

Mixsy Trinidad
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Lit Can Do, 3.1

The Mountains of Tibet, Mordicai Gerstein

Reason: Lets us see other lives through other eyes.

I believe the author uses plot and theme to let us see lives through other eyes. We are taken through a quick journey of the character's life but the author lets us know early that this character is not done exploring life, he always says, "Someday I'm going to visit them," or "Someday I'll go and see them." When the little boy, now an old man dies, he is given two choices to either go on to Heaven or to live another life. He quickly chooses to live another life because he says, "The one I just lived has faded from my mind like a dream. All I can remember is that I wanted to see more of the world." So he chooses which galaxy he is going to live in, which star, which planet, he decides to be a child again, he chooses a valley to live in because of "the old familiar stories" and he chooses which family to join, he also chooses to be a girl because, "I seem to remember that I was a boy this time I'd like to see what being a girl is like." "So a little girl is born in the mountains of Tibet and she loved to fly kites."

The theme of the story is, we often wonder, especially as children, what it would be like to be someone else, to belong to another family and to live in faraway places. The author is clever and takes the little boy through his life and upon death lets him choose what he will do next. The character chooses all of the same things except that this time he is a girl, but still loves to fly kites, is born in the same place, has the same family, and will probably grow up doing very similar things like getting married and having a family. I took away the message that it does not matter whether you are born a boy or a girl, in your life you will end up doing exactly what you were meant to be doing regardless of sex. You end up being born to the same parents and in the same region with the same customs.

Come Away from the Water, Shirley, John Burningham

Reason: Develops Imagination.

The author's style certainly helps develop imagination. Shirley and her parents are at the beach on a day that is too cold to swim from the illustrations we can see that everyone is not wearing swimming attire. As mom and dad are setting up their chairs Shirley takes off on her adventure with her dog, as her mom suggests, "Why don't you go and play with those children?" Shirley is already on her way to an adventure to the pirate ship she sees in the distance. Shirley is so busy fighting off the pirates she does not hear mom say, "That's the third and last time I'm asking you whether you want a drink, Shirley." As Shirley is digging for the buried treasure mom says, "Your father might have a game with you when he's had a little rest."

As mom and dad are getting in a little down time, Shirley is busy having her own adventure the illustrations help the reader see what Shirley is really doing in her mind on that chilly day at the beach. It helps the reader see that we can have a fun adventure even if we can't swim at the beach.

The Kissing Hand, Audrey Penn

Reason: Helps us solve problems.

The characters and style in this book offer a clever way to solve the apprehension we may feel when confronting a new or scary situation. The style of the book is very simple, the conversation Mrs. Raccoon has with Chester raccoon is one that most anyone can relate with, whether you are a child, or a parent of a child, even a teacher reassuring her student. The style of the conversation helps me “hear” Mom’s voice as a strong but soothing one letting me (the reader) know that everything will be just fine and that pretty soon I will actually enjoy the new experience. Mrs. Raccoon says, “Now, whenever you feel lonely and need a little loving from home, just press your hand to your cheek and think, ‘Mommy loves you. Mommy loves you.’ And that very kiss will jump to your face and fill you with toasty warm thoughts.”

In this case the relationship is Mother/Son however any reader can relate with a caring adult that has reassured them along the way.

Martin’s Big Words, Doren Rappaport

Reason: Gives us a sense of History

The theme and style of the book certainly help bring in a sense of history. Although the story of Dr. King is a powerful one and many do not understand his story until much later, this book can be used to introduce young children to a time and place in history that they may not know ever existed. Also how current in our history this actually is. Many of our youth today appreciate having the day off from work or school, but do not appreciate the struggles it took to get there. This book serves as a vehicle to introduce children to a part of our history that many today consider shameful, and the discussion of racism can be had. The powerful words from his mother, “You are as good as anyone,” that stuck with him can have a powerful impact on a student. Although the words are simple, they carry powerful messages of courage, peace, love, equality. His message of non violence to achieve a goal is a message that is not heard often enough. Although this can be seen as a simple children’s literature book it can lead to a great discussion of racism, perseverance and a true hero.

The Frog Prince Continued, Jon Scieszka

Reason: Transmits cultural literacy

This book is great! I found it to be witty and funny, but that you also had to be familiar with the Frog Prince’s original story and also familiar with the stories that are referred during his quest to become a frog again. During one of her fits the princess says, “Sometimes I think we would both be better off if you were still a frog,” and with these words off he goes on his journey to make them both happy again. He encounters several witches from previous stories, “he knew those fairy tales well,” so he knew which witches to quickly escape from. Ironically he is turned into Cinderella’s carriage and is completely heartbroken. At the stroke of midnight the spell is broken, once again he is the Prince and he quickly rushes home to live happily ever after. “After kissing the Princess they both turn into frogs and live happily ever after.” It is the style and plot of this book that pulls the reader in.

This book can also be used to trigger a curiosity in children that are perhaps not readers. After reading this book they can become curious to find out what stories the Frog Prince was referring too while on his quest for happiness.

Owl Moon, Jane Yolen

Reason: Lets us experience the beauty of language.

“When you go owling you don’t need words or warm or anything but hope.” How ironic that the author says you don’t need words when owling, yet her magical use of words puts us right in that forest with Pa and his child. When they first begin their journey you could almost hear the train and the dog in the background. The style of writing that Jane Yolen uses for this book automatically captures our attention, “It was late one winter night, long past my bedtime.” We know it is late, she tells us, and it is also very late because it is past a child’s bedtime, we grow quieter as we begin to read in anticipation of the story, we too become, “...still as giant statues.” Even if you have never walked in the snow you can hear the crunching noises described when she writes, “Our feet crunched over the crisp snow...” We can feel how cold they are on their journey when she says, “I could feel the cold, as if someone’s icy hand was palm-down on my back.” Most of us can relate to this feeling, especially on a hot day if someone surprises us with a cold hand on our back. We can see how white the snow is, “...the snow below it was whiter than the milk in a cereal bowl.” We experience the thrill of “hearing” the owl when it responds to Pa’s call, “Whoo-who-who-who-who-whoooooo.” We can smile for Pa and his child because they finally did see the owl.

The great use of language in this book transports us to a different time and place. Of course the book can be used for many teaching lessons, but what a great book to read to someone for the simple pleasure of reading and experiencing rich use of language.

The Seven Silly Eaters, Mary Ann Hoberman

Reason: Lets us experience the play of language.

The style of this book lets us experience rhyme and takes us on a whimsical journey of Mrs. Peters and her Seven Silly Eaters (I did it too!). There is no doubt that this book would become a quick favorite in an early elementary classroom. The author’s use of words as well as the illustrations will capture any reader and they will want to continue flipping through the pages of this book. When Mrs. Peters says, “What a silly pair of eaters are Lucy dear and Peter Peters.” As the book continues and more Peters join the bunch we can tell Mrs. Peters is perhaps becoming a bit tired of their picky situation, at first they are silly, but then they become, “foolish group of eaters, fussy bunch of eaters, persnickety young eaters.” After the children try to cook their mom a birthday surprise, and they do, a perfect cake they could all enjoy, “her birthday wish came true, as birthday wishes always do.” “A meal that’s good for everyone, A meal on which they all agree, Made from their secret recipe.”

I believe there is also an underlying them here on how children can grow to become less selfish and see themselves as part of a bigger family unit. I wouldn’t necessarily point this out to a classroom full of young students, but it would be interesting to see if they notice.

Quest for the Tree Kangaroo, Sy Montgomery

Reason: Teaches information.

This book is full of information, not only about the tree kangaroo itself, but about the country Papua New Guinea, about its people and about other animals that live there as well. We can learn about animal conservation and the different languages spoken there. The reason for bringing this book into our classroom is to afford the opportunity of exploration to our students. How many of us have even heard of a tree kangaroo? What is it? What does it look like? What does it eat, where does it live? All these questions can be answered by reading this book and by going on this journey with Lisa and the others. Children will be captured when on page 7 Lisa says, "It looked like a big stuffed animal!" Readers of this book can also have a peek inside of a different culture and language. On pages 30-31 we see pictures of men with paint, they use black charcoal to darken their eyes, and paint their faces and bodies with splashes of white ash. "The color white reflects what comes from our hearts," Joshua explains as Gabriel translates.

The style of the book can be considered pretty dense with abundant and sometimes overwhelming amounts of information however the theme of the book is to follow your passion and live your dream. Lisa herself has words directed to children on page 74, she says, "Follow your passion!" and has a list of recommendations on things children can do to get and stay motivated.

The Z was Zapped, Chris Van Allsburg

Reason: Helps develop reading skills.

The clever use of style will motivate any younger reader to continue turning the pages of this book. Although illustrated in black and white I believe this was done on purpose so that the reader can just concentrate on the words and then on the pictures. This book could help develop reading skills in many ways, from a very young reader just learning their alphabet, the letters are placed in order as capital letters throughout the book, to predicting, for example when looking at the picture of the letter G, a student could be asked to predict what they think the letter G may be doing. By using words such as "rapidly Overgrown" to describe the letter O and V was "mysteriously Vanishing" a student's vocabulary is enhanced as the same time.

The author is very clever is representing letters in ways that are not typically how we envision that letter, for example the R rolling away, we do not usually envision R as a rolling letter like O could be. S did not simply slither away it was Soaked. The creative use of words in this book could capture a student's imagination in a way that is new to them and can get a child excited about continuing to explore books.

What a refreshing way to view children and adolescent literature. As you mentioned in the introduction of this assignment, we usually focus on a book for particular lessons, but forget to use literature as literature. Thank you for helping me shift my focus!