

Developing Comprehension using Wordless Books

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Engagement
- Purpose, genre and voice
- Comprehension.

Developing Comprehension

Wordless picture books are an ideal resource to practise and support children's language learning and reading development.

Wordless books, simply, are picture books without words, where the illustrations tell the story. According to Beckett (2012), the 'cinematic and interactive qualities' in wordless books appeal to readers of all ages, and are particularly suited to our digital world.

Rationale: Why use Wordless Books?

Wordless books encourage children to personally engage with the story, to imagine and to think thoroughly and critically about the events and characters and to communicate their thoughts and ideas about the narrative, creating a collaborative reading experience. Although wordless books may not seem complex at first sight, once opened, one will be challenged to

Wordless books offer 'a unique opportunity for collaborative reading between children and adults [empowering] the two audiences more equally' (Beckett, 2012)

view a series of detailed pictures, to determine the importance of these details, to process and summarise the information by predicting, inferring and synthesising, in order to 'read' or tell the story as they see it. Therefore, children need to be taught this complex skill of 'reading' detailed images.

Supporting children to 'read' pictures

- Model the process of looking at a picture and take note of the details.
- Think aloud while determining the importance of the content of the picture, and connecting the content together in order to create a story.
- Teach relevant vocabulary by labelling pictures.
- Engage the students in describing what they can see in the picture.
- Play games, such as I spy, based on an illustration in order to engage the students and to motivate them to look at the illustrations in detail.

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Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension instruction should occur at all reading levels, as emergent readers can engage in many of the same meaning making strategies as confident readers (Stahl, 2014).

Comprehending a text is an active thinking process where the reader creates schemata relating to the text, in order to construct meaning. There is vast research now supporting that an effective way to teach comprehension involves directly teaching a range of key comprehension strategies. *Building Bridges of Understanding* is a popular resource for schools that was designed based on this theory.

By introducing these strategies gradually from Junior Infants, our students will be competent at using these comprehension strategies, confident on drawing them from their repertoire and moving fluidly and interchangeably between them while reading independently.

Direct comprehension instruction, although a vital aspect of the reading process, can often be neglected, particularly in the infant classrooms where a great emphasis is placed on phonics. However, as can be seen in the accompanying videos, the development of comprehension skills can be comfortably integrated with oral language lessons, reading, writing and Aistear, ensuring time for all curricular areas.

Comprehension Strategies focused on within *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson, 2010)

- Prediction
- Visualisation
- Making connections
- Questioning
- Inferring
- Clarifying
- Determining importance
- Synthesising

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Using Wordless Books to Teach Comprehension Strategies

Wordless books initiate and facilitate dialogue, which promotes higher order thinking. They also enable children to use comprehension strategies in context, even at an emergent reading level. This genre engages students with higher

quality texts and more complex narratives than the texts they would usually read independently. Fluency and word identification, the areas of reading that may impede some readers, or cause them anxiety, are not an issue when reading wordless books. Therefore, all students can focus solely on using comprehension strategies and

becoming successful in this area of reading.

Wordless books can also be used as a resource to assess students' comprehension in an authentic and meaningful way.

Visual literacy, the ability to take meaning from what we see, is a vital skill for all readers, particularly in this era of multi-modal texts where comprehending images is as essential as comprehending written text. For this reason, wordless books are very suitable for students in *Stage One* and *Stage Two*. As Moline (1995) states, 'visual texts are [...] not an academically 'soft option' to verbal (words only) texts' and can be 'used extensively at all levels of learning'.

The interpretive and constructive skills involved in narrative comprehension of picture books are parallel to the text processing skills involved in reading narratives, but do not involve the decoding of words. (Yussen & Ozcan, 1996)

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Wordless Books to Develop and Integrate Language

Wordless books are particularly beneficial in TI schools, where the primary language is Gaeilge, as the story can be told and discussed in any language, due to the absence of written text. They also act as a medium for introducing new vocabulary or phrases, and give ample opportunities for students to hear and use new words in meaningful contexts. Wordless books would also be very useful to develop children's spoken language in Stage 1, or as a resource for teaching children with EAL.

Conceptual knowledge and metacognitive strategies (e.g. comprehension strategies) readily transfer between Irish and English as a result of an underlying conceptual proficiency

that is common across languages (Cummins, 1981). Therefore, when focusing on developing Irish oral and literacy skills in a Gaelscoil through the use of a wordless book, literacy skills and strategies in English will also be enhanced as metacognitive skills are common in both languages (Cummins, Ó Duibhir, 2012).

Oral language skills, are also naturally developed when reading wordless books as a discussion evolves while looking at the pictures. The open text encourages children to actively imagine the voice, thoughts and feelings of characters and to discuss the events taking place. Wordless books cultivate storytelling skills and give children opportunities to listen, ask questions and speak to each other.

Activities to Develop Comprehension while Reading Wordless Books

Preparation for teacher

- Write a script, to help you model reading the story aloud.
- Make a note of questions you may ask the children (include a range of literal, inferential and evaluative questions).
- Select the new vocabulary or language you will introduce and teach.
- Scan the Wordless Book to project the pages on a screen or IWB.

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Pre Reading Activities to develop Comprehension

- Arouse curiosity by placing a physical object that has significance to the story, in the room.
 - Guess the significance of the physical object to the book.
 - Discuss the cover.
 - Make predictions about the story.
 - Take a silent picture walk through the book before beginning to read.
 - Introduce new vocabulary. Label these new words in the illustrations.
 - Play I Spy, using the cover or illustrations.
 - Present various vocabulary or phrases from the story on flashcards. Ask students to predict the story, based on these words.
 - Make connections to other books, by same author or illustrator.
 - Create a character sketch in order to empathise with the character.
- Cover the title of the book and ask students to guess the title from the book cover.
 - Introduce and explain a specific comprehension strategy. Model the use of the strategy during a *Think Aloud* session. Encourage pupils to become involved and scaffold the strategy development during reading.



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During Reading Activities to develop Comprehension

- Model how to read a Wordless Book.
- Read the story collaboratively as a class.
- Take a voice recording of the collaborative reading. This can later be used to create an audio book for the library to complement the Wordless Book.
- Notice details in illustrations.
- Continue to make predictions, visually, orally or with the use of drama.
- Encourage the students to ask questions, and to make connections.
- Teacher in Role. The teacher becomes a character in the story and speaks to the class from this role. Children can communicate with the Teacher in Role to explore the story in more detail. Confident pupils could also adopt this position.
- Role-play events and conversations from the story as a strategy to predict what may happen next.
- Thought Tracking. Invite some children to recreate a still image from the story. Ask them to share their thoughts and feelings at that time with the class.
- Make inferences based on clues given to us by the illustrator, using a T chart. Facts which are presented in the illustration are written in the first column, and pupils write what these facts make them think of in the corresponding column.
- Thought Tunnels . If an issue arises in the story, invite children to express their opinions while a character from the story walks through a physical tunnel of children.

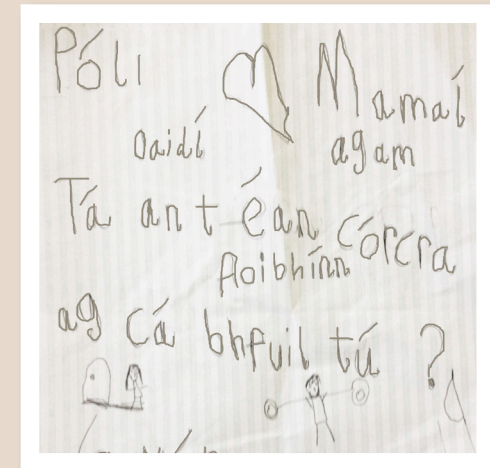
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Post Reading Activities to develop Comprehension

- Retell the story.
- Re-read the story in small groups.
- Sequence the images from the story on the IWB.
- Debrief on the Comprehension Strategy used while reading.
- Draw a picture from the prequel or sequel.
- Dramatise a section of the story, or expand the story with role-play.
- Re-enact part of the story with puppets.
- Create a soundscape. Make the sounds and noises that can be heard during the story and record them. These can then be played as children silently re-read the story.
- Revisit the character sketch from the Pre Reading stage.
- Art activity based on the book.
- Invite children to create their own wordless book.
- Convert the wordless book into a picture book with text during a session of Shared Writing.
- Create and read a *Readers' Theatre* script based on the book.
- Write a postcard, a letter, a packing list for a character in the story.
- Use the story as a stimulus for the play areas during Aistear. Re-enact the story, or create a new problem leading to a change in the plot. In a Gaelscoil, it is important that the teacher models and teaches the language to the class first, in order to support the children to practise

and use the language effectively during play.

Basing the theme for Aistear on the Wordless Book enables the class to revisit the story and to step into the world of the characters through play. As the children create aspects of the story during guided play, they acquire a deeper understanding of the story and gain an insight into the thoughts and feelings of a character. They can be also given the opportunity to view different perspectives on the story.



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Wordless Books Suggestions

Hug Jez Alborough (2000)

Tall Jez Alborough (2006)

Anno's Counting Book Mitsumasa Anno (1975)

Zoom Istvan Banyai (1995)

Journey Aaron Becker (2013)

Quest Aaron Becker (2014)

Clown Quentin Blake (1995)

The Snowman Raymond Briggs (1978)

A Circle of Friends Giora Carmi (2003)

Fortunately Remy Charlip (1964)

Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Henry Cole (2012)

Carl the Dog (Series) Alexandra Day

Pancakes for Breakfast Tomie DePaola (1978)

Un-Brella Scott E. Franson (2007)

The Snowman Story Will Hillenbrand (2014)

Flora and the Flamingo Molly Idle (2013)

Red Sled Lita Judge (2011)

Wave Suzy Lee (2008)

The Red Book Barbara Lehman (2004)

Rainstorm Barbara Lehman (2006)

Trainstop Barbara Lehman (2008)

The Girl and the Bicycle Mark Pett (2014)

The Boy and the Airplane Mark Pett (2013)

The Lion & The Mouse Jerry Pinkney (2009)

The Tortoise & The Hare Jerry Pinkney (2013)

You can't take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman & Robin Preiss Glasser (1998)

You can't take a Balloon into the National Gallery Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman & Robin Preiss Glasser (2000)

You can't take a Balloon into the Museum of Fine Art Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman & Robin Preiss Glasser (2002)

Good Night Gorilla Peggy Rathmann (1994)

A Ball for Daisy Chris Rashka (2011)

The Chicken Thief Beatrice Rodriguez (2005)

Time Flies Eric Rohmann (1994)

Where's Walrus? Stephen Savage (2011)

The Invention of Hugo Cabret Brian Selznick (2007)

Wonderstruck Brian Selznick (2011)

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Wordless Books Suggestions (continued)

Noah's Ark Peter Spier (1977)

Peter Spier's Rain Peter Spier (1997)

Bluebird Bob Stake (2013)

The Arrival Shaun Tan (2007)

Chalk Bill Thomson (2010)

Tuesday David Wiesner (1991)

Free Fall David Wiesner (1991)

June 29, 1999 David Wiesner (1992)

Sector 7 David Wiesner (1999)

Flotsam David Wiesner (2006)

Art and Max David Wiesner (2010)

Mr. Wuffles! David Wiesner (2013)

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