Selecting Wordless Picture Books

So many great ways **Wordless Picture Books** contribute to literary enrichment, critical thinking, and curricular content. Types and uses vary greatly. The following questions address some of these considerations. Here, the "reader" refers to students with the book in hand. Not all questions will be reflected in the book being examined.

1. Audience, Age, Appropriateness

- *What audience or age range is the book created for?*
- *Does the book offer a universality to reader age and audience appropriateness?*
- *Can the book be interpreted differently for different ages?*
- *Without words, how does the illustrator draw the reader in to engage readers with the book?*
- *In procuring a book intended for older readers new to learning English, do the illustrations carry content that will be of sophisticated enough interest to engage them?*

2. Illustrations

- *How well do the illustrations stand on their own to:*

  - *Deliver complex and/or universal themes?*
  - *Present a clear story arc (fiction) or content information (nonfiction)?*
  - *Move the reader to an emotional connection with content through art?*
  - *Allow 'breathing room' for readers to figure out what the story or content is about without the burden of decoding words, to encourage readers to draw conclusions connotatively through the art rather than what is explicitly denoted through text?*

- *Are the illustrations unique enough to allow different interpretations by different readers?*
- *What techniques or media styles does the illustrator use to engage the reader?*
- *How effective are the media type the illustrator uses in delivering the book's message?*
- *Left to the reader's own interpretation, how does the visual information on each page leave space between each sequential illustration for the reader to conclude a sequential flow to the story or content?*

- *What interpretive literary value or interpretation is found on each illustration? Does the book allow space for the reader*
- *How does the illustrator use body movement or facial expression to convey emotional change?*
- *Are the illustrations detailed and/or rich enough to allow for lingering meaning, to encourage embarking on multiple readings?*

3. Literary

- *Does the book have a story arc—a beginning, middle and end— delivered through images?*
- *What universal themes open to individual interpretation are contained within?*
- *How do the illustrations offer opportunities for each individual reader's interpretation to:*

  - *Flesh out the story line?*
  - *Infer character motivation?*
  - *Draw out literary themes?*
  - *Determine characters' feelings and emotions?*
  - *Show patterns?*
  - *Portray symbols and/or symbolism(s)?*
  - *Create assumptions about settings?*

- *Does the book allow for each child's story to "unfold in a uniquely and intimately personal manner" (Wiesner, 2022)?*
- *How can the book be used as a writing prompt to inspire creative writing?*
- *What techniques does the illustrator use to provide realistic depictions of characters' motivation and emotions through art?*
- *How can the book be used to introduce a unit of study?*
- *Does the book contribute uniquely to curriculum content in areas such as science or math?*

4. Picture Books for Older Readers

- *What features in the illustrations can be used to promote critical connotative thinking and multi-layered conclusions drawn from the images?*
- *Does the story arc (fiction) or content information (nonfiction) stand on its own to contribute literary value to curriculum?*

- *How does the text depict increasing levels of sophistication, providing opportunities for older readers to wrestle with complex themes, or incite stimulating classroom dialogue, creative writing, art appreciation and other opportunities for predicting, questioning, and inferring?*

Reference

Wiesner, David. (2022, Feb. 8). "How to Read a Wordless Picture Book: The Mary Nagel Sweetser Lecture. *The Horn Book.* https://www.hbook.com/story/how-to-read-a-wordless-picture-book-the-mary-nagel-sweetser-lecture