

The Stories and Art of Ezra Jack Keats: Arts Integration Lesson Plan



Image: Ezra Jack Keats, illustration for *The Snowy Day*, 1962. Ezra Jack Keats papers, de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi. Copyright © Ezra Jack Keats Foundation.

About

Overview

This resource offers tools to integrate a visual art experience with your literacy curriculum. Through this K–2 geared lesson plan, elementary and art teachers will learn how to incorporate The CJM's award-winning [Stories and Art of Ezra Jack Keats](#) program into their classrooms.

Lesson Objectives

- To integrate art making and observation into K–2 literacy curriculum
- To contribute to a culturally competent classroom where all students see themselves and their identities reflected in learning materials
- To provide students with tools to make personal connections to written and illustrated stories
- To offer students an open-ended, playful art process that centers personal agency and decision-making

Learning Materials

Vocabulary

Antisemitism – Treating someone differently, unequally, or meanly because they are Jewish. In school settings, this can take the form of bullying.

Author – A person who writes books.

Background – A part of the picture that depicts scenery to the rear or behind the main subject.

Collage – A picture made by layering pieces of paper onto a surface.

Foreground – The elements or parts of an image that are closest to the front.

Illustrator – A person who draws pictures, especially in books or magazines.

Immigrant – A person who comes to a country from another country to permanently live there.

Jewish person – a person who identifies as Jewish based on their heritage, religion, or culture; many people who identify as Jewish are not religious and identify as Jewish because of their culture or heritage.

Moment – A short amount of time.

Scene – The place where an action or event occurs. In book illustrations, the scene can be identified with objects that indicate location, time, season, etc.

Video

The Life and Art of Ezra Jack Keats is a biographical video produced by The CJM. Explore Keats's experience growing up in the 1920s as the son of Jewish immigrants in New York City, how he used his urban surroundings as sources of inspiration, and his journey to becoming a beloved American children's author and illustrator.

To watch, visit: https://www.thecjm.org/learn_resources/877

Book***A Letter to Amy*****Written and Illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats**

A story about taking risks and deepening friendships, *A Letter to Amy* aligns with California K–2 literacy standards, including exploring emotion and connecting text with illustrations. This small moment narrative also deals with weather and time of day.

Art Materials

Colorful paper (e.g. construction paper, cardstock, printer paper), patterned or textured paper, glue sticks, scissors; watercolor paper, watercolors, brushes, water cups, paper towels (optional, for watercolor component).

Activity

Author Study

Ezra Jack Keats was born in 1916 to Jewish immigrants from Poland in Brooklyn, New York.

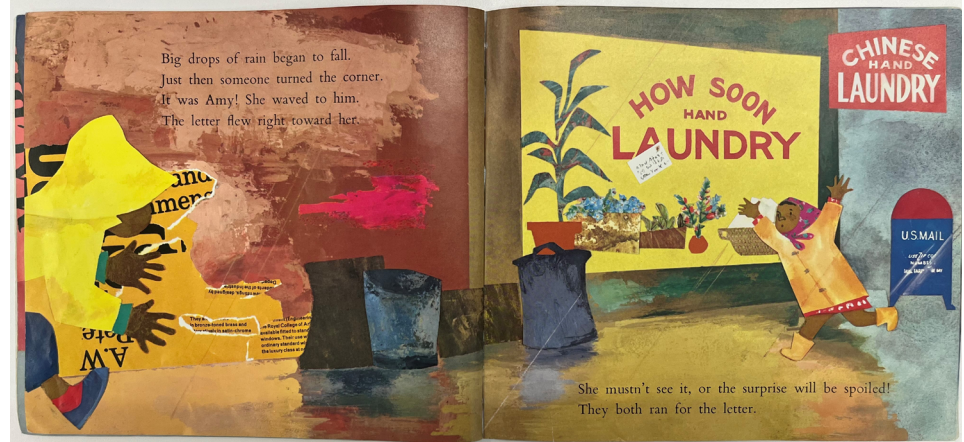
Keats demonstrated artistic talent from a young age. As an adult, he wrote and illustrated many beloved children's books, including *The Snowy Day*. He died in 1983.

Watch [The CJM's video on Ezra Jack Keats](#). Reflect on the video and review concepts of Judaism, Jewish culture, immigration, and antisemitism.

1. Ask students what they know about the word "Jewish." Jewish refers to a religion (called Judaism), a culture, and a heritage, which can be where your family came from, your family's culture or religion, or another important part of your family's background.
 - a. Culture is when a group of people share values, traditions, foods, arts, language, etc. Jewish culture includes holidays like Hanukkah and Shabbat, foods like challah bread, and the Hebrew language in sacred books. Jewish culture also includes values such as good deeds (*mitzvot*) and giving charity (*tzedakah*).
 - i. Ask the students what are some of the special holidays, foods, and languages that connect them to their culture.
 - b. Jewish diversity: There are Jewish people all over the world. While Jewish holidays are the same around the globe, there are many differences within Jewish culture, including different traditional foods, songs and melodies, and spoken languages, depending on where their families are from. Jewish people may also be Asian, Latinx, Black/African American, and more.
2. Immigration: Invite students to share immigration stories from their own families or friendships.
 - a. Use the provided link to a world map to point to the countries students' families or friends came from:
<https://www.mapsofworld.com/>
3. Bullying, discrimination, and standing up
 - a. Ask students to recall how Ezra Jack Keats and his parents experienced discrimination in their lives because of their Jewish identity.
 - b. Ask students to consider how Ezra Jack Keats stood up to bullying through his stories.

Activity

Read Aloud and Close Looking



Ezra Jack Keats's books were often based on stories from his own childhood. Sometimes these stories focused on a small moment or day. Some were about overcoming being bullied. Today, we are going to read a book that explores emotions and takes place on a rainy day.

Read *A Letter to Amy* aloud to the class

Project this illustration of Peter and Amy running toward the letter as “Big drops of rain began to fall” onto the screen and guide students through a close looking exercise. **See [Further Resources](#) for a larger version of this image.**

1. Share with students that Ezra Jack Keats used different techniques to create his illustrations, including collage, painting, drawing, and papermaking. Point to areas of the picture where there is collage versus areas where there is painting.
2. Use the following questions to help steer a class investigation of the illustration. As you go, and again at the end of the discussion, paraphrase what students are seeing.
 - a. What do you see? What do you notice?
 - b. What colors do you see? Where?
 - c. What is happening in the background of the scene? What is happening in the foreground?
 - d. What is the weather in the scene? What do you see that makes you say that?
 - e. What are the two children, Peter and Amy, doing? What do you think they are feeling at this moment? What do you see that makes you say that?
 - f. What other details do you see in the picture? What more can we find?
3. Ask students to imagine that they are also in the scene. What does it feel like to be there? What does it sound like?

Activity

Class Walk: Exploring the Neighborhood

Go on a class walk around your school's neighborhood. Ask students to observe the built and natural environment around them, the weather, the time of day, and any colors or shapes they see.

1. Back in the classroom, discuss and reflect on the walk as a class. Keep track of student responses on the board.
2. Use the following questions to help guide the discussion.
"On our walk..."
 - a. What did you see?
 - b. What colors did you see? Where?
 - c. What shapes did you see? Where?
 - d. What was the weather? What time of day was it?
 - e. What kinds of buildings did you see?
 - f. What nature did you see?
 - g. Did you see other people or animals? Were there cars or bikes?
 - h. What sounds did you hear?

Turn and talk: Have students turn to a classmate and tell a one- to two-sentence story of their walk using the details shared by the class.

Activity

Art Making

Prompt: Make a collage based on the class walk**What is *collage*?**

1. A picture made by layering pieces of paper onto a surface. Show an example from Ezra Jack Keats and/or another collage artist. See Further Resources for more collage artists.

Materials

1. Distribute art materials. Every student should have at least five differently colored pieces of paper, scissors, and a glue stick. See the following page for instructions on adding a watercolor component to the lesson.
2. Have students select one piece of paper to be their background. The background can be any color they want to select.

Making

1. Create the shapes for your collage:
 - a. Cut or tear the paper into shapes.
 - i. Your shapes can be precise, or you can create a variety of shapes to piece together on your background.
 - ii. Have students think about shapes they saw on the walk. For example, if they saw a house, ask them what different shapes made up the house. Show them how to combine different shapes to make an object in their picture.
2. Selecting colors for your collage:
 - a. You can select colors that are realistic (what you actually saw on the walk) or imagined (what colors you like or want to use).
 - b. Colors can also express emotion or mood in art.
3. Arranging your shapes to make your picture:
 - a. You can play around with where your shapes will go on your background piece of paper.
 - b. You can layer shapes on top of each other.
4. When you are ready, use glue to stick your shapes in place.

Activity

Making a Watercolor Background (Optional)

Materials

Watercolor paper, watercolor set, brushes, water cups, water, paper towels

1. Demonstrate how to use watercolors:
 - a. Dip brush into water, swirl on color to pick up paint, and apply to paper.
 - More water = thinner wash
 - Less water = thicker wash
2. To mix colors, use the plastic top of the watercolor container to combine colors. Always dip the brush into water to clean it before picking up a new color.
3. Painting the background:
 - a. Students can apply color to the paper however they choose to make their background.
 - b. Some ideas for backgrounds include painting: one solid color, a rainbow, an abstract composition, polka dots, an assortment of shapes, a landscape, or city streets.
4. Drying: Once the students have completed their watercolors, let them dry for about 15–30 minutes.

Activity

Closing Options

1. Ask students to write a one- to two-sentence story describing their collage.
2. Lead students on a gallery walk to look at each other's creations.
3. Ask students to reflect on connections between their art making experience and Ezra Jack Keats's art practice.

Resource

Further Resources

Collage Artists

Deborah Roberts (American, b. 1962)

- a. Explores Blackness, childhood, and constructed identity. Utilizes collage and drawing.
- b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuhlImD6mtg>

William Kentridge (South African, b. 1955)

- a. Explores history, social injustice, and multimedia art making. Utilizes collage, animation, drawing, printmaking, and more.
- b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYjMpNxvreo>

Big drops of rain began to fall.
 Just then someone turned the corner.
 It was Amy! She waved to him.
 The letter flew right toward her.



**CHINESE
HAND
LAUNDRY**

**HOW SOON
HAND
LAUNDRY**



She mustn't see it, or the surprise will be spoiled!
 They both ran for the letter.

A Letter to Amy page selection