

50 Ways to Use Picture Books in ELA Classrooms

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1. As an **interest-enhancing hook** to engage readers (Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001)
 - Enhance students' interests in ELA with *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*, *A River of Words*, *The Book-Eating Boy*, *Exclamation Mark*, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, or *Punctuation Takes a Vacation*
2. To make cross-curricular connections with science, social studies, or math (Bloem & Padak, 1996)
 - Try making connections with books from the National Council for the Social Studies' Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People list or the National Science Teachers Association's Outstanding Science Trade Books list
3. To teach **literary analysis** and **close reading** (Treasury Islands, 2012; Wright, 2015; Martinez, et al., 2009)
 - Use a complex picture book to analyze, such as *Woolvs in the Sitee*, *The Lost Thing*, *The Arrival*, *The Wall*, or *Black and White*
4. To teach differences in author's **style**, such as syntax, diction, and tone
 - Use a text set to teach students about style, such as this set about wolves: *The Wolves in the Walls*, *Woolvs in the Sitee*, *Wolf Wanted*, *Virginia Wolf*, *Big Wolf and Little Wolf*, and *Wolves*
5. To teach **extended metaphor** and **allegory** (Wolk, 2004)
 - Choose an allegorical or metaphorical picture book to analyze with students, such as *The Book-Eating Boy*, *Zero*, *The Dot*, *Terrible Things*, or *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*
6. To teach the **elements of comedy** and to introduce **satire** as genre (College Board, 2004; Maddox)
 - Share one of the following hilarious picture books and discuss the elements of comedy to lighten up your curriculum: *Chester*, *The Composer is Dead*, *It's a Book*, *Bad Day at Riverbend*, or *I Want My Hat Back*
7. To introduce **postmodernism** as a genre (Anstey, 2002; Goldstone, 2004; Pantaleo, 2014)
 - Choose a variety of postmodern books to discuss, such as *Black and White*, *The Three Pigs*, *Come Away From the Water*, *Shirley*, *Battle Bunny*, or *The Stinky Cheese Man*
8. To develop **background knowledge**
 - Use picture books as a quick way to build background knowledge before reading a more complex text. For example, before reading *Things Fall Apart*, share *A is For Africa*, *The Distant Talking Drum*, & *Here Comes Our Bride*, and *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (Taliaferro, 2009)
9. To teach **inference** (McGee & Tompkins, 1983; McCann, 2007)
 - Use complex, wordless picture books like *Tuesday*, *Flotsam*, *The Arrival*, *Mr. Wuffles*, *Rules of Summer*, *The Farmer and the Clown*, *Ballad*, *Zoom*, *ReZoom*, *Sector Seven*, *Tuesday*, and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*
10. To immerse students in various **cultures** and easily include diverse perspectives (Landt, 1996; Mathis, 2002)
 - Help students experience the world with *If the World Were A Village*, *Tibet*, *Jamela's Dress*, *Going to School in India*, *Akkisi*, and *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit*
11. To learn **poetic techniques** (Matthews et al., 1999)
 - Pair picture books with poetry to introduce poetic terminology with *Fredrick* (Bennet, 2013), *One Leaf Rides the Wind*, *Forgive Me*, *I Meant to Do it*, *A Kick in the Head*, or *The Death of the Hat*
12. To analyze **characterization**
 - Analyze author's use of indirect and direct characterization with memorable characters in *My Name is Yoon*, *Chester*, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*, or *El Deafo*
13. As a **scaffold** to further understand longer stories
 - Begin with a picture book version of a complex story, such as *Sundiata*, *Beowulf*, or *Walking with Henry Thoreau*
14. To learn about **oral tradition**, such as folk tales and fables
 - Teach students about oral tradition around the world with *Swamp Angels*, *The Lion and the Mouse*, *Stories from the Billabong*, *The Great Snake: Stories from the Amazon*, or *Fables*.

15. Teach students to determine **tone** by analyzing the relationship between words and pictures
 - Give students a variety of picture books featuring symmetry, complementary, enhancement, counterpoint, or contradiction to analyze tone (Martinez, Roser, & Harmon, 2009).
16. To discuss how authors make choices that affect **mood**
 - Choose books with distinct and varied moods, like *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, *My Father's Arms are a Boat*, and *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, in order to teach students about authorial intent.
17. To learn **literary elements**, like simile, metaphor, allusion, or personification
 - Choose books with rich language, such as *The Promise*. Also see Susan Hall's *Using Picture Storybooks to Teach Literary Devices, Vol. 1-3* for a more detailed list of literary elements in picture books.
18. **Comparing** different works that tell the same story (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014)
 - Choose books that students can compare and contrast, such as a variety of Cinderella stories from around the world.
19. To **analyze quality** in written works (Galda et al., 2010; Bond, 2006)
 - Improve students' critical evaluation skills with any complex picture book
20. To **evaluate the cultural authenticity** of international or multicultural picture books
 - Use international or multicultural books such as *A Fine Dessert*, *Arrow to the Sun*, or *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* and a checklist for cultural authenticity and/or racism (NCCLR; Short, 2015)
21. To **evaluate books for sexism** and discuss gender issues in literature (Narahara, 1998)
 - Choose books that examine gender stereotypes, like *Princess Smartypants*, *Barbie: I Can Be A Computer Engineer*, or *The Dangerous Book for Boys*; and pair them with nonfiction articles on the *Let Books Be Books* movement and checklists evaluating sexism in children's literature (Flood, 2014)
22. To analyze **artistic techniques** and styles (Neal & Moore, 1991)
 - Teach students about various art styles with *The Little House* (Cleaver, 2015), *Seen Art?*, or *Willy's Pictures* (Serafini, 2015).
23. To interpret **multiple meanings**
 - Pick books that are open to multiple interpretations, like *My Father's Arms are a Boat*, *Rules of Summer*, *Slog's Dad*, or *Black and White* (Henry).
24. To highlight **universal themes** (Neal and Moore 1991; Matthews et al., 1999; Mathis, 2002)
 - Picture books with a distinctive theme can help students learn to complete a thematic analysis: *The Heart and the Bottle*, *The Scar*, *The Sweetest Fig*, *My Name is Yoon*, *Home*, *Gaston*, *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*, *Hug Me*
25. As a **read-aloud** to practice listening skills (Albright, 2002; Giorgis 1999)
 - Choose an engaging text, such as *We Are the Ship* or *Shackleton's Journey*, to improve students' listening comprehension
26. To teach the **writing and publishing process** with student-created picture books (Conrad, 2005; Matthews et al., 1999; Wright, 2015)
 - Have students create ABC books on a complex topic you've recently covered (Schoch, 2011)
 - Pair with an elementary class to give students an authentic audience
27. To teach **visual literacy** and **multimodal literacy** (Read and Smith 1982; Serafini, 2014)
 - Pantaleo (2015) recommends teaching students about color, point of view, framing, line, perspective, typography, and conventions with books such as *The Red Tree*, *Sidekicks*, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, or *Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word, and Music* (Cairney, 2014).
28. As a way to teach targeted **writing skills** (Beckman & Diamond, 1984; McElveen, 2001; Spandel & Culham, 1994)
 - See Dawn Little's website or Ruth Culham's book, *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits*
29. As a **model** or inspiration for their own writing (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Eti, 2013, Koutras & Kurstedt, 2000; Bennett, 2013)
 - Choose a book like *House Held Up By Trees*, *The Memory String*, or *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* to jumpstart students' writing process

30. To teach three types of **irony** (Matthews et al., 1999)
 - Teach students about verbal, situational, and dramatic irony with *Princess Smartypants*, *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *The Sweetest Fig*, or *Pink and Say*
31. To help students understand **point of view** (Neal & Moore, 1991; Matthews et al., 1999)
 - Try using a text set with different perspectives of the same event, such as *Encounter*, *Where Do You Think We're Going*, *Christopher Columbus?*, and *Coyote Columbus* (Desai, 2014), or a book from different points of view, like *Voices in the Park*
32. As a topic for **argumentative writing**
 - Read *The Conquerors* and have students debate if books for children should be political (NYT, 2014)
 - Read *In Our Mothers' House* or *And Tango Makes Three*, as well as some nonfiction articles on censorship in Utah (Rogers, 2012; Newlin, 2013) before writing an argumentative essay on censorship.
 - Read *The Wolves in the Walls* or *Woolvs in the Sitee* and have students debate if books for children and teens should be dark (Li, 2014; Gurdon, 2011)
33. For **author studies** (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1997; Schoch, 2011)
 - Have students choose a picture book author/illustrator to learn about and analyze, such as Emily Gravett, Lane Smith, John Scieszka, Jorg Muller, Eve Bunting, Sean Tan, Neal Gaiman, or Anthony Browne
34. To inspire **vocabulary** development (Neal & Moore, 1991)
 - Use fun, vocabulary-filled books like *13 Words*, *Animalia*, *Baloney*, or *Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters*, as models for vocabulary notebooks or for word-learning opportunities
35. To **motivate** reluctant readers and build classroom community (Anderson, 2013; Ripp, 2015)
 - Read an inspirational story like *Thank You, Mr. Faulkner* to motivate students' reading
 - Build students' self-efficacy and enthusiasm for literacy with short, fun, easy-to-read works such as *It's a Book*, *Chester*, *I Want My Hat Back*, or *Unicorn Thinks He's Pretty Great*
36. Paired with a challenging **critical essay** or author interview on the book
 - Try pairing an author's book with an interview with them in *Show Me a Story: Why Picture Books Matter*
 - Give students a challenging critical essay on the book from *The Lion and the Unicorn* or *The Horn Book* (DeSena, 2015)
37. As a pair with **nonfiction** articles
 - Try pairing *What There Is Before There Is Anything There: A Scary Story* or *The Dark* with nonfiction on childhood fears/ nightmares (Popova, 2014)
 - Try pairing *My Teacher is a Monster* with Tolstoy's letters to Gandhi on why we hurt or an author interview on accepting the "other" (Popova, 2014)
 - Pair *What Pet Should I Get* with articles on the paradox of choice or FOMO (Konnikova, 2014)
38. As a way **introduce reading comprehension strategies** for STRUGGLING readers (Zimny, 2008; Cassady, 1998)
 - Use any picture book to teach struggling readers how to use strategies like visualizing, summarizing, clarifying, or questioning
39. To help students understand complex or **abstract concepts** (Bloem & Padak, 1996)
 - Teach Maslow's hierarchy of needs with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Meyerson, 2006)
 - Teach Id, Ego, and Superego with *Cat in the Hat* (Wright, 2015)
 - Introduce postcolonialism with *Curious George* (Cummins, 1997)
40. To **spark dialogue** about issues like racism, stereotypes, and democracy (Wolk, 2004)
 - Inspire discussion about important issues with *Terrible Things*, *Smoky Night*, *The Other Side*, *The Long March*, *Stone Soup*, *Nelson Mandela*, or *Migrant*
41. To **humanize historical figures** and events (Connor, 2003)
 - Help students connect emotionally with the past with books like *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*, *Kids at Work*, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*, or *Mama Miti*

42. As a **jump-start to debate** or research (Matthews et al., 1999)
 - Discuss citizenship with *The Honest-to-Goodness Truth, Emily's Art, & The Giving Tree* (Sebek, 2015)
 - Debate controversial issues with *In Our Mother's House, Encounter, or Grandfather's Journey*
43. To begin a discussion on **what "counts" as literacy** and get students to recognize their own out-of-school literacies
 - Read books with unusual formats, such as *It's a Book, The Black Book of Colors, The Book with No Pictures, or Migrant*, to get students thinking about literacy in a new way.
44. To support **English Language Learners** (O'Loughlin, 2014)
 - Scaffold ELL learning with *Dave, the Potter* (Breiseth, 2015) or wordless picture books (Cassady, 1998)
45. For learning **grammar and mechanics** in a fun way (Schoch, 2011; Patrick, 2007)
 - Use the *Language Adventures* series by Rick Walton, the *World of Language* series by Ruth Heller, or Brian Cleary's grammar picture book series, or *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really DO Make a Difference!*
46. To encourage **metacognition** and a **growth mindset**
 - Get rid of a fixed mindset with *The Dot, The Most Magnificent Thing, or Oh the Things You Can Think*.
47. To teach **academic language discourse and registers**
 - Choose a common story, like *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, and have them rewrite it to address the needs of different audiences or to imitate the style of different authors
48. To teach specific **academic vocabulary**
 - Choose 4-5 words from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) from your targeted picture book
49. To teach students how write **academic summaries**
 - Use this two-part lesson using biographical picture books to teach students to write academic summaries using textual evidence (Schoch, 2014)
50. To remind students of the **joy of reading!**
 - Grab a few of your favorites and share them with your students (Anderson, 2013). For more inspiration, check out the booklist below.

General Reference Materials:

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Booklist

13 Words by Lemony Snicket
A is for Africa by Ifeoma Onyefulu
A Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat by Emily Jenkins
A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms by Paul Janeczko
Akissi: Cat Invasion by Marguerite Abouet
A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams by Jennifer Fisher Bryant
A Rock is Lively by Dianna Hutts Aston
The Arrival by Sean Tan
Arrow to the Sun by Gerald McDermott
Abe Lincoln's Dream by Lane Smith
And the Soldiers Sang by Patrick J. Lewis
And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson
Animalia by Graeme Base
A Sick Day for Amos McGee by Philip C. Stead
Bad Day at Riverbend by Chris Van Allsburg
Ballad by Blexbolex
Baloney by Jon Scieszka
Battle Bunny by Jon Scieszka
Black and White by David Macaulay
Bluebird by Bob Staake
Blueberry Girl by Neil Gaiman
Big Wolf and Little Wolf by Nadine Brun-Cosme
The Black Book of Colors by Menena Cottin
The Big Box by Toni Morrison
The Book with No Pictures by B. J. Novak
The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos by Deborah Heiligman
Brother Eagle, Sister Sky by Susan Jeffers
The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco
The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss
The Cats in Krasinski Square by Karen Hesse
Chester by Melanie Watt
Come Away from the Water, Shirley by John Burningham
Coming on Home Soon by Jacqueline Woodson
The Composer is Dead by Lemony Snicket
The Conquerors by David McKee
Coyote Columbus Story by Thomas King
The Dangerous Book for Boys by Conn Iggulden
The Dark by Lemony Snicket
The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish by Neal Gaiman
The Death of the Hat by Paul B. Janeczko
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