

Foundation lessons

Chapter 6



Aims of this chapter

The focal texts for the lessons in this chapter are two picture books characteristic of the high-quality texts read aloud for enjoyment, modelled reading and literature appreciation in the early years. These two richly worded and illustrated texts provide engaging resources for teaching beginning viewing skills in meaningful contexts. They are also excellent resources for teaching sound-letter relationships, vocabulary and other beginning literacy skills and knowledge. The role of the teacher talk in providing a model of how an experienced viewer thinks is emphasised through modelled and guided viewing activity suggestions. Students are encouraged to be active creators of visual texts through scaffolded image-making opportunities in order to embody and consolidate their learning.

This small blue dot: Imaginative text



Figure 6.1 The cover of *This small blue dot* by Zeno Swords

Interrelationship of images and text: Visual and verbal meanings

Context, content and concepts

This small blue dot is an ode to the potential of every human being and the wonderful possibilities of our planet. It is written as 'a letter of love and hope', as author and illustrator Zeno Sword comments in the endpapers. This hopeful message is conveyed through a monologue, as a young girl talks to her baby sibling. The title references the way planet Earth looks from space: a small blue dot.

Verbal meanings

The text uses first-person narration as the little girl talks to her young sibling. A variety of language features contribute to the spoken-like nature of the written text:

- colloquialism ('No joke')
- addressing the viewer/listener who is positioned as the baby sibling ('You don't know this yet, but I'm an amazing runner. Really.')
- sentence types – a variety of short simple sentences, compound sentences and complex sentences
- punctuated phrases ('Elephants and dung beetles! A new explorer. A new dreamer.')
- tense – present tense ('The secret best part of being young is having a wild imagination.');
- future tense ('When I grow up, I'm going to explore all of it!').

The text also utilises descriptive language and vocabulary that complements the colourful illustrations:

- types of verbs – action ('explore', 'dance', 'create'); sensing/feeling ('share', 'remember')
- types of noun groups – descriptive ('silly dances', 'red bean bun', 'small beginnings', 'new friends'); comparative ('best Chinese dessert'); evaluative ('really important stuff', 'amazing things', 'wild imagination')
- personification ('Mother Nature', 'she')
- simile ('His face looks like scrunched up paper.').

Visual meanings

Representational features

- Participants – young girl, baby sibling.
- Modality/level of realism – higher (black and white photograph-like images of the siblings), lower (circumstances/backgrounds).
- Processes – varied actions, running, swimming, singing, drawing; speech represented through 'bubbles' in some images and through gestures such as mouth cupped by hand, position of head, gaze between participants.
- Circumstances – bedroom (in black and white images), varied imagined outdoor settings, no circumstance; participants on solid colour background.

The young narrator is represented in the opening and final pages of the book through grey monotone images reminiscent of older style photographs. The rounded frame edges hark back to

photo albums of the past. The rest of the pages continue to show the little girl in monotonous on variously coloured and textured imagined backgrounds.

Interactive features

An equal relationship is implied between the viewer and participants through the use of eye-level angle. Some close-up shots position the viewer next to the main character as she is talking to her new sibling, allowing the viewer access to an intimate moment. Other illustrations show the main character from a greater distance, allowing the viewer to take in the detailed, colourful and sometimes expansive scenes of the world around us. These illustrations allow the viewer to see into the narrator's imagination and aim to inspire and excite the viewer.

- Angle – eye-level, positioned alongside main character as she shares her thoughts and ideas, likes and dislikes, and reflections on life.
- Distance – some midshots and some long shots that show the details of the wondrous world.
- Contact – mostly offers, between little girl and her sibling or other elements of the setting; one demand as she appears to be running towards the viewer on a page on which she quotes a family member's metaphor of life not being a race.



Figure 6.2 A page spread from *This small blue dot*

Compositional features

The illustrations have an evident constructedness. The viewer can tell that the illustrations have been constructed using crayons. It is implied through image-text interrelationships that the little girl character is creating the illustrations of the book. This is demonstrated on a page that shows the main participant drawing while the characters from her drawing stand around and look down on her, with the accompanying text 'and create worlds with only a crayon and a piece of paper'.

- Layout – left to right, consistent with imaginative structure and the listing of life's good and wonderful things.
- Salience – the little girl, in every image, even when she's shown very small and compared to the whale she is illustrated swimming with.

- Vectors – body movements, animated lines for dancing etc.
- Framing – some heavier framing in the beginning; orientation of the text, when the viewer is introduced to the main character and her sibling. Then no framing as illustrations enhance the written text and imaginatively represent the things the main character talks about.



Figure 6.3 A page spread from *This small blue dot*

Teaching and learning viewing

Texts used in this sequence

- *This small blue dot* by Zeno Swords
- *Nop* by Caroline Magerl
- *Chalk boy* by Margaret Wild and Mandy Ord (illustrator)
- *Good question: A tale told backwards* by Sue Whiting and Annie White (illustrator)

Lesson focus

Illustrators can use different media to convey their story in imaginative ways.

Orient students to the text and set the viewing intention

- Introduce concepts of media as the different tools and methods used by artists and illustrators to create their images.
- Allow students opportunities to experiment with media such as watercolour, crayon, chalk, pastels, acrylic paints, charcoal or lead pencil.
- During and after experimentation, introduce vocabulary for talking about media, e.g. bright, colourful, single colours, monochromatic, sombre, happy, calm, quiet, peaceful, energetic and lively.



Figure 6.4 Experiments with different mediums

Noticing: Model the visual feature

Display a variety of picture books that use different media for the illustrations. Many picture books include a description of the illustrations' media in the back of the book. Think aloud and notice which media are used in the books on display and discuss their effect.

For example, the watercolours used by Caroline Magerl in *Nop* give a light and dreamy quality to the illustrations that help the reader imagine floating away in a hot air balloon with Nop. The ink used by Mandy Ord in *Chalk Boy* matches the storyline and gives a watery feel to help the reader imagine they are in the scenes in which it is raining. The composite images of *Good question: A tale told backwards* by Sue Whiting and Annie White make the illustrations look like they have been cut and pasted from other stories and match the way that the written text draws on a range of well-known fairytales.

Create a word bank that includes words that refer to media (e.g. watercolour, oil pastels, ink, computer-generated), colour choices (single colour, range of colours, colourful, monochromatic, palette) and the impact on the viewer or the feelings elicited (e.g. sombre, happy, calm, quiet, peaceful, energetic, lively).

Engaging: Explore the text

Read *This small blue dot* and allow students to share their initial responses. Then draw students' attention to one or two images. Jointly notice the medium and the colours used. Explain the difference in illustrative techniques of the monochromatic opening and closing pages compared to the rest of the colourful, imaginative illustrations. Share your response to one page spread; for example, the broccoli page.

The green background on this page matches the green colour of broccoli. But it looks like the broccoli has been drawn with white crayon. Like the girl has made a mistake, like she says Mother Nature has. Maybe the girl has drawn it white, bland, colourless because she thinks broccoli is tasteless; she doesn't like it.

Model how to use words from the word bank to label the pages under close viewing.

Noticing and engaging: Guided viewing

Assign small groups or pairs of students other pages to view closely. Ask them to notice and discuss the mediums used and the effect the images have on them. Ask students to attach cards from the word bank to the illustrations they are closely viewing.

Responding: Towards independent viewing

Take photographs of students in different poses or doing different activities. Print them out in greyscale and have students cut out their body from the photograph. Paste each student's outline onto a blank piece of paper or card. Have students add backgrounds to their sheet of paper using different mediums to convey different effects. For example, colourful oil pastels to show liveliness and energy versus watercolour blues and greens to convey peace and calm.



Figure 6.5 An example of student work

Display student artworks and ask students to explain their choice to the class or a small group of students. Use prompting questions such as:

- What medium did you use?
- Why did you choose that medium?
- How would you describe your colours?
- What do you want viewers to imagine when they look at your illustration?
- How do the colours you chose help to do that?
- How does your chosen medium help to do that?

Busy beaks: Informative text

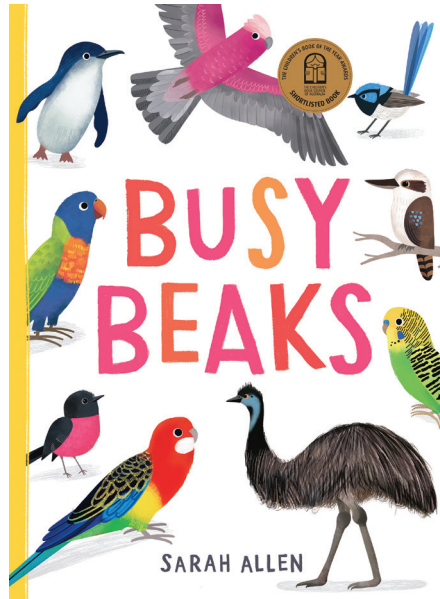


Figure 6.6 The cover of *Busy beaks* by Sarah Allen

Interrelationship of images and text: Visual and verbal meanings

Context, content and concepts

Informative in purpose, the literary non-fiction book *Busy beaks* uses sparse, lyrical sentences to inform the reader of the habits, movements and sounds made by different native Australian birds. The end of the book includes a page spread showing a catalogue of the birds featured on previous pages. In this section, each bird is pictured above a brief paragraph of factual information.

Melding literary and informative visual and verbal techniques with technical language makes the text's information appealing and accessible to younger readers.

Verbal meanings

The alliteration in the title, *Busy beaks*, and including the subjective adjective *busy* are the first indications of the literary non-fiction nature of the text. Other literary linguistic features are:

- onomatopoeia (e.g. 'craaaa', 'hoo-hooo')
- alliteration (e.g. 'a gang of galahs')
- rhyme (e.g. 'chicks/sticks')
- subjective language (e.g. 'takes good care', 'cosy tree hollow')
- gendered pronouns (e.g. 'A robin sits tight on **her** three speckled eggs.', 'A loud kookaburra calls out to **his** friends.')
- human motives given to birds (e.g. 'A brolga pair dance and **practise** their leaps.').

Each bird illustration is labelled with the bird's common and scientific name. Other non-fiction linguistic features are:

- timeless present tense (e.g. 'Shorebirds **find** food...')
- technical vocabulary (e.g. 'flock', 'roost', 'preening').

Visual meanings

Representational features

- Carrier-participants – native Australian birds.
- Modality/level of realism – lowered, evidently drawn.
- Processes – standing or flying (on cover and in end catalogue), variety of actions matched to written text (in body of book).
- Circumstances – none (on cover and in end catalogue), variety of generic native bush or urban settings (in body of book).

The participants depicted in the text are stylised, though realistically proportioned, birds. Authentic colour choice has been applied to the birds, with symbolic indications of the subjects' feathery textures, along with lack of shading that gives the birds a flattened look.

The front cover and catalogue at the end of the text show the birds on a white background. This lack of circumstance makes use of an analytic diagram convention and displays the birds in static positions as carrier-participants, demonstrating that the birds are the focus of the text and indicating the text's informative purpose. By contrast, the rhyming text is accompanied by narrative-style illustrations that include the birds engaged in various naturalistic processes. These illustrations also include circumstances, showing native Australian bush or urban settings depicted in soft pastel hues.



Figure 6.7 A page spread from *Busy beaks*

Interactive features

- Angle – eye level with birds, some shot from below.
- Distance – mid- to long shots.
- Contact – offer.

The illustrations are shown via distances that allow for multiple birds to be included on each page. Most birds are represented at eye level and are documented and displayed through visual offers inviting the viewer's perusal.

Compositional features

- Layout – left to right/given and new; centred/diagrammatic.
- Salience – birds contrasted against white background, birds as animate participants in various settings.
- Vectors – body and wing positions of walking and flying birds.
- Framing – either light framing or lack of framing in body of text; white circumstance acts as framing for birds in the cataloguing pages.

In some instances, the positioning of the birds emulates the left-to-right reading path of the written text. In others, the participants are placed centrally to display the focus bird for the viewer's information. All compositional features work together to direct the viewer's attention to the bird carrier-participants.

Teaching and learning viewing

Text used in this sequence

- *Busy beaks* by Sarah Allen

Lesson focus

Illustrators can inform the viewer through their choice of participant, process and circumstance.

Orient students to the text and set the viewing intention

- Activate students' background knowledge of native Australian birds.
- Discuss the different native birds endemic to your local area.
- Listen to birdcalls and try to guess the bird.

Noticing: Model the visual feature

Display some photographs and teacher-drawn images of native Australian birds sourced from the internet or print-based sources. Point out the participant (the particular bird), the process (what the bird is doing) and the circumstance (the setting, background, where the bird is located).

Engaging: Explore the text

Display *Busy beaks* and think aloud about the visual features on the cover, predicting the general purpose of the book (to inform) and the specific content (Australian birds) based on the lack of circumstance and the depicted participants.

Read aloud and highlight the embedded facts, scientific bird names and technical terms that are included in the written text ('roost', 'warble', 'preening', 'plumes'). Point out the connections between the written text and the participants and processes in the illustrations.

Figure 6.8 Teacher-drawn bird



Noticing and engaging: Guided viewing

As a whole class or in small groups, ask students to compare the front cover and cataloguing pages to the rest of the illustrations. Use prompting questions such as:

- What do you notice about the participants, processes and circumstances?
- What is the same or different?

Responding: Towards independent viewing

Ask students to draw a native bird relevant to your school setting.

Ask them to choose the process they will depict their participant engaging in and whether to include the circumstance based on what they hope to inform their viewer about.



Figure 6.9 Samples of student bird drawings

Applying the principles of this chapter

Use the following questions to help you reflect on your learning from this chapter.

- What did you notice about the use of metalanguage in the teacher talk?
- How did visual text creation support student learning?
- How could you incorporate visual metalanguage into your reading aloud?
- What visual-text-creation activities could you use to engage students' learning of viewing?