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Using Wordless Picture Books with the Language Experience Approach: A Method for Teaching Pre-emergent and At-Risk Readers

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Using Wordless Picture Books with the Language Experience Approach: A Method for Teaching Pre-emergent and At-Risk Readers

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Abstract

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This independent study proposes using wordless picture books in conjunction with Roach Van Allen’s Language Experience Approach as a method for teaching pre-emergent and at-risk readers. The original work that comprises the bulk of this study is a wordless picture book of Aesop’s Fable, *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. The author describes the developmental and artistic considerations taken during the creation of the book as well as potential classroom applications for its use.
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Introduction

Last fall I began working as a literacy tutor with at-risk students in a first grade classroom. Although all of the students with whom I worked were classified as at-risk, there was quite a bit of variation in their reading abilities. Some students struggled with phonemic awareness, others with comprehension and a few lacked a firm grasp on the concepts of print. In order to best serve the different needs of my students, I made efforts to discover sources of strength, or skills that they brought with them that I could tap into as a way of assisting their literacy development. It was through this process of getting to know my students that I came across wordless picture books as a tool for literacy and decided to create one of my own.

The student that inspired me down this path, Albert, is a natural born storyteller. He has an anecdote for everything and is one of the most articulate students in the class. His parents are published authors, and it has been very difficult for him to reconcile the fact that he cannot read, when he sees it come so easily to those around him. He often calls himself dumb and will give up on reading and writing assignments if he feels that he is taking too long.

Although I was able to identify Albert’s language as a potential strength, I was unsure, at first, of the best way to use it. I started by having him dictate sentences to me while I wrote them down for him, but I found this did little to improve his reading. I did a bit of online sleuthing and finally found something that I thought might work for him: Roach Van Allen’s Language Experience Approach.

The Language Experience Approach or LEA was developed by Roach Van Allen in the 1960s. The approach takes a student’s language and uses it as the basis for their learning. Put succinctly, it states that what a learner can say, they can write. what they can write, they can read. They can read what they write and what other people can write for them to read. To use this approach, students must first have an experience. The experience can be as simple as a walk in the park or as complex
as making a three layer cake, so long as it leaves the students with an experience. Once the experience has been established, the teacher then prompts the students to tell them about their experiences in their own words. The teacher records this language, either electronically or through other means, and then uses it to create original learning materials for the student.

Since Albert loved to tell stories, an approach that borrowed heavily from his own language as a way of improving his literacy skills seemed like a good method to try out. However, as an America Reads tutor, I did not have a lot of opportunities to take him outside of the classroom to set up an experience for him. I decided that it would be easier for me to bring the experience to him by way of a wordless picture book. In my reading about the Language Experience Approach I had seen wordless picture books mentioned as a potential medium for experiences since they do not contain text and require students to rely on their own experiences to tell the stories within.

When I initially went on the hunt for a wordless picture book to use with Albert, I wrongly assumed that all wordless picture books were created equally. As it turns out, there is a wide range of wordless picture books and some are better suited for beginning readers than others. We started by working with *Tuesday* by David Wiesner, since it was already in the classroom. However, I found it to be too surreal for Albert’s current storytelling vocabulary. On a suggestion from a friend, I tried Jerry Pinkney’s *The Lion and the Mouse*, and I found that it worked out wonderfully. Albert had had prior experience with the fables from kindergarten and was easily able to tell a story with support from his prior experience coupled with the illustrations. I would record his stories as he told them, and then later transcribe them for activities involving story structure, vocabulary and comprehension. He really took to working with this book, and I began to see him develop confidence as a reader.

Seeing Albert’s progress inspired me to create my own wordless picture book for my Bank Street Integrative Masters Project. Since the fable of *The Lion and the Mouse* worked so well for
Albert, I chose a fable as the storyline for my book: *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. In addition to borrowing the idea of working with a fable, I also decided to emulate certain aspects of the illustrative style of Jerry Pinkney for my book. I really loved the way he used watercolor to capture expression in *The Lion and the Mouse*, so I tried to bring that into mine. Finally, as a way of testing my book, I created and led lesson plans that used the Language Experience Approach to assist Albert with reading it. Albert had a beneficial experience working with the book, and I gained a resource to take with me to future classrooms.
Statement of Project

As previously stated in my introduction, I have created a wordless picture book of Aesop’s fable, *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. The inspiration for using a fable as my storyline came from reading Jerry Pinkney’s *The Lion and the Mouse* with my America Reads student, Albert. Pinkney’s skillful depiction of the animals’ emotions as the vehicle for plot development in the story resonated with me as an artist and with Albert as a reader. The fact that it was a fable, too, provided Albert with a familiar story which gave him confidence in his retelling of it. Since that book had gone over so well with him, I decided that I wanted to try something similar for my own work. I chose the fable of *The Ant and the Grasshopper* because it had not been depicted by Pinkney yet, and it is one of the more well-known fables, which meant that Albert might recognize it.

The artwork that I created for the story borrows from Pinkney in terms of medium and subject, but is otherwise a complete departure from his work. I am a hobby cartoonist, so the work has a cartoonish feel to it. I have anthropomorphized the insects and added other elements of the human world into the story to give it a humorous feel and to allow the reader to connect with the insects’ actions.

In my telling of the fable, I sought to make the differences between the ants and the grasshopper explicit by dividing them into separate scenes. The ant scenes typically show them hard at work reading blueprints, carrying food or water, and making other preparations for winter, while in the grasshopper scenes he is typically shown lazing about. The ants wear hard hats and orange construction vests to further the impression that they are hard-working, while the grasshopper eats an ice cream cone that slowly drips onto one of the ant’s heads. While the story mostly follows the conventions of Aesop’s fable by depicting the ants as hardworking and the grasshopper as lazy, I tweaked the ending of the story a bit, because I felt that the grasshopper freezing to death was too harsh for my target demographic of seven year olds. In my version of the
story, the grasshopper, upon his realization that it is winter and he has nowhere to go, comes to the ants for help. The ants are shown fighting among themselves about whether or not to take him in, when one ant suddenly has an idea. In the next scene, the grasshopper and the ant shake hands upon the details of this agreement, and in the final scene of the book the grasshopper is shown laboring in a field for all of the ants. This final scene mimics a scene at the start of the book that shows the ants laboring in the field while the grasshopper lounges.
Developmental Profile of Age Seven

Before I started the process of creating my wordless picture book, I first researched my target demographic, seven year olds, so that my book would take into consideration the developmental traits of the children I was teaching in America Reads. I then incorporated this research into the design of the book itself in a number of different ways. Below is a brief summary of the developmental milestones of the age and the ways in which my book attempted to take them into account.

Overview

At the age of seven, children are starting down a path towards independence. According to Erik Erikson they are entering the period of Industry vs. Inferiority where they ramp up their production and focus on "being responsible, being good, and doing it right" (Erikson, 1964, p.259). Their physical, cognitive and social skills are developing rapidly, and they are beginning to grasp essential concepts like reading and writing. Sevens are hard workers and strive for perfection. “They want to be correct and they want their work to look good, too” (Wood, 1997, p. 70). As their skills develop, they need support and encouragement to help develop confidence in their abilities.

By choosing to create a wordless picture book as the original work for my project, I wanted to support and encourage my students in the development of their reading abilities. Since I work with students that struggle to read, taking away the need to rely on text for the story took away their fear of being wrong or of being seen as dumb by their peers.

Physical Development

Children at this age tend to have a shortsighted view of the world, quite literally. They “exhibit myopic tendencies and concentrate on the details in their visual field” (Wood, 1997, p. 70). In accordance with this narrow field of vision, they are starting to pay more attention to the quality of their work. Seven year olds love to erase and try to make every written work a polished piece.
In illustrating my book, I took these myopic tendencies into consideration by breaking up the actions of the ant and the grasshopper into separate scenes. Splitting up the picture book in this way helped to lessen the visual stimuli that students needed to take in and better differentiate the actions of the ant from the grasshopper.

**Social and Emotional Development**

The social and emotional world of the seven year old is a very sensitive, volatile area. Seven year olds can be very withdrawn and according to Wood “...extremely moody, sulking, and sometimes depressed” (Wood, 1997, p. 70). They can be happy and smiling one moment and then bawling their eyes out in the next. They do not like to make mistakes or take risks that might result in mistakes. They are very opinionated and sometimes have trouble reconciling that others have opinions that differ from their own. At school, they like to work by themselves, but they occasionally will pull friends into their fold. However, these friendships “...may be on one day and off the next”(Wood, 1997, p. 70). The most stable relationships that the seven year old keep are their family, and their teacher.

Since the relationships that students have with their peers at this age are so volatile, it felt important to demonstrate an act of reconciliation in my text as a model of a good relationship between friends. I tweaked the ending of my story so that the ants take pity on the grasshopper and decide to invite him into their home for the winter. Students are meant to piece together that even though a friend might do something wrong, they can be forgiven.

**Cognitive Development**

Cognitively, there are many exciting developments at this age. Children are eager to learn and are picking up essential skills, such as reading and writing, that they will carry with them for
the rest of their lives. They are concrete thinkers and enjoy working with manipulatives that allow
them to discover how things work by taking them apart and putting them back together again.

While they do have this preference for the concrete, they are also starting to gain experience
with more abstract ideas. “They are beginning to grasp the concepts of conservation, reversibility,
seriation, decentration, and classification.” (Lightfoot, 2009, p.426). They are becoming more
reflective about their work, less egocentric and are able to think logically.

Although my book largely contains concrete examples of the ant and the grasshopper’s
actions, there are a few scenes that require abstract thinking. For example, it requires that the
students make inferences about character in order to figure out why the ants eventually decide to
take the grasshopper in from the cold.
The Language Experience Approach

The language experience approach or LEA is an approach created by Roach Van Allen in the 1960s that promotes reading and writing through the use of personal experiences and oral language. Teachers set up opportunities for students to have an experience, and then encourage them to use their oral language to describe it. Although any experience can be used as a the material for this approach, wordless picture books are a convenient method, because they do not require leaving the classroom or acquiring a great deal of materials. Students are simply shown the images in the book and then offer up their own story or their own description of what they are seeing. The teacher then records the student’s exact language and transcribes it to serve as the materials for the student’s learning. The approach assumes that all of the language arts—listening, speaking, reading, and writing are related and dependent upon one another.” (Stahl, 1989, p.89) It attempts to play to students’ strengths in their ability to think and speak with words in order to help students develop skills in written texts.

An important aspect of the language experience approach is that it brings in students’ prior knowledge about a subject matter. Students come to the classroom with a wide range of pre-existing knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes, which influence how they respond to what is being taught. As Thorn said in her work on the matter “...In school as well as out of school, language develops in relation to [this]experience”(Thorn, 1969, p.5). The language experience approach incorporates this prior knowledge seamlessly into the process, making helpful connections between old and new information.

Another beneficial aspect to using student language as the basis for their learning is that it helps children to develop social skills. Reading and writing with their own language reinforces their ideas and helps them communicate those ideas to their peers. Thorn believes these interactions are crucial: “This sharing of ideas puts language into its proper context as a social skill and enables the
school to meet its responsibility to extend rather than merely maintain experience.” (Thorn, 1969, p.5)

Finally, the language experience approach is child-centered, meaning it helps students become active, responsible participants in their own learning. Since their own language is being used as the primary source of instruction, it “will naturally capitalize on [their]...unique strengths and capacities...”(Schwartz, 1975, p.322). Students are able to pick up on context clues more quickly since the instructional material being used directly reflects their experiences.
What Are Wordless Picture Books?

While the idea of a book without words may seem unusual at first, there is a lot of precedent for the use of this technique in storytelling. In fact, four winners of the prestigious Caldecott Award for distinguished American picture books are wordless: *A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka, *The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney, and *Flotsam* and *Tuesday* by David Wiesner Clearly, these books have an established place in children’s literature, but what qualifies as a wordless picture book?

Apart from the fact that books of this genre contain little to no text, they share a few other common features. For example, there is typically a relationship between the art and the development of the storyline. Strong details in the artwork support the creation of story elements and the author’s creative use of space, color and symbolism help carry those elements forward. Sutton commented on this vital connection between the artwork and the story itself, “Wordless picture books require great cunning not only to provide a recognizable pantomime but also to lead readers from one scene to the next: how do you know when to turn the page when there are no words to pull you forward?” (Sutton, 2009, p.15).

While it may seem that other picture books share these traits, wordless books are different because the illustrations are there specifically to tell the story (Meier, 2009, p.72). It is this intentionality that puts these books in a category all their own and which help them work with many audiences to accomplish a variety of learning goals.
The Benefits of Using Wordless Picture Books

Connecting with Diverse Audiences

As mentioned previously, a unique attribute of wordless picture books is that they are adaptable for a wide range of audiences: older and reluctant readers, younger readers and beginning readers, and readers that are culturally different or who lack a strong foundation in English.

For older readers and reluctant readers, the nontraditional format of a wordless book may motivate them to engage with it more readily. These books have many layers; as McGee said, they often “depict clever, entertaining tales... presented on several levels of understanding” (McGee, 1983, p.120). Many readers enjoy the challenges of navigating the complexities of their illustrations.

On the other end of the age spectrum, wordless picture books can offer young readers and beginning readers an opportunity to solidify their knowledge of concepts of print. As Larrick commented, Children can look at the pictures in the books and learn how to manipulate them by moving them “from front to back, left to right. They soon find they can create their own play with the pictures and enjoy the feeling of independence” (Larrick, 1976, p.743).

And for readers who are culturally different or who lack a strong foundation in English, these books can give them a chance to express themselves more fully using their own existing language assets. As Flatley said, “Because wordless picture books tell a story without the use of words...[these]...students can create text which is in their natural language pattern and based upon their prior knowledge and schemata” (Flatley, 1986, p.277).

Accomplishing a Variety of Learning Goals

In addition to serving many different types of students, wordless picture books can serve many different types of learning goals. The development of language, reading, and writing skills are three areas where wordless picture books perform strongly.
In terms of language development, students can be prompted to tell their own stories using the illustrations from the book. This type of storytelling helps students who come from different cultural backgrounds by requiring them to tell them a story not by reading the words, which may be problematic for them, but by looking at the pictures (Meier, 2009, p.72). This allows for the fact that the “phonology, syntax, vocabulary, intonation, orthography, and patterns of communication”...spoken by the students might be different from English. (Flatley, 1986, p.276). Similarly, storytelling with wordless picture books can also be helpful for young children because it develops oral expression in English (Fagerlie, 1975, p.92).

Books without words can also be used to establish skills and attitudes that are important to reading. As children look at the pictures and tell a story, they are also developing higher level thinking skills. Having conversations about a text changes students’ perception of it, because they have been introduced to new perspectives and alternate interpretations through their classmates’ stories (Leland, 2013, p.18). As Degler states, students can “be encouraged to evaluate a character’s actions or to empathize with some aspect of the unfolding drama. Thus, children can begin to engage in various types of thinking about what they are viewing, and this way, to develop the kind of thinking strategies they must use later when they read” (Degler, 1979, p.399).

Finally, wordless books can be used to promote a variety of writing skills. From the production of single words and phrases, to complete statements and paragraphs, books without words can help children build up their writing stamina. And for students who struggle with writing stories because “they may have difficulty in thinking of and developing a plot”(Fagerlie, 1975, p.92), wordless picture books can take the necessity of creating a plot out of the equation and allow students to direct their focus to the writing task itself.

**Giving Children Opportunities to be Successful**
Although it cannot be taught or planned, one of the most important effects that can come from the use of wordless picture books is the development of confidence and positive attitudes toward reading and writing. D’Angelo stated, “By providing pictures which clearly portray actions and sequences, wordless books serve as a framework within which to create and provide students with opportunities to be successful...” (D’Angelo, 1979, p. 814).
The Structure and Appeal of Fables

Fables are composed of two major elements: stories and morals, the two working together to convey hidden messages meant to improve human conduct. “The story illustrates a moral, and the moral is made memorable by the story” (Goldsmith, 1939, p.223). Fables are typically short and simple, telling their stories with the minimum amount of words necessary.

One of the most appealing attributes of fables is the amount of action, interest and drama that is packed into the tale. In the fable of The Lion and the Mouse, for example, the tiniest animal in the kingdom has an encounter with the largest and most ferocious creature in the kingdom and barely manages to escape. And in the fable of the Grasshopper and the Ants, the tension between the grasshopper and the ants is palpable as he lazes about while they toil. Fables, though pithy, work well as a medium for readers to offer commentary on even the most intricate of situations.

Apart from their ability to present stories in a dramatic fashion, fables are also appealing because of their universality. Fables are ancient in origin, with Aesop’s Fables dating back to the 5th century. They have had a great deal of time to travel around the world and are known, in one sense or another, to a wide population of people. As Young stated, “Every child has heard myriad lessons meant to guide him or her toward a more successful life, and every adult has found himself or herself in the position of telling children stories with explicit morals to encourage certain behaviors for good living” (Young, 2004, p.36). The times may have changed since Aesop’s day but the desire to encourage good behaviors has not.

In choosing the fable of The Ant and the Grasshopper as the storyline for my wordless picture book, I took each of these attributes into consideration. I wanted a story that was short but dramatic, familiar to students but also able to take on a new form. Fables, with their naturally short story structure and universal appeal fit the needs of my struggling readers and gave me an opportunity to give a fresh face to a familiar tale.
Jerry Pinkney, Artist, Storyteller and Source of Inspiration

Before I started to work on my own wordless picture book, it seemed important to examine the source of my inspiration more fully to see if there was anything else I could learn from him, or that I wanted to borrow from his style. As it turns out, Pinkney, like Albert, was a struggling reader himself as a child and turned to art as a way of developing his confidence. Additionally, I learned that Pinkney had also illustrated a collection of Aesop’s Fables which included the fable of *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. This background research was immensely helpful for me in figuring out the final form that my project would eventually take. Below, I have provided a brief biography of Pinkney's interest in art and in fables, as well as an analyses of his illustrations from *The Lion and the Mouse* and *The Ant and the Grasshopper*: two works which informed my own.

Interest in Art

Jerry Pinkney is an award-winning American illustrator of children’s books. As a child, he struggled with dyslexia and turned to art as a way of learning. He was mentored by the cartoonist John Liney, who encouraged him to pursue a career in art. Pinkney later attended the Philadelphia Museum College of Art on a full scholarship. He worked for a short time as a greeting card designer before ultimately making the decision to illustrate children's books. Although he considers himself first and foremost, a drawer, he enjoys working in watercolors. In an interview with Leonard Marcus, Pinkney discussed his preference for the medium saying that “In the mid 1980s, full-color became available for use in children's trade books, and combining watercolor with drawing seemed a natural way to keep the sense of energy and spontaneity in the work” (Marcus, 2012, p.165).

Interest in Fables

Pinkney's interest in fables stems from the rich oral storytelling tradition in which he was raised: “Having grown up with the Aesop and Anderson stories at home, Pinkney viewed the opportunity to illustrate them later in life as a chance to reconnect with his storytelling roots on an
intimate level. “(Marcus, 2010, p.39). Working with fables, too, allowed for Pinkney to draw one of his favorite subjects: animals. In an interview with Pat Cummings, he mentions animals as one of the subjects he enjoys drawing the most. He related, “It varies. Perhaps I most enjoy drawing animals. Next to that would be using animals in an anthropomorphic way--giving them human characteristics, like dressing them in clothes or giving them human expressions” (Cummings, 1992, p. 63).

**Works that Informed my Original Work:**

**Aesop’s Fables**

Prior to his work *The Lion and the Mouse*, Pinkney worked on a collection of *Aesop’s Fables*. There are sixty tales featured in this collection, each with its own illustration, story and moral.
Figure 1. Cover from Jerry Pinkney’s *Aesop’s Fables*
Figure 2. Illustration of The Grasshopper and the Ants from Jerry Pinkney’s Aesop’s Fables
Analysis of the Art from The Grasshopper and the Ants

In looking at the illustrations for the fable, *The Grasshopper and the Ants*, Pinkney has divided the art into two scenes: summer and winter. In the summer scene we see the grasshopper atop a mushroom playing both an accordion and a fiddle as the ants toil below him. The grasshopper’s face appears to curve upward in a smile and he looks directly at the reader as he plays his music in the sun. The ants below him do not appear to register his presence at all as they march along carrying their seeds. In the winter scene, the grasshopper is still atop the mushroom but there is now snow falling. The grasshopper’s back is now turned to us with his limbs withdrawn and his hand held protectively over his hat. Only a few ants can be seen in this scene and they appear to be looking up toward the grasshopper. In both scenes, the grasshopper has been given clothing and instruments that are reminiscent of 19th century American style.

The media used for both the summer and winter scenes is watercolor, pen and ink, favorites of Pinkney’s. The depictions of the insects, apart from the anthropomorphic qualities assigned to the grasshopper, are realistic. In terms of positioning, it seems significant that the grasshopper is atop the mushroom in both scenes, since it is his folly that drives the moral of the story. Additionally, it seems important that the ants only begin to regard the presence of the grasshopper in the winter scene, since they need to be shown as hardworking in the summer.

How it Informed my Work

For my own work, I have borrowed Pinkney’s media of watercolor, pen and ink to illustrate my pictures. I also took his division of summer and winter scenes and applied that to the actions of my ants and grasshoppers by dividing them into separate scenes on most pages. Where I differ from Pinkney is that, while I do have anthropomorphized insects, I have updated their clothing and objects to the twenty-first century and depicted them far less realistically.
Figure 3. Cover of Jerry Pinkney’s The Lion and the Mouse

The Lion and the Mouse

Jerry Pinkney’s rendering of The Lion and the Mouse is widely considered a masterpiece of wordless storytelling. Winning the Caldecott Award for 2010, it tells Aesop’s fable of The Lion and
The Lion and the Mouse was something of a culminating work for Pinkney. It combined his “affection for the classic Western stories of his childhood, his fascination with the animal world, and the medium of watercolor…[with his] felt connection with the life and landscapes of Africa” (Marcus, 2010, p.41).

When Pinkney set out to create the book, he had not intended for it to be wordless. He started off by creating thumbnails of his illustrations and realized after some time that text was not necessary to tell the story. And as a matter of fact, it was not desirable for him to create a text to accompany the story. As Pinkney says in an interview with editors from Language Arts, “So that was a thought I had---a book that became not necessarily interactive (but maybe you can use that word), where young readers would take some ownership of how the story ended or maybe where the pictures inspired them or prompted them to think about adding something to the story” (Editors, 2014, p. 450). Pinkney wanted students to use his illustrations to tell their own stories.

![Figure 4. Illustration from Jerry Pinkney’s The Lion and the Mouse](image-url)
Analysis of the Art in *The Lion and the Mouse*

A close examination of the illustrations in *The Lion and the Mouse* shows that it is composed primarily of watercolor, pen and ink, Pinkney’s preferred media. The style is characteristic of his art, too, with representational, yet realistic figures and settings. These figures and settings are seen through close-ups, overhead views and even a few panoramic illustrations. Each viewpoint is purposeful, helping to further the story’s plot in some way.

In terms of color, he chose earth tones for his palette that correspond with the coloration actually found in the Serengeti: muted oranges, greens, browns and reds. The coloration of the animals was given a similar consideration, with realistic golden hues for the lion and shades of grey for the mouse.

Returning to the representation of the figures, though, great attention has been paid to their facial expressions. Roger Sutton in his review of the book for the New York Times says that “[Pinkney’s] beasts are not humans in disguise; while both the lion and the mouse have emotions and intelligence in their eyes, they are animal in nature” (Sutton, 2009, p.15). Pinkney has rendered his subjects with just enough human emotion to reveal their motivations and carry the plot.

**How it Informed my Work**

In addition to the ideas that I borrowed from Pinkney’s rendering of the fable of *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, I also took the idea of depicting emotion and intelligence from *The Lion and the Mouse*. I have attempted to render my ants and grasshoppers with a wide range of emotions largely expressed through their eyes but also through their movements.

All of these factors taken together have informed the book I have created and the applications I have designed to accompany it in the classroom.
Original Work

THE ANT
AND THE GRASSHOPPER
The Ant and the Grasshopper

Illustrated by
Rachel Lucekowski
Classroom Applications

As mentioned previously, wordless picture books are a unique resource for classrooms because of the wide array of ages and purposes they can serve. Wordless picture books can be used to develop early language skills, teach conventions of print, learn about sequencing and story structure and much, much more. With that said, certain books will be better suited to one task than another and as always, it is important to take into account, the needs of the students who will be learning from these materials.

In the case of my original work *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, I found that while it could be used to develop a number of different literacy skills, not all of those skills were relevant to Albert’s needs. Below, I have outlined the different areas in which Albert and I have worked with the material as potential ways to apply it to other classrooms.

Language

One of the first activities that Albert did with the book was to tell me a story using the illustrations as the source of his material. I recorded this story in my notebook in order to use his exact words. The story went as follows:

*There were a bunch of ants working hard in a field. A grasshopper sat down in the sun. There is an ant and he was a worker. There was a grasshopper who was sleeping and reading a book. The ants carried water and food. There was a ladybug selling ice cream while the grasshopper ate it. The ant got ice cream on his head. The ants were working while the grasshopper played guitar. The grasshopper jumped in a pile of leaves while the ants worked. Then it started to snow. The grasshopper was cold. He asked the ants to come in. The ants were like, ‘yes, no, yes.’ Then they let him in. Then it was spring. Then the ants relaxed while the grasshopper worked.*
After Albert had finished telling me his story, I showed him everything that I had recorded. He could not believe that he had said all of the words that were written there. After assuring him that he had, in fact, said all of that, he remarked that he knew the story well. It was a fable which he had heard in kindergarten.

For the next step, I took Albert’s story and transcribed it onto index cards to create new sight words for him to use. Albert struggled with phonemic awareness so we went through each one and examined them for vowel sounds and sorted them into corresponding piles. When he had gained familiarity with the sounds in each word, I started having him use the words in other sentences of his own creation. This helped him to understand the meanings of his words outside of the context of his story.

**Reading**

Once we had gone over his words fairly thoroughly, I had him start to read his story. The words at this point, were mostly sight words for him so it was easier for him to read fluently and hear how they were supposed to sound. Since the traits of the grasshopper and the ants are so different and so pronounced, we spent a lot of time thinking about character and what the actions of a character can tell us about their personalities. We did a few character mapping exercises together and then I did a few read alouds with other versions of the story. Albert thought of ways in which the ants and grasshoppers of these stories were different from the version I had created and how that changed the meaning of the story.

**Writing**

As a last application, I had Albert use his story language as a way of practicing standard writing conventions such as capitalization, punctuation and grammar. He copied his story into his own writing and then added these elements to it. Later, when he had the first draft of his story written, we brainstormed different ways in which he might add more details to it.
Reflection

When I signed up to work as an America Reads tutor, I really had no idea what to expect. I knew that I enjoyed working with children and that the experience would supplement my student teaching fieldwork, but I had no idea of how closely I would come to work with this class and how much I would learn about them as readers.

One of the best parts about being a teacher is that it requires you to become a lifelong learner yourself. My experience with Albert was one of the first times that I found myself researching different ways that I could make use of a student’s strengths in order to teach him a subject. I was not sure that the Language Experience Approach would work, but through trial and error with the first wordless picture books, and getting to know Albert’s prior experience in school, I was able to create a material that was both meaningful to him as a learner and enjoyable to him as a kid. There is really nothing better than seeing a seven year old’s face light up when you tell them that you made a book just for them.

Another part of this experience that will stick with me is just how complex the act of learning how to read is for a child. It is one thing to learn about the process of reading acquisition in a class, but another thing to witness it in action with a struggling student. Albert had issues with phonemic awareness which made him frustrated and uncertain about his ability to read. It took many careful hours of work together before he started to feel that reading was a subject that he could master and that I was a teacher he could trust with that process.
On a final note, making this original work has helped me to think about my art as a tool for the classroom. I used to view my art and my teaching in very separate terms, but this project has made me realize the potential for teaching with art objects in a very concrete way. I am excited to have a resource to take with me to my future classroom and I imagine that this will not be the only book I create.
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Hello,

My name is Rachel Luczkowski and I'm a graduate student at Bank Street College of Education. As part of my degree program, I am required to work on something called an integrative masters project. For this project, I created a wordless picture book that was loosely inspired by Jerry Pinkney's the Lion and the Mouse and his collection of Aesop's Fables. I'm writing to ask for permission to borrow the following images for use in the paper. The images are included as part of a section where I analyze Pinkney's art and discuss the elements that I chose to borrow for my own book. Please let me know if you need anything else.

Best,

Rachel
Hi Rachel,

The images can be included as long as you credit the copyright to Jerry Pinkney.

Best,
Jill

JILL YEOMANS
Event Coordinator
for Jerry Pinkney
Pittsburgh, PA
www.jerrypinkneystudio.com

On Apr 10, 2016, at 10:47 PM, Rachel Luczkowski <rachelluczkowski@gmail.com> wrote:

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Best,
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