

The Power of Pictures

"A picture is worth a thousand words" – a quote I have heard many times but didn't really think about until I sat down to write this article. I knew I wanted to write about picture books, but I struggled with a theme. Although it's October and the natural inclination is towards Halloween, I wanted to talk about something different. As the holiday approaches many parents ask for books on Halloween so I knew those books didn't need the spotlight. But what did? A coworker helped me find a theme that is sometimes overlooked: wordless picture books. Also known as stories without words, these picture books use illustrations to convey the story.

The artwork in most picture books is amazing, but in a wordless picture book the focus is on the pictures. What you may not know is that these books can help a child prepare for reading. Children can create their own stories using their imaginations, an ability known as narrative skills. Studies have shown that children with this skill have an easier time learning how to read. Children also learn how to correctly hold a book and gain an interest (hopefully lifelong) in books. While there are no words in the book, children can learn vocabulary as they try to figure out what specific items are in each picture.

Here are just a few of the wordless picture books we have at the library:

"Wave" by Suzy Lee – This exquisite picture book was created with charcoals and acrylics and tells the story of a little girl who enjoys a day at the beach, frolicking in a brilliant blue wave.

"Rainstorm" by Barbara Lehman – Vibrant colors are used to tell the story of a little boy who is bored on a rainy day. He comes across a mysterious key and tries each lock until he opens a large trunk with a ladder inside. The ladder leads him to a tunnel where a great adventure waits at the end.

"South" by Patrick McDonnell – Autumn has come to an end and it's time for birds to fly south for the winter. Sadly, one little yellow bird is asleep when his flock flies south. A cat happens across the bird and decides to help the bird find his way home. As they both journey south they become friends. Happily the yellow bird reaches his flock and the cat returns home. The author uses watercolors and recycled paper in warm tones to bring this heart-warming story to life.

"Welcome to the Zoo" by Alison Jay – The beautiful crackle-varnished artwork shows a different kind of zoo: one where animals roam free. Plus, at the end is a bonus: a seek-and-find game.

"The Adventures of Polo" by Régis Faller – Polo is a little dog that leaves home for grand adventures that take him under the ocean, to a tropical island, an igloo, and even the moon! Polo's story is told using brilliant primary colors.

"Leaf" by Stephen Michael King – A seed is dropped on a little boy's head and what happens? A leaf grows! He lovingly takes care of it but then his mom decides it's time for

a haircut. So he takes his leaf (with his hair) and plants it outside. The silly line and watercolor drawings are sure to create a laugh.

“Treasure Bath” by Dan Andreasen – It’s time for a little boy to take a bath and he takes the reader on a fantastic adventure found beneath the bubbles in his bathtub. Full of whimsical illustrations, this book is full of wonder and humor.

Jennifer Tchida is Children’s Librarian at Bartholomew County Public Library