

The Power of Pictures: “Reading” Wordless Picture Books

By Denise Marchetti, Children’s Librarian, Wyckoff Public Library

Wordless picture books tell stories solely through their illustrations. These images are open to interpretation and therefore allow readers to make the story their own, an empowering experience that promotes visual literacy. Growing readers develop vocabulary, comprehension, and narrative skills while “reading” the illustrations.

There are a wide variety of wonderfully engaging wordless picture books for readers of all ages, interests, reading levels, and languages to enjoy. While some offer humor, mystery, and adventure, there are those that are incredibly moving and sure to resonate with readers as they explore themes of kindness, courage, friendship, perseverance, and love, as well as overcoming feelings of fear, frustration, anxiety, and loneliness.

I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness by Kerascoet, which is inspired by actual events, is the story of a girl who sees her classmate being treated badly by other students. She initially feels angry and helpless, but then figures out a way to get her community to stand up to bullying. Since the story is told only through pictures, the idea that someone can be an ally without saying a word, is emphasized. The companion book, *I Forgive Alex: A Simple Story About Understanding* highlights the importance of taking responsibility for mistakes, but also the equally important ability to have empathy and show forgiveness.

Matthew Cordell’s Caldecott Award-winning *Wolf in the Snow* is an inspiring adventure story about helping others. Cordell’s landscapes portray the vastness of a girl’s lonely journey as she gets lost in a snowstorm at night. She comes across a wolf cub who is also lost and carries him through the snow and ice safely back to his pack. The wolves return her kindness by howling loudly, leading her family members who are out searching to where she is.

The Lion and the Mouse by Jerry Pinkney is the Caldecott Award-winning wordless adaptation of one of Aesop’s most beloved fables, in which a lion who spares a trembling and terrified mouse which he is about to eat, is later rescued by that very same mouse from poachers. The illustrations speak volumes, as this unlikely pair demonstrate that no act of kindness is ever wasted.

Stormy: A Story About Finding a Forever Home by Guojing is a heartwarming tale that begins with a woman visiting a park and discovering a puppy hiding under a bench. Even though the woman tries to befriend him day after day, he is too scared to come out. It takes perseverance, patience, and a raging storm to finally bring the two together.

Guojing demonstrates that trust doesn't always come easily, but the satisfaction of finding love and friendship is definitely worth the effort.

Small Things by Mel Tregonning is a wordless graphic picture book about a young boy who feels alone and worried that he doesn't fit in well at school. His anxiety manifests as tiny beings that surround him all the time, making him feel overwhelmed. He comes to realize that feelings of worry and anxiety are experienced by everyone, even those that don't show it, and he is finally able to overcome his own feeling of isolation.

Thao Lam's *Wallpaper* tells the story of a young girl whose family moves into a new neighborhood. She hears kids playing outside, but is too shy to introduce herself, so she stays alone in her room. Feeling bored, she begins to pick at the wallpaper, which soon reveals an entry to a new adventure behind the walls, including being chased by a monster. She realizes that the monster just wants to be her friend. When she comes back to the reality of her room, she finds the courage to go outside and make some new friends.

Molly is very shy and insecure in *Brave Molly* by Brooke Boynton-Hughes. She is the only one who sees monsters everywhere, especially when she is trying to make a new friend. She initially tries to run and hide from them, but they keep showing up, even multiplying. When she finally finds the courage to confront them head-on, she puts them in their place, and out of her life.

In *The Wanderer* by Peter Van den Ende, a little paper boat journeys alone across the ocean, navigating around reefs and icebergs, and encountering strange sea monsters. Being alone gives it a chance to contemplate the world above and beneath the waves, but it also must work to save itself from storms. Readers come away feeling the amazing rewards that come with taking risks and being brave while facing challenges.

Journey, the first book in Aaron Becker's *The Journey Trilogy*, is a Caldecott Honor Award winner about a lonely girl who uses a red marker to draw a magic door on her bedroom wall. She is able to enter a world full of adventure as she uses her marker to create a boat, a balloon, and even a magic carpet to carry her along. When she is captured by a frightening emperor, only an act of utmost courage and kindness can save her. *Quest* is the second book, and *Return* is the third in the trilogy.

Logan S. Kline's nearly wordless *Finding Fire*, inspired by prehistoric times, is an exciting adventure tale about a brave boy who sets out to find more fire after a hard rain puts out the one his family has. He faces many challenges along the way, including dangerous mountains, raging rivers, and scary predators. But the most amazing,

unexpected thing that he finds is a friend. This is an engaging story of perseverance, family, and friendship.

Lizi Boyd offers an enchanting exploration of nature at night in *Flashlight*. A boy who is on a camping adventure initially thinks it may be scary out there in the dark, but then he decides to shine his flashlight from his tent into the shadows. He soon discovers the fascinating world that exists once he looks for it, one filled with all sorts of interesting creatures, insects, plants, and trees.

Caldecott Honor Award-winning *The Red Book*, by Barbara Lehman is a magical story about a book-in-a-book. It begins with a girl finding a red book lying in the snow in the city. The book reveals another world where she sees a boy who has the same red book and can see her as well. This unique tale of friendship and connectedness shows us how stories can bring us together, and even bring us inside their pages.

A Day for Sandcastles by JonArno Lawson and Qin Leng is the story of three siblings who spend a day having fun at the beach, working together to create a castle. Unfortunately, whenever they are close to finishing, something happens to stop their progress, like the tide that comes too close. Rather than feeling defeated and giving up each time their structure is destroyed, they have renewed determination to work together and make it even better.

Imagine by Raul Colon is a wordless tribute to the arts and the power of imagination. A boy who often walks by a city museum, finally decides to go inside. He passes many pieces of art until he sees a painting that inspires him to stop and reflect. The painting comes to life, and his afternoon is filled with discovery and adventure, forever changing how he sees the world.

Rosie wakes up with a dark cloud over her head in *Rosie's Glasses* by Dave Whamond. The cloud follows her throughout the day, one which is filled with frustration and annoyance. When she finds a pair of glasses on her way home from school and puts them on, everything changes. The dark cloud disappears, and she begins to see bright, joyful color all around her. The reader must decide if the glasses magically changed Rosie's day, or can it be that how we choose to see the world can actually determine our experiences?

Please visit the Wyckoff Rizzo Children's Library and browse our Wordless Picture Book Display this month, as well as our StoryWalk, featuring *Stormy: A Story About Finding a Forever Home* by Guojing. Enjoy "reading" the story while walking outside our library on these lovely fall days. Also, please inquire about our book clubs for kids of all ages, and

visit, call us at #201-891-4866, x.3, or email denise.marchetti@wyckoff.bccls.org for more great suggestions, including picture books, early readers, chapter books, and non-fiction titles.