

# Open Wide!

This unit helps children learn how to take good care of their teeth. It also provides opportunities to talk and learn about visits to the dentist and losing baby teeth. To introduce these topics, you may want to show the video or read the book, *Arthur's Tooth*. Share the information below with your students as you do the activities on page 8.

## Background Information

**Tooth anatomy.** The part of your tooth above the gums is called the *crown*. Below the gums are the *roots*. The crown is covered with a hard white surface called *enamel*. It is the hardest material your body makes. It protects the inner tooth from germs and bacteria. Beneath the enamel is the *dentin*. It is not very hard. In the center of the tooth is the *pulp*. This is where all the nerves and blood vessels are. The pulp is the part that hurts when you have a toothache.

**Baby teeth.** By the time they are 3 years old, most children have a full set of 20 baby, or primary, teeth. (Adults have 32 teeth.) Around the age of 5 to 7, the first baby tooth falls out, usually a front tooth, top or bottom. A permanent tooth soon takes its place. Around age 7 or 8, children lose the two teeth on either side. Between the ages of 9 and 12, children lose their pointed canine teeth and their first and second molars.

**How cavities are formed.** Cavities are caused by sugars left on teeth after meals or snacks. Bacteria feast on these sugars and form acid as a by-product. This acid eats into the tooth enamel, eventually creating a cavity. One way to prevent cavities is to limit between-meal snacks. If you need a snack, choose raw vegetables, fruit, or cheese.

**Clean, healthy teeth.** Brush your teeth as soon as possible after eating. Removing all food particles from your teeth prevents decay. Children should be encouraged to brush their own teeth from an early age, but an adult should rebrush the child's teeth until he or she is 5 or 6, to ensure a thorough cleaning. Many dentists recommend that parents also help their children learn to floss. Children and adults should visit a dentist twice a year for a check up and teeth cleaning.

### Arthur's Tooth

Everyone in the third grade has lost a baby tooth, except for Arthur. Francine teases him and calls him a baby. Arthur visits his dentist who reassures him that many children do not lose their first tooth until they are 8 or 9 years old.



For tips on how to keep your teeth clean and strong, see page 11.

Kittens and puppies lose their baby teeth, too.

