

Using Wordless Picture Books in the Classroom



Why Wordless Books?

Wordless books, rather than a departure from “real” reading, are an invaluable resource for emergent readers and writers. Here are just a few of their many benefits:

- They increase children’s understanding that stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- They enable children to develop proficiency in oral language as they tell the stories they see in the images.
- They increase children’s vocabularies as they use new words to describe pictures.
- They help children develop vital visual literacy skills as they begin to interpret and evaluate pictures, notice details, and understand the messages contained in facial expressions and body language. These are important skills in a world where more information than ever is presented on TVs, phones, and computer screens.
- They are less intimidating to reluctant readers than books with a lot of text, enabling them to participate with the stronger readers in the class.
- They enable all children to participate and gain confidence, even English language learners who can tell the story in their own words or even their first language.
- They help develop children’s imaginations as they expand the story depicted in the illustrations.
- They enable parents who are not proficient in English to read to their children at home by telling the stories in their first language.

Engaging in these reading behaviors empowers children to consider themselves successful readers.

Common Core Connections

Notes throughout this guide correlate some discussion and activities to specific Common Core Language Arts Standards. Although they are not repeated in each instance, several of the standards apply to more than one discussion topic or activity. For more information on specific standards for your state and grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.

The Midnight Fair

by Gideon Sterer, illustrated by Mariachiara Di Giorgio

Ages 3–7 • HC: 978-1-5362-1115-3

Far from the city, but not quite in the countryside, lies a fairground. When night comes and the fair is empty, something unexpected happens. Wild animals emerge from the forest, a brave raccoon pulls a lever, and the roller coasters and rides explode back into bright, neon life. It's time for the woodland creatures to head to the fair!



With six starred reviews, this title will sparkle in your classroom!

- ★ “Gleaming and golden, *The Midnight Fair* radiates magic. It’s truly exceptional.” —*Bookpage*
- ★ “This splendid story needs no words. . . . Children will savor this glorious, wordless night to remember.” —*Booklist*
- ★ “This intriguing ending affords viewers the opportunity to reflect on the dreamlike narrative and ponder what happens next.” —*The Horn Book*
- ★ “Gorgeously whimsical and utterly convincing.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ “A wordless story about a night of magic for a forest’s animal denizens.” —*Publishers Weekly*
- ★ “Ask 100 children what might happen if you put wild animals in charge of a country fair in the middle of the night—there’s a good chance that variations of their answers appear in this gloriously imaginative wordless picture book.”
—*Shelf Awareness*

A note from the author, Gideon Sterer

Once a year, where I grew up, a county fair came to town. Our fairgrounds more or less did nothing the rest of year, lying dormant until the big spectacle rolled in. I remember always wondering as a child what the forest animals thought about this disruption. For them, I imagined, it must have been incomprehensibly bizarre. Naturally, I began wondering if they ever came in at night and checked it out, and some twenty years later this book seems the logical conclusion of that curiosity!

Using *The Midnight Fair* in your classroom:

With your class, come up with sound words one might hear at a fair and that woodland animals make. Then have students imagine what sounds they might hear on each page of the book. Read through the book, having students make the sounds as you go along. For example, swishing, cranking, squeaking, crunching, whirring, splashing, whistling.

Study the illustrations and point out how the illustrator uses color to create light and darkness. Talk about shadow and silhouette.

Brainstorm other ideas the woodland creatures might have at night and have students create their own wordless books.

Your Guide to Reading a Wordless Book

by Aaron Becker, author-illustrator of the *Journey* trilogy and *A Stone for Sascha*

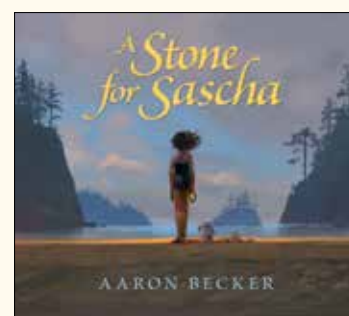
It's a question I've often heard from parents and teachers: how can they "read" a wordless book to a group of children? Fear not! It's actually more intuitive than you might think. Whether you're a parent reading to your child, a bookstore owner or librarian presenting at story time, or a teacher using a wordless book in the classroom, this guide should help you take the plunge.

1. Sit down with your audience at their eye level. The wordless book asks young readers to come toward the book rather than have the story come to them, so let them feel right away that they're going to be involved.
2. Before you begin, keep this one thing in mind: you're not about to tell your audience a story. You're about to discover one—together. And if all goes well, they'll be telling one to you!
3. Ask your audience about the title. What do they think it means? What do they think the story might be about based on the cover alone? Ask for evidence.
4. If, as in the case of *Journey* or *Quest*, there's something hidden under the jacket, ask if they think it may be a hint of what's yet to come. Then take a look at the endpapers and ask the same question. You haven't even started to read the book and already the children are starting to engage in the story. Treat this as a warm-up to get the kids actively seeking out ideas in what they're about to see.
5. As the story begins, you can start with this basic question: what do you see? Get the obvious out of the way. Then ask: what else do you see? Get these kids hunting for clues. At this point, I always ask the kids to just shout their ideas out instead of raising their hands. You're asking kids to step out of their roles as passive listeners and, instead, to become active participants, so they've got to feel like they really have permission to speak out.
6. As the story progresses, you can start asking other types of questions, such as:

"How do you think (a character) is feeling?"

"How do you know?"

"Do you ever feel this way?"
7. At moments of tension or conflict, I like to ask, "What would you do?" I think this helps children identify with the characters' challenges. And it raises the stakes for what might happen on the page turn. Act surprised even if you know what's coming.
8. Sometimes I take the reins for a while and just narrate the story, especially if the kids seem antsy or unfocused. It's a balancing act. Remember, not only are the children engaging with the story, but you are too! This is the challenge of a wordless book. But it's also why, when a child offers up something unexpected or revelatory, it can be such a powerful experience for both the adult and child.
9. Lastly, and this is something to keep in mind throughout the reading, remember to take your time. It's easy to rush through the pages without a script to follow, but don't! You'll miss out on the most rewarding part of sharing a wordless book: allowing the child to discover a story of his or her very own.

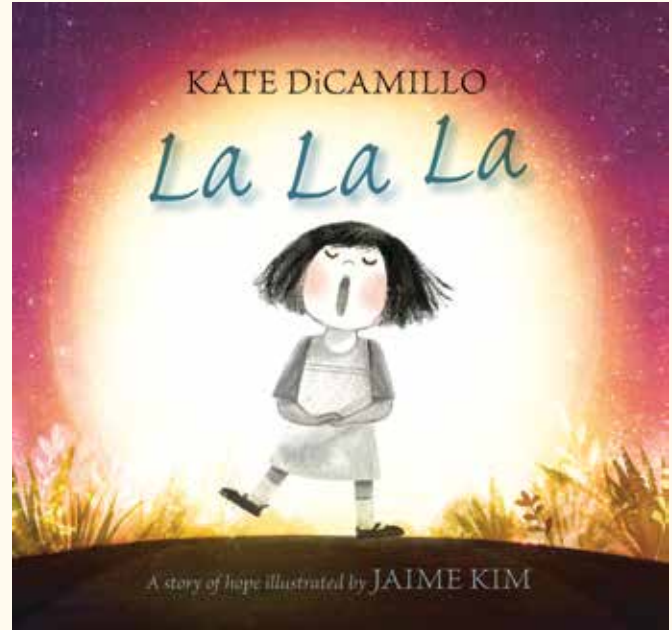


La La La: A Story of Hope

by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Jaime Kim

Ages 4–8 • HC: 978-0-7636-5833-5

“La la la . . . la.” A little girl stands alone and sings, but hears no response. Gathering her courage and her curiosity, she skips farther out into the world, singing away to the trees and the pond and the reeds—but no song comes back to her. Day passes into night, and the girl dares to venture into the darkness toward the light of the moon, becoming more insistent in her singing, climbing as high as she can, but still there is silence in return. Dejected, she falls asleep on the ground, only to be awakened by an amazing sound. . . . She has been heard.



Pre-Reading Discussion

Hold the book at the children’s eye level so everyone can see it easily. Provide ample time for the children to focus on the cover and form an overall impression of the book. Then talk about the cover, asking questions such as:

1. How are the title and the picture of the girl connected?
2. What is the girl doing?
3. Why is she raising one leg in the air?
4. How do you think she is feeling?
5. What evidence does the cover image provide for your answers?
6. What do you think this story will be about? Why?
7. What does the word *hope* mean?

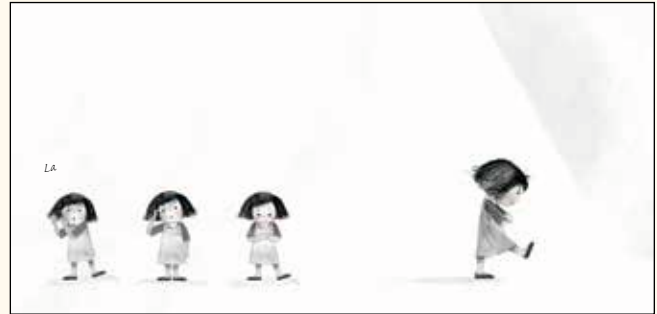
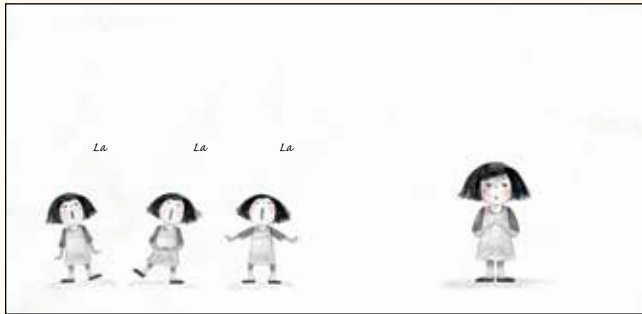
Following this discussion, go through the entire book without comment, pausing on each page to allow time for the children to observe the scene and the girl’s actions. Ask the class to think about what the girl is doing and how she is feeling as the story plays out. Allow as much time as is necessary for the class to take in the story as a whole and follow the girl’s movements before opening the discussion.



Post-Reading Discussion

1. Begin by asking the children to help tell the story as they recall it from the book. The aim here is to have a common frame of reference on which the class can build subsequent discussion. Focus on visual cues and details during that discussion. Allow sufficient time for the children to elaborate on one another's ideas.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.2.1.B: Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.

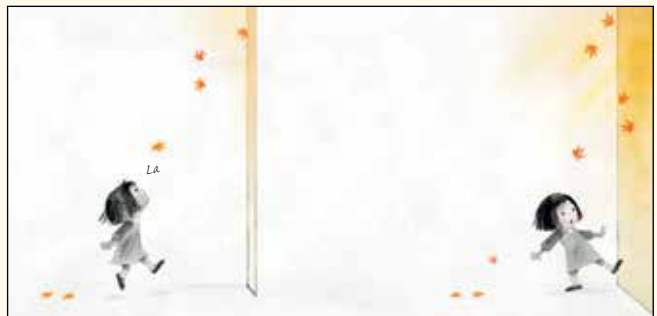


2. Turn to the second and third spreads (shown above). Ask students questions such as, What is the girl doing? (Most stories involve a conflict—a problem the main character must solve—and a resolution of that conflict. Make certain at this point that the children realize the girl's problem is that she is lonely and is singing to elicit a response, to make a friend. This quest for a friend is the theme of the story and the reason for her actions and reactions.) What happens when she holds her hands to her ears, and how does it make her feel? How do you know? Have them compare her raised leg in the first two pictures on spread two with her raised leg in the last image on spread three. What is the difference? How do they know this?

Reading: Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

3. As a group, study the following four spreads (shown below) where the girl sees the leaves and goes outside to the tree. Ask students how the girl seems now. What details do they see in the pictures that tell them this? Have them examine the girl's eyes, mouth, and body postures for clues and look at the letters that represent the girl's song. How do they change? Why?

Reading: Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.



4. After the girl runs past the pond and even searches in the reeds for a friend, ask students what she is thinking and feeling. How do they know this? We know she is not going to give up her search for a friend. Why? What would they do?

Reading: Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

5. Ask what the illustrator does to tell us day is turning to night. What makes the girl venture out into the dark by herself? Why does the illustrator show a close-up of the girl enclosed in a small box? Why do your students think the illustrator makes her appear so tiny in the purplish circles of light on the spread after she raises her arms and sings “La La”?
6. The girl runs to get a ladder to climb as high as she can—close to the moon—to find a friend. Ask students questions such as, Could she really do this? Why do you think the author and illustrator put this in the story?
7. Discouraged, the girl finally falls asleep. She awakes hearing a sound. What does the illustrator do with color that shows how the girl feels now?
8. Have your class think about the girl at the beginning of the story and compare her to the girl at the end of the story. How has she changed? Why?

Reading: Literature: Craft and Structure RL.2.5: Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

9. Why do your students think the girl decided to sing? Ask them to talk about times when singing or listening to music helped them when they were feeling lonely or afraid. Has singing or music ever helped them meet a friend? Have them talk about times they enjoyed music with a friend.

Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.4: Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences; SL.3.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

10. Ask your students, Have you ever been lonely and in need of a friend? Tell us some things you did to try to make a friend. Did they work? Why?



Author and Illustrator Discussion

Point out the names of the author and illustrator on the cover and ask questions like these:

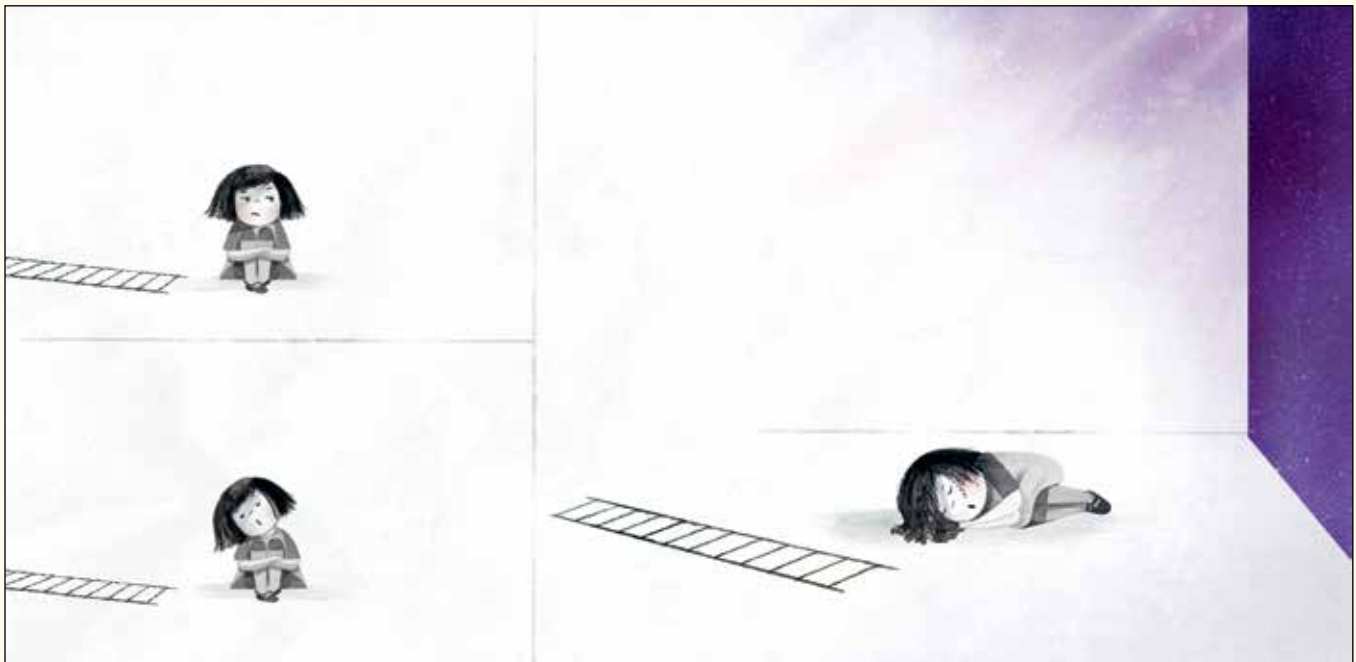
1. What does an author do to create a story?
2. What does an illustrator do to create a story?
3. How can a writer write a story if there are no words?

Reading: Literature: Craft and Structure RL.K.6: With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.

Then read Kate DiCamillo’s note at the end of the book.

Activities

1. Make a large chart with three columns labeled *Beginning*, *Middle*, and *End*. Ask the children what parts of the story belong in each column. Write their responses on the chart and hang it in the classroom for reference during your study.
2. The illustrator of *La La La* gave us many clues about how the girl was feeling throughout the story through her facial expressions and what she was doing with her body. When we interact with other people, it is important to listen not only to what they are telling us with words, but also to what they are saying with their faces and bodies. It helps us understand and get along with them better. Ask for volunteers to demonstrate different feelings with facial expressions and body postures: happy, sad, fearful, excited, etc. The children might also enjoy contributing to a chart of labeled outline drawings of facial expressions. Another possibility is to show images of facial expressions from the Internet and ask the children to determine how each person is feeling.
3. The girl in *La La La* is lonely and reaches out to make a friend. Ask your class what the difference is between being lonely and spending time alone. What are the advantages of spending time alone occasionally? Make a list together of some enjoyable activities a person can do by him- or herself.
4. Finding a friend is at the heart of *La La La*. Ask students to each make a list of the qualities a good friend should have, then combine the lists into a chart entitled "A Good Friend Is ..."
5. Have your students role-play different situations: making friends with a shy person, with a person sitting alone at lunch or alone at recess, with a person in a wheelchair, and with a child who has just moved to their neighborhood or school.



Additional Wordless Books to Share with Your Students



HC: 978-0-7636-9010-6

Bee & Me

Ages 2–5

A little girl befriends a bee that takes her on a journey of discovery, revealing an action that every child can take to aid in conservation.

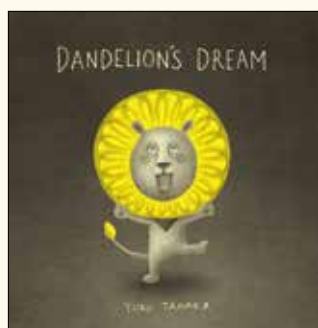


HC: 978-0-7636-7621-6

Before After

Ages 4–8

In this clever, visually enchanting volume, a cow can result in both a bottle of milk and a painting of a cow, and an ape in a jungle may become an urban King Kong.

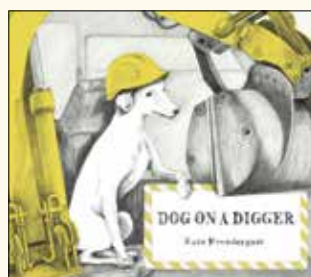


HC: 978-1-5362-0453-7

Dandelion's Dream

Ages 3–7

What if a dandelion became a real lion? With enchanting, ethereal art, this wordless story shares a world where reality can be transfigured by imagination.

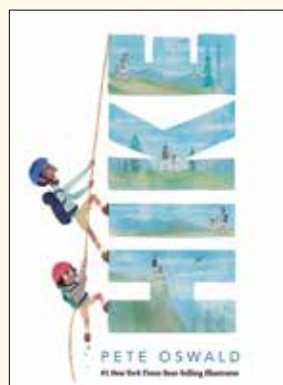


HC: 978-1-5362-0041-6

Dog on a Digger

Ages 4–6

Dog likes to ride along while his human companion works at the construction site. But today Dog's puppy friend goes missing. Luckily, Dog has a brave and ingenious idea for coming to the rescue — with the help of the excavator, of course!

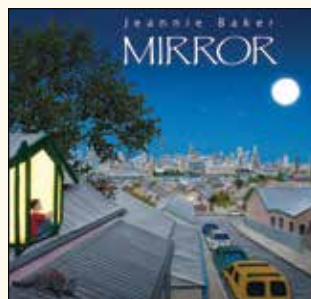


HC: 978-1-5362-0157-4

Hike

Ages 4–8

In this nearly wordless adventure, follow a father and child into the mountains as they witness the magic of the wilderness, overcome challenges, and play a small role in the survival of the forest.



HC: 978-0-7636-4848-0

Mirror

Ages 5–9

This innovative, two-in-one picture book follows a parallel day in the life of two families: one from Australia and one from Morocco.

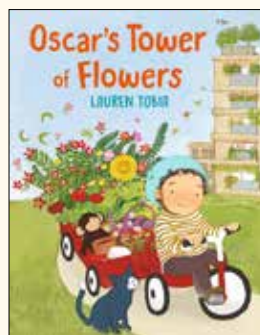


HC: 978-0-7636-8782-3

Now You See Me, Now You Don't

Ages 2–5

There's a menagerie of colorful animals in this book, but pay attention! When the background color changes with each page turn, a different animal (almost) vanishes—and another seems to appear on every spread.



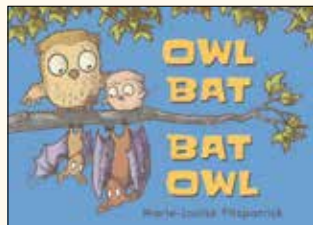
HC 978-1-5362-1777-3

Oscar's Tower of Flowers

Ages 2–5

A celebration for the very young of community, gardening, and sharing beauty with the world.

Additional Wordless Books to Share with Your Students

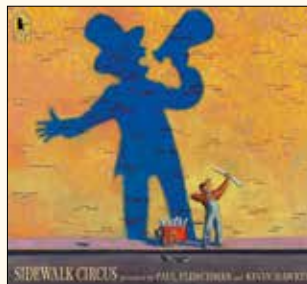


HC: 978-0-7636-9161-5

Owl Bat Bat Owl

Ages 3–7

When a bat family moves onto a branch occupied by an owl and her owlets, the two families are fearful of each other until a stormy night brings them together.

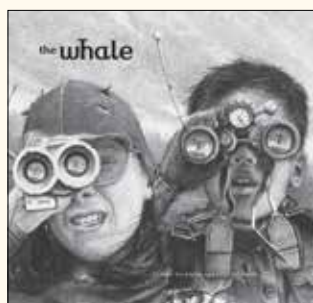


PB: 978-0-7636-2795-9

Sidewalk Circus

Ages 5–9

The Garibaldi Circus is coming soon, but readers with sharp eyes will see the circus performers hidden in places along the sidewalk.



HC: 978-0-7636-7965-1

The Whale

Ages 4–8

When their boats collide, two young whale watchers, one with a camera, the other with sound-recording equipment, pool their resources in order to find proof that a mythical spotted whale exists.

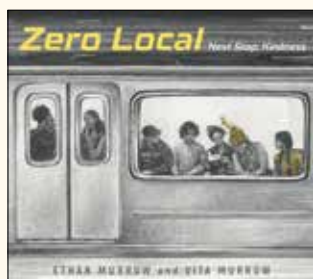


HC: 978-0-7636-8107-4

The White Book

Ages 2–5

Roller in hand, a boy starts to paint a blank wall. Each time he changes colors, animals appear and disappear.



HC: 978-0-7636-9747-1

Zero Local: Next Stop: Kindness

Ages 4–8

Board the train for a story of art, diversity, and community in a near-wordless tale told through masterful, sumptuously detailed illustrations.

This guide was written by Marianne Saccardi, author of *Books That Teach Kids to Write* and *Creativity and Children's Literature: New Ways to Encourage Divergent Thinking*. She is a children's literature and early literacy consultant who works with teachers in professional development sessions.