

Visual Literacy and Wordless Picture Books

Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, create, question, challenge and make meaning from information presented with visual images as well as, or rather than, words. Visually literate people can read the intended meaning in a visual text, interpret the purpose and intended meaning, and evaluate the form, structure and features of the text.

Sharing wordless picture books is a terrific way to build important literacy skills, including listening skills, vocabulary, comprehension and an increased awareness of how stories are “built,” as the storyteller often uses a beginning, middle, and end format (Reading Rockets).

A wordless book doesn't have the author's voice—the text—telling the story: *Each reader tells it in their own way. There is an interpretive element that is really interesting (David Wiesner).*

Wordless books are a wonderful introduction to books and plotting for children who can't read yet. Since we become picture-literate before we become print-literate, they can “read” the book if someone helps blaze a trail through the narrative initially. After hearing the book and seeing how the clues for the narrative are all in the pictures/ illustrations, the child can pretend to read, though in fact they are taking real steps in reading. Just as pilots “read” the sky ahead of them (no words, just images of clouds), the child is taking a reading on the plot from the illustrations (Jim Trelease).

Some resources:

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/sharing-wordless-picture-books>

Tips for sharing wordless picture books

Our Favorite Wordless Picture Books (an annotated list)

Reading Tips for Parents (in 11 languages)

<http://www.hcpl.net/content/encourage-learning-wordless-picture-books>

Encourage Learning with Wordless Picture Books is an excellent resource from the Harris County Public Library. The introductory information will be useful when talking with adults who care for children and want ideas for helping children develop language and literacy skills. An extensive annotated bibliography of wordless picture books includes only the best in children's literature.

<http://wordlesspbs.wikispaces.com/file/view/using+wordless+picture+books+to+support+emergent+literacy.pdf>

Article from Early Childhood Education Journal, Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring 2002.

<http://www.childrens-books-and-reading.com/wordless-picture-books.html>

Helping Your Child Become a Successful Reader: Wordless Picture Books

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/parent-child/how-wordless-picture-books-help-kids-read.html>

Information for families:

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but the perfect picture book is priceless. Here are the reasons why we love wordless stories:

- They help visual thinkers play to their strengths.

Reading is hard for beginners, so taking some of the pressure off with wordless picture books can build confidence. This type of book helps convey the message of the story without the anxiety associated with text, says Gabrielle Miller, Ed.D., national executive director of Raising A Reader. Reluctant readers can get comfortable with the idea of “reading.”

- They incorporate context clues.

With no set narrative to guide the plot, wordless picture books leave a lot to the imagination. But that doesn't mean there's no story line! Full of vivid illustrations, these books encourage children to use the detailed images to pick up on context clues and figure out what's happening. Those same clues will be a factor in decoding text later, and recognizing their importance can help kids become stronger readers.

- They welcome retelling.

Whether you reread it once or every night at bedtime, there's always a new direction for a wordless picture book to take. Encouraging kids to think of new possibilities and reinterpret the story in different ways is a fun way to get them excited about reading. And revving up their imagination can inspire them to create their own stories and work their way up to writing, too!

