

# TEACHING READING

## Story development using wordless picture books

Colleen Reese

In the summer of 1992, I applied for a grant to buy 44 wordless picture books (36 different titles) for my second-grade students. Their assignment was to write descriptive sentences to accompany the pictures. The objectives were for students to develop a sense of story, to use higher level thinking skills, and to develop their writing skills. The book *Wordless/Almost Wordless Picture Books* (Richey & Puckett, 1992) was a good resource for listing books that matched my criteria: The books could have no written text to accompany the pictures and had to be available in print.

Eight of the wordless picture books were read together as a class. Twelve of the books were used with pair/share partners and 24 were used by individuals. Through discussion and critical examination of the details of the illustrations, students wrote sentences that effectively complemented the pictures. The project was evaluated when the books were shared with other classrooms by peer feedback to such questions as "Did the words go with the pictures?" and "Did the story make sense?"

### Whole class

The first wordless picture book for which my class wrote the text was an alphabet book entitled *Animal Alphabet* (Kitchen, 1984). The objective was to have the children describe each picture by writing a sentence. After the description of the picture was agreed upon by the class, I wrote the sentence on paper and immediately affixed it to the accompanying page.

After the book was completed, each child read a page orally. Two children

were then picked to read the book to the principal, and two other children read the book to a first-grade classroom.

As an evaluation, the first graders were asked if they thought the story made sense. The two second-grade readers shared the first-grade responses with their classmates upon their return to class. The class then decided if revisions needed to be made.

Encouraged by a positive response, my second graders eagerly awaited the next wordless picture book, *How Santa Claus Had a Long and Difficult Journey Delivering His Presents* (Krahn, 1970). On the day the book was introduced, we discussed what was happening in the pictures. On the second day, the children dictated sentences that went with the pictures. The sentences were short and often used different tenses: "Two angels come along and Santa gets an idea. They turned the sled over and lifted Santa back into the sleigh." Two different children visited another first-grade classroom to read the completed product and returned with positive evaluative comments.

After the children worked through 8 wordless picture books together, their writing improved, and they became increasingly willing to revise. Their sentences were longer and more descriptive and used conversation. For instance "Mother talked to little mouse" became, "What are you doing here?" asked Mother."

The final book my class did together was *Flying Jake* (Smith, 1988). For this book, the children decided to write the story in the first person. They used good connecting words such as *next*, *then*, and *but* so that not all of the sentences would start the same way. Word balloons were utilized to show the thoughts of various characters on a page. For example, "You dirty rat!" and "Oh my golly gee!" were two exclamations used in word balloons to

show the characters were upset with the bird. We shared this book with a fourth-grade classroom.

### Partners

By this time my students were anxious to do something on their own. I paired the children by putting a skilled reader and speller with a less skilled reader and speller.

First everyone made a list of things to remember while writing: Use capitals and periods, don't start all the sentences the same way, use linking words, try to use the same tense throughout the story, when using conversation remember quotation marks, give the characters names, and writing in the first person is permitted. (Such a list of ideas could never have been formulated had it not been for the class modeling that was done previously. Such modeling became the source of important tools for expressing ideas and learning strategies that could be used by my students to complete stories with a partner and on their own.)

I gave a wordless picture book to each pair/share team. The partners looked at the pictures and discussed what sentences could go with the pictures. The next day, each pair/share partner received a packet of self-sticking notes to use when writing their sentences. Both partners read the finished product to each other, checking to see if the story made sense and making corrections where needed.

Each pair/share team gave its book to me for typing. Many partners gave very specific instructions as to how they wanted certain pages typed (e.g., using all capitals to show excitement, using speech balloons above characters, and using an ellipsis to lead to the next page). Finally, the partners picked a class that would enjoy hearing them share their story.

## Individuals

The time finally came for the children to choose from 24 titles a wordless picture book to complete independently. Individually they did everything the class had done as a group: (a) looked at the entire book and thought about the story; (b) used self-sticking notes to combine the story with the pictures; (c) reread their story, checking for readability, correct grammar, and punctuation; and (d) handed in the completed book along with any directions.

Later, students read each completed book to the class. Then, one by one,

kindergarten, first, and second grades were invited to the cafeteria to listen to the completed books. Each visitor sat with one of the authors who, after reading the story, asked the questions: (a) Did the sentences match the pictures? (b) Did you like the story? (c) What was your favorite part and why? and (d) What was your favorite illustration and why? The answers to these questions gave each child personal feedback on whether they had managed to effectively write a story to go with the pictures. After listening to one story, the visitors rotated and listened to another story.

## Evaluation and summary

The project entered the final stage when each child took his or her completed book home to share with his or her family.

Throughout the 6 months of the grant project my students learned to write stories in complete sentences, to expand their ideas to better describe the pictures, and to produce a meaningful story. They learned to summarize pages with multiple pictures, at the same time making sure the sentences matched the action shown in the pictures. Linking words were used to make the story cohesive, and sentences were begun in different ways. Students learned to use quotation marks for conversations, commas for items in a series, exclamation marks for emphasis, ellipses to tell the reader that the thought was not yet complete, and correct verb tenses. Many children personalized their stories by giving names to the characters and places. Thus, the children were able to build their reading and writing skills and strategies to ultimately produce a unique book.

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### Wordless picture books used in the project

- Bang, M. (1980). *The grey lady and the strawberry snatcher*. New York: Four Winds.
- Bonnars, S. (1989). *Just in passing*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Brown, C. (1989). *The patchwork farmer*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Cristini, E., & Puricelli, L. (1984). *In the pond*. New York: Picture Book Studio, Simon & Schuster.
- Day, A. (1985). *Good dog, Carl*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Day, A. (1989). *Paddy's pay-day*. New York: Viking Kestrel.
- Drescher, H. (1987). *The yellow umbrella*. New York: Bradbury.
- Goodall, J.S. (1977). *The surprise picnic*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry.
- Goodall, J.S. (1984). *Paddy under water*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry.
- Hutchins, P. (1971). *Changes*. New York: Macmillan.
- Kitchen, B. (1984). *Animal alphabet*. New York: Dial.
- Krahn, F. (1970). *How Santa Claus had a long and difficult journey delivering his presents*. New York: Dell.
- Krahn, F. (1985). *Amanda and the mysterious carpet*. New York: Clarion.
- McCully, E.A. (1984). *Picnic*. New York: HarperCollins.
- McCully, E.A. (1985). *First snow*. New York: HarperCollins.
- McCully, E.A. (1987). *School*. New York: Harper & Row.
- MacGregor, M. (1988). *On top*. New York: Morrow.
- Mayer, M. (1967). *A boy, a dog and a frog*. New York: Dial.
- Mayer, M. (1969). *Frog, where are you?* New York: Dial.
- Mayer, M. (1973). *Frog on his own*. New York: Dial.
- Mayer, M. (1974). *Frog goes to dinner*. New York: Dial.
- Mayer, M., & Mayer, M. (1971). *A boy, a dog, a frog and a friend*. New York: Dial.
- Mayer, M., & Mayer, M. (1975). *One frog too many*. New York: Dial.
- Ormerod, J. (1981). *Sunshine*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Ormerod, J. (1982). *Moonlight*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Prater, J. (1985). *The gift*. New York: Viking Kestrel.
- Schories, P. (1991). *Mouse around*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Smith, L. (1988). *Flying Jake*. New York: Macmillan.
- Spier, P. (1982). *Rain*. New York: Delacorte.
- Spier, P. (1986). *Dreams*. New York: Doubleday.
- Tafari, N. (1983). *Early morning in the barn*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Tafari, N. (1985). *Rabbit's morning*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Tafari, N. (1988). *Junglewalk*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Tafari, N. (1990). *Follow me!* New York: Greenwillow.
- Turkle, B. (1976). *Deep in the forest*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Young, E. (1984). *The other bone*. New York: HarperCollins.

### Reference

- Richey, V., & Puckett, K. (1992). *Wordless/ almost wordless picture books*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

## Writing to music

Linda George Scott

Fourth-grade students often hate writing, but they enjoy listening to music. Combining writing and music may be an effective way for teachers to unite two creative mediums. Students not only expand their appreciation for music, but they also use their writing skills and are made aware of the possibilities that exist for words and music. Creativity, imaginative thinking, music appreciation, and improved writing skills are some of the benefits that result.

I gathered several instrumental tapes for use in my classroom. Among them were tapes by modern composers and