

Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

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## REIMAGINING THE READER AS A WRITER USING WORDLESS BOOKS DURING SHARED READING

By Dr. Annette VanAken and Dr. Kari Pawl

Shared reading experiences provide unique interaction opportunities between an adult and one or more other individuals while reading a book using structured strategies to activate the other individual's engagement with the book (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015). Evidence indicates this experience can support language and literacy skills (Cabell et al., 2011). While usually thought of as an experience engaging the reader with text, consider the possibilities of the shared reading strategy with wordless picture books.

Wordless books provide distinctive encounters for the reader. Through intentional planning the teacher is not limited by the text within the book, thus able to plan rich vocabulary and sophisticated theme experiences that stretch students in various directions. In sharing these books, students can develop their storytelling abilities, (Zevenbergen, et al., 2021), vocabulary (Grolig, et al., 2019), and comprehension (Lysaker, 2019). Whole classrooms of students can engage in the same collaborative dialogue without the barriers of leveled text. Following the shared reading strategy, the educator can open a creative reading, thinking, and writing world to students supportive of their current level of understanding.

Once the educators decide how to introduce the wordless book, either as a picture walk having students notice there are no words, or telling them ahead of time, explaining the importance of them being able to see the story so they do not miss key story details, the fun begins! Below we suggest using Laminack and Wadsworth's (2015) flipped writers are readers approach, which looks at the book through the lens of the author and the planning that might take place prior to the actual writing experience.

## Shared Reading with Wordless Books

### Journey: Aaron Becker

| Literacy Skills             | Subskills             | Flipping the Shared Reading Lens  | Writing Connections   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Comprehension Skills</b> | Character Development | <p><i>Journey</i> includes one main character, with several sub-characters. Becker plans out how each will act in the story, what they will do, how they will respond, and what motivates the character. The more the author shows us about each character the more we will understand them. While reading <i>Journey</i>, discuss the young girl and see how the author helps students understand who she is.</p> <p><b>Comprehension Connection:</b></p> <p>The author intentionally helps the reader identify character traits. Through the identification of these character traits, the reader makes deeper connections to strengthen comprehension.</p>   | <p>Have the writers reflect on the intentional decisions the author of <i>Journey</i> made to develop the character traits of the young girl. Then, each writer should select a main character from a new or in progress story and do a quick draw of that character. The writer then spends time writing words, ideas, and phrases around their drawing that will show how the character will act, what they will do, how they will respond, and words to reflect what motivates them.</p> |
| <b>Vocabulary</b>           | Expression voice      | <p>Review the story and think of one and two word short phrases that would express the interactions between the young girl and her experience. For example, at the beginning when the girl is sitting on the step she might say, "I'm bored." On the next page, her mother might say, "Not now." The dad might say, "I'm busy." and the sister might say, "Stop staring." Continue this process through the story as appropriate for your students.</p> <p>During this shared reading experience, the teacher charts the students' responses. Keeping these expressive words and phrases in order creates a unique poetic piece that creatively retells the story using vocabulary the students might reuse in their own writing.</p> <p>Depending on the level of the students, the teacher may consider using onomatopoeia.</p> | <p>Share a few pages of a popular story previously shared in the class. If the story has text, cover the text and have the students complete the same expressive voice experience. Have them put their words and short phrases together to create a unique poetic piece of writing.</p>   |

#### References

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- Grolig, L., Cohrdes, C., Tiffin-Richards, S. P., & Schroeder, S. (2020). Narrative dialogic reading with wordless picture books: A cluster-randomized intervention study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 51, 191-203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.11.002>

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Lysaker, J. T. (2019). *Before words: Wordless picturebooks and the development of reading in young students*. Teachers College Press.  
Institute of Education Sciences. (2007). *Interactive shared book reading*. Institute of Education Sciences.  
Zevenbergen, A., Angell, A., Battaglia, N., & Kaicher, C. (2021). Co-constructing stories: Sharing wordless picture books with preschoolers. *Children & Libraries*, 19(4), 22.  
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## THREE THINGS WE CAN DO TO HELP ALL STUDENTS SEE THEMSELVES AS READERS AND WRITERS

By Andrea Mear

“What are we doing today?” rings out over the cacophony of chairs scraping against the floor, bags unceremoniously tossed onto desks, and the sound of computers firing up. You may find yourself disheartened by the repetition of this question, because the question you really want your students to ask you is, “What are we learning today?” If you want students to ask these types of questions, it all comes down to semantics. Words have power and they can alienate or elevate a student.

To help our students make the connection between reading and writing, we have to first help them see themselves as writers; this starts with choosing words they can connect with.

The majority of students will tell you that an author is someone who writes a book. When these students are asked the follow up question, “Can you be an author?”, the answer is usually, “NO!” with an explanation detailing how they could not write a whole book. When students are asked to define the term “writer,” their definitions tend to be more inclusive with an explanation that is similar to: “someone who writes something.” This shows us the term author is too far removed from their experience and can alienate them from the activity of writing.

To help students make the connection between reading and writing, while helping them realize they too can be writers, we simply need to tweak a few things in our instructional strategy. First, we need to make a shift from only using the term “author,” and spend more time talking about the author as a writer, because the term “writer” is more relatable and accessible for our students. Next, we can help students discover the role of the “reader” vs. the role of the “writer.” When working with teachers and students, I help facilitate the creation of simple definitions that focus on the actions of readers vs writers. For example: “A writer’s job” is to guide readers HOW to interpret what he/she/they wrote and “A reader’s job” is to interpret WHAT the writer wants them to know. Lastly, we need to revisit these roles every time we ask our students to “do something” so they know exactly what actions they should be taking to accomplish the task. This is best accomplished by making an anchor chart that serves as a visual to remind teachers and students to stop and be reflective on our roles as learners every time we begin a new task.

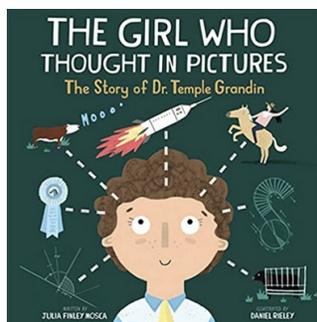
By making these three tweaks to our instruction, we can help students with more complex skills like analyzing a writer’s purpose or perspective. Once students start to see themselves as writers, guiding readers to interpret what they wrote, they will start to see how other writers did the same for them and that all text has a carefully crafted structure waiting to be discovered.

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## FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

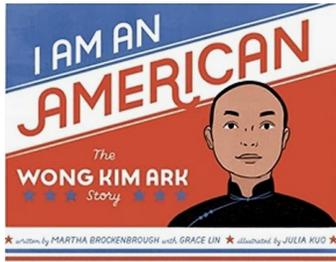
By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

Spring has arrived even though it has been chilly and rainy. The trees and flowers are beginning to bloom, the birds are chirping, and warmer sunny days are on the horizon. During May we’re reminded to honor our moms on Mother’s Day, celebrate Cinco de Mayo, Asian Pacific Heritage Month, Jewish American Heritage Month, and Mental Health Awareness Month. Memorial Day also reminds us to honor those who have served our country.



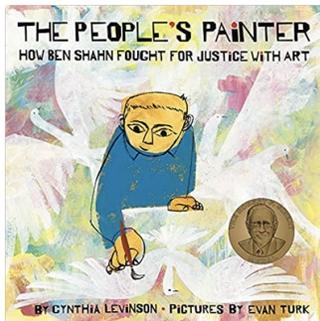
***The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin (Amazing Scientists)*** by Julia Finley Mosca is the biographical story of Temple Grandin. The story, told in verse, begins with Temple’s childhood. She wasn’t able to speak even at age 3, crowd noises bothered her, and she hated to be hugged. At school she was picked on and made fun of. Then one day as a result of her difficult time at school she acted in a negative manner and was expelled from school. A doctor suggested that she be institutionalized but her mother refused. Through her mother’s persistence, Temple was eventually diagnosed with autism. Temple’s mother worked to secure the therapies and education her daughter needed. Temple soon began to speak and learn and also

succeeded in school. One summer her mother sent her to live on her aunt's farm/ranch. While there Temple developed a friendship with the animals and realized that they think the same way as she does, using pictures. Continuing her education and love for animals, especially cows, Temple eventually earned her PhD degree, becoming a world renowned expert in animal behavior, devising inventions and methods to treat animals more humanely, ways to improve livestock transportation, and ways to help farmers/ranchers run their farms/ranches more efficiently. Today, Temple Grandin is a professor and public speaker, often talking about autism. The back of the book includes a timeline, fun facts, additional information about Temple Grandin, and a letter from Dr. Grandin. *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures* would be an excellent addition to all libraries. You can view this book on YouTube.



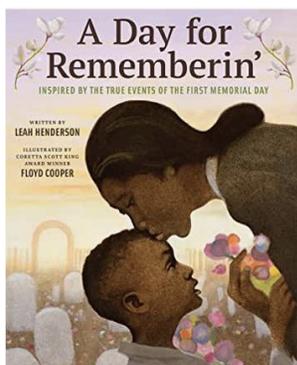
What does it mean to be a U.S. citizen? *I Am An American: The Wong Kim Ark Story* by Martha Brockenbrough and Grace Lin is the untold story of Wong Kim Ark who was born to Chinese immigrant parents in San Francisco at the turn of the century. Growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown, Wong Kim Ark struggled with racism and discrimination, but in his heart he always believed and considered himself an American. When the political climate became hostile toward the Chinese people his parents returned to China but Wong Kim Ark remained in California. As a young man he missed his parents and decided to visit them in China. Upon his return to America his

citizenship was not recognized even though he had the proper documents. He was kept imprisoned for months on various ships. Then in 1898 the Supreme Court ruled that anyone born in America was an American citizen. Upon hearing this news Wong Kim Ark took his case to court, and it eventually got to the Supreme Court where he won based upon the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution. Wong Kim Ark continued to struggle with racism and discrimination in America, but eventually returned to China due to the unfair treatment he and other Chinese people endured. *I Am An American* is a great book to introduce a discussion on citizenship and the path many immigrants follow even today. The book also provides a "mirror" for immigrant students and their families. The back of the book contains additional information about Wong's life, the court case, American citizenship, a timeline, and Chinese American history. Hear the Wong Kim Ark story on YouTube.



May is Jewish American Heritage Month. *The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice With Art* by Cynthia Levinson is the 2022 Association of Jewish Libraries Notable Picture Book Award winner, as well as the 2022 Robert Sibert Information Book Medal Winner. It is the story of Ben Shahn, who was born in Lithuania to Jewish parents. Ben loved to draw but there wasn't any money for paper so he drew pictures of everything he saw in the margins of his Bible stories book. As a young boy he saw his father, who was a labor activist, being banished to Siberia for demanding worker's rights. Ben was affected by this and began to use his artistic drawings to speak and fight for justice. Ben's family eventually immigrated to America. His teachers recognized his artistic talents and encouraged him to paint and draw beautiful

landscapes but he defied them by continuing to draw pictures of his own choosing. Inspired by an unjust execution Ben began to draw social realism paintings (drawings that tell stories). This caught the eye of President Franklin Roosevelt. Hired by the government, he traveled across America taking photographs of Americans experiencing life during the Dust Bowl and the Depression which eventually led to Congress passing laws that enabled people to get food and jobs (the New Deal). Ben continued to paint and draw pictures that told stories of injustice. His artwork became popular and could be found on magazine covers, in libraries, and even the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Ben's artwork documented stories of World War II through the Vietnam War as well as the Civil Rights Movement. *The People's Painter* is enhanced by illustrations that reflect Ben Shahn's work. It also provides an opportunity for discussion on immigration, worker's rights, injustice, antisemitism, and art with your middle school and jr high students. The back of the book contains additional information about Ben Shahn from both the author and illustrator. *The People's Painter* can be viewed on YouTube.



Memorial Day is celebrated on the last Monday of May. To learn about the origin of this special day, read *A Day For Rememberin': Inspired by the True Events of the First Memorial Day* by Leah Henderson. The story is told through the eyes and voice of a young African American called Eli. The first Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day and was celebrated shortly after the end of the Civil War on May 1, 1865 in Charleston, South Carolina. During the Civil War the Confederate army used the Washington Race Course in Charleston as a prison for captured Union soldiers. Many of these soldiers endured inhumane treatment and lost their lives. After the war some newly freed men volunteered their time and work to create a final resting place for the soldiers who fought for their freedom. Eli's father is a volunteer and finally the day comes when Eli and his friends can go to work with their fathers and see the cemetery their fathers created. The next day Eli and his family put on their best clothes

and join many other freed slaves and abolitionists to pay tribute to the soldiers. As night falls Eli and his family are sad for the lost soldiers but also happy knowing that they will never be sold and separated

again and that Eli and other children will now be able to get an education and enjoy their own freedom and liberty. The beautiful illustrations by Floyd Cooper capture the mood and tone of the story as the author takes the reader back in time. The back of the book includes an Author's Note, the Roots of Decoration Day, Other Cities Who Claim to be the Birthplace of Memorial Day, an Informative Timeline, and additional resources for further reading. You can hear *A Day For Rememberin'* on YouTube.

## Looking Ahead

**May is Get Caught Reading Month:** Put a magazine in your tote bag, keep various books in the car to read, or share a book with a friend, a grandparent etc.

**May 2-6: Teacher Appreciation Week**– Hope you receive many expressions of gratitude from your students, families, and PTO

**May 5: Cinco de Mayo**– Enjoy some tacos or have a family dinner with a Spanish menu

**May 6: National Nurses Day**– Thank the nurses in your family, your school nurse, neighborhood etc.

**May 7: Kentucky Derby Day**– Read *D is for Derby* by Helen Wilbar

**May 11: School Nurses Day**– Be sure to remember your school nurse and thank her for all she does to care for you each day

**May 8: Mother's Day**– Give your mom or grandmother a phone call or special message today that you love and appreciate all they do for you

**May 30: Memorial Day**– Thank a Veteran for his/her service and remember all those who gave their life in service to our country

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## LITERACY LINKS

By Sheila Ruh, IRC Educational Media Committee Chair

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

### Reading Passage Resources

#### [Word Hippo](#)

This free resource is a tool that students can use to find definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and translations for words. This tool also assists students with verb conjugation, pronunciation, and prefixes and suffixes. This is a great resource for students of all ages.

### Interactive Resources

#### [Magnetic Poetry](#)

This free interactive tool allows students to write poetry and stories in a fun and interactive way. This tool also provides an opportunity to learn grammar and encourage writing for all ages.

### Web 2.0 Resources

#### [Classtools SMS Generator](#)

This free tool is one from the large catalog of free tools offered by Classtools. The SMS Generator can be used for creating fictional text message conversations between fictional and or historical characters. Students do not need a login and text conversations can be any length. Final text conversations are shared using a unique link.

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## UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **May 1, 2022:** IRC is accepting [Literacy Support Grant](#) applications.
- **May 1, 2022** IRC is accepting [International Grant](#) applications.
- **May 4, 2022: IRC Webinar** on Changing the World One Word, One Book and One Reader at a Time with Joelle Charbonneau from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **May 7, 2022: South Suburban Reading Council** will host Black Joy in Literature with Julie Hoffman, Jennifer Brooks, and Melissa Wheeler at 9:00 am via Zoom.

- **May 13, 2022: Fox Valley Reading Council** will hold a Wine, Dine & Collaborate for a membership drive and teacher appreciation night from 4:30-7:30 pm at Geneva Winery & Tasting Room, 426 S. 3rd St. Geneva, Illinois.
- **May 18, 2022: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **June 1, 2022: National Road Reading Council** will host a Summer Book Club via Google Classroom.
- **June 1, 2022: IRC Webinar** on Using Text Sets to Nurture Thinkers, Speakers, Readers, Writers, and Tiny Human Beings with Aeriale N. Johnson from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).

## QUICK LINKS

[Visit the IRC Website](#)

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[Latest on the IRC Conference](#)

[Available IRC Awards and Grants](#)

[Bring IRC PD to your School District](#)

[Learn more about the Illinois Reads Program](#)

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