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WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS FOR THE YOUNG GIFTED AND TALENTED LEARNERS

by

Nabeeha Pasha

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Education

Laurie Croft
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2019

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
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Nabeeha Pasha

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Abstract

This article discusses what a wordless picture book entails from its content to the images included in the picture book leading them to be “visually rendered narratives”. It further explains the purpose of wordless picture books, and how educators can incorporate these stories within their classrooms. The possible opportunities of differentiation with wordless picture books include using them with Talented and Gifted students, ELL learners, and individuals with dyslexia or other disabilities. Teachers can also develop unique lessons and activities specific to the various needs of their young learners. Following the explanation for how wordless picture books can be used in the classroom is a list of 19 visually rendered narratives for educators to refer to. Majority of the authors of the texts included have either illustrated or authored multiple published wordless picture books. A selection of the texts mentioned have either been recipients of the Caldecott Medal or have been a Caldecott Honor book.

Wordless Picture Books for the Young Gifted and Talented Learners

“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 (Caldecott Winner David Wiesner *Speaks Volumes on Wordless Books*, 2016, p. 6).

Even before they begin school, many gifted students learn how to read a book by focusing on the text included on the page. Depending on the book, the author may include illustrations which represent what the text says. Sometimes, however, a young learner may not connect with a story through the words on a page. Some creative authors have created a way for learners to read a story in a nontraditional way, through wordless picture books. Serafini (2014) suggested not all wordless picture books are completely wordless since most books have a title, author, publication information, and some have images with words incorporated into them. Instead, Serafini refers to these texts as “visually rendered narratives” (Serafini, 2014, p. 24). This article includes a list of visually rendered narratives, or using the more common terminology, wordless picture books, which teachers can use in their classrooms for early readers, as well as other students who will appreciate exploring the imagery (see Table 1, *19 Choices for Wordless Picture Books*). The narratives included in the table vary widely, including books that students from any background or academic level could comprehend. Some older books are readily available in public and some school libraries; multiple texts and/or their authors or illustrators have received awards for their creative work. Each text is unique and can provide both enjoyment and challenges for gifted learners.

It can be difficult to help gifted and talented students in the early grades to find literature appropriate for them. As the books increase in level of complexity in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and character development, the stories may include more mature topics as well, making the texts inappropriate for younger readers. Teachers can provide both accomplished readers and students whose talents do not include a mastery of written text with wordless picture books. Their use allows high-ability students to “benefit from meaningful and challenging learning activities addressing their unique characteristics and needs” (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2019, p.7).

Parents and teachers may wonder what advantages can come from a book without any text. “Stories without words offer exercises in observation and visual discrimination...[requiring] close attention to detail” (Williams, 1994, p. 38). Without text, the reader will need to develop the story on his or her own. Lysaker & Hopper (2015) suggest that “children navigate books as objects to be read...and use images and personal experiences to create oral narratives” (Lysaker & Hopper, 2015, p. 651). The narrative will encourage the student to expand his or her imagination. The illustrations provide an outline for the reader to refer to, but the absence of text will free the student from being limited to one type of story for the book; culturally responsive teachers will seek positive portrayals of diverse populations (Floyd & Hébert, 2010; Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017). Wordless picture books “connect visual literacy (learning to interpret images), cultural literacy (learning the characteristics and expectations of social groups) and literacy with print (learning to read and write language)” (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, & Zhang, 2002, p. 168). The student will have the opportunity to construct a story about the images orally, but the teacher can allow other means of presenting the created story as well.

Beyond the use of wordless picture books for students who read well above grade level, others who struggle with reading, including twice-exceptional students diagnosed with dyslexia or other disabilities that impact language processing, can greatly benefit from wordless picture books as well. “Inclusive literature is one way that schools can cultivate a view of human differences along an infinite number of dimensions, including ability and disability” (Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017, p. 412). Pictures mean what the interpreter believes, serving as a mirror reflecting students’ own thoughts or feelings, as a window to new experiences, and as a door that transports children to other worlds (Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017). English Language Learners (ELL) or other students who have difficulties understanding words written in English can imagine the story suggested to them by the visual narratives. Flatley and Rutland (1986) note that wordless picture books have value as instructional aids with ELL, suggesting a wide variety of strategies to use when prereading, reading the illustrations, and postreading the material). Since wordless picture books avoid traditional patterns of communication, including, for example, syntax, vocabulary, and intonation that may confuse some learners, the students are not hindered by the text. As the students engage the images and create their own stories, the teacher can ask the students to write down their thoughts, or verbally express what is in their minds, assessing the comprehension levels of these students.

Once students have read the illustrations in the wordless books, the teacher can also facilitate several types of projects. Students can expand the story they have imagined by creating their own illustrations, providing the text for the book they read, and/or sharing a summary or reflections about the story with other people; students in middle school have been surprised by the differences that others in their classroom imagine for the same wordless text (Cassady, 1998).

Depending on the educational goals associated with the book, and on the English Language Arts (ELA) Reading: Literature standards accessible through wordless books, teachers and students can agree on countless activities to extend enthusiasm for reading and learning, as well as for creativity, problem solving, and empathy (Killeen, 2014; Meador, 1996; Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017).

By incorporating visual rendered narratives into their curriculum, teachers would be creating lessons which connect to the *2019 NAGC Pre-K - Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards* (NAGC, 2019). Curriculum Planning and Instruction Standard 3.3.1. encourages educators to “develop and use curriculum that is responsive and relevant to diversity that connects to students’ real-life experiences, examine their own perspectives and biases, and develop a critical consciousness” (p. 11). Since visually rendered narratives rely on the student’s imagination, the students can practice understanding the purpose behind a text in their own ways. The images from the various texts can represent different aspects of diversity as mentioned in the standard. Without words, the students must comprehend the images on their own, inspiring them to read the material more than once and imagine the story and meanings at a deeper level.

Table 1

Choices for Wordless Picture Books

<i>Title</i> Description	Author	Publication
<i>Guess What</i> Colorful illustrations reveal one part of an animal. Before turning the page, the reader can guess what he or she is looking at.	Beau Gardner*	1985

- Free Fall****** David Wiesner* 1991
A young boy dreams about mythical creatures in an imaginary land. The reader joins the boy's dream as he travels far and wide.
- Colors Everywhere*** Tana Hoban* 1995
Through the photos of objects and living things, the reader can identify the colorful images on each page.
- Rain*** Peter Spier* 1997
Join an adventure with a brother and a sister on a rainy day and into the next sunny morning.
- Museum Trip*** Barbara Lehman* 2006
Join a curious young boy who is exploring the mysteries of a museum.
- Wave*** Suzy Lee* 2008
What happens when a girl challenges a wave? Although she is drenched, the wave brings her many beautiful things from the water.
- The Lion and the Mouse***** Jerry Pinkney* 2009
Beautiful illustrations tell the story of a mouse in trouble. The reader sees the value of helping others, no matter who they may be.
- The Secret Box*** Barbara Lehman* 2011
With time, things change. People age, cities develop, seasons come and go, but the thirst for adventure never fades.
- Where's Walrus*** Stephen Savage* 2011
A walrus escapes from the zoo, and the reader travels the city with the walrus as he experiences a new world.

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| <p><i>Once Upon A Banana</i>
 Reading street signs is a must! Follow illustrations which depict accidents caused by a banana peel.</p> | <p>Jennifer Armstrong
 David Small*,
 Illustrator</p> | <p>2013</p> |
| <p><i>Journey***</i>
 Join a young girl on a journey through a fantasy world opened by a magical door she drew. Marvelous illustrations depict her fantasy world. <i>Journey</i> is the first book in a wordless trilogy.</p> | <p>Aaron Becker*</p> | <p>2013</p> |
| <p><i>Inside Outside</i>
 What is happening outside the window? Now, what is happening inside? Each page is filled with unique images depicting a variety of places.</p> | <p>Lizi Boyd*</p> | <p>2013</p> |
| <p><i>Flora and the Flamingo***</i>
 Through imitation and practice, watch Flora progress through her journey to learn dance positions taught by the flamingo.</p> | <p>Molly Idle*</p> | <p>2013</p> |
| <p><i>Draw!</i>
 What can a young boy do with his sketch pad and his imagination? Join Leonardo on a safari to see his images brought to life.</p> | <p>Raul Colon*</p> | <p>2014</p> |
| <p><i>Pool</i>
 Go with two shy children to see how imagination and friendship can flourish anywhere.</p> | <p>Jihyeon Lee*</p> | <p>2015</p> |
| <p><i>The Little Red Cat Who Ran Away and Learned his ABC's (the Hard Way)</i>
 Each page has an image that depicts a word starting with a letter. See the alphabet through unexpected images!</p> | <p>Patrick McDonnell*</p> | <p>2017</p> |

<i>Bee & Me</i>	Alison Jay	2018
What can a little girl learn from taking care of a bee in need? Explore the adventures of the two through artwork that shares a message of friendship and of the environment.		
<i>Wallpaper</i>	Thao Lam*	2018
Hearing voices outside can make a little girl feel anxious and alone in her new house. Follow the detailed images to see all her new discoveries.		
<i>I Got It!</i>	David Wiesner*	2018
Practice makes perfect when you do not give up. Enjoy the imagination of a boy catching a baseball.		

*The author or illustrator has published more than one wordless book.

**The book is a Caldecott Medal Winner.

***The book is a Caldecott Honor Book.

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