarian
- Author
- Illustrator
- Zookeeper
- Wildlife biologist

Family and Caregiver Engagement

On-site:

- Direct youth to write a story about some of the themes reflected in the book. Next help participants to put on a play for family and friends!
- Like many animals, naked mole rats depend on native plants for food. Ask for family and caregiver volunteers to help start and maintain a garden for native animals, such as birds and insects.

At Home:

- Encourage families to visit their local libraries to research animals like naked mole rats, and to check out books. Many libraries host community events and story time activities that families may enjoy.
- Encourage families to go on nature walks to discover native animals in their backyard.
- Encourage families to keep a journal or written log whenever someone shows courage and kindness. Find ways to celebrate achievements on a weekly or monthly basis.