



# KEEP 'EM READING WHAT'S IN A PICTURE?

Once readers graduate into chapter books, most are reluctant to return to picture books. Yet many of these books offer beautiful and poignant stories with descriptive language, literary devices, and, of course, award-winning art relevant to all ages. Using Caldecott books for exercises in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation will give an important purpose for reading picture books again.

Judging picture book illustrations provides a great opportunity to collaborate with both the art and the classroom teachers. By integrating the following exercises with those found in this month's Technology article, students will develop a deeper understanding of what picture books

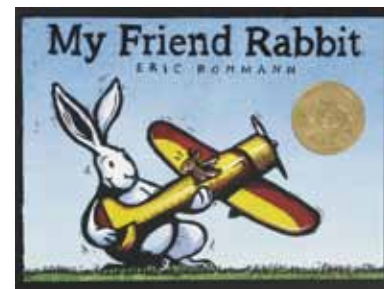
offer. All students, regardless of age or reading level, can participate.

## What Makes a Winner?

(Grades 3–6)

Using simplified Caldecott award criteria (see sidebar), the librarian can model how to judge illustrations and provide guided practice for students. This eases the difficulty of the task and gives students insight into the types of ideas to express in discussions.

Model the exercise using *My Friend Rabbit* by Eric Rohmann, the 2003 Caldecott medal winner. Display or distribute copies of the Questions



for Award Consideration ([www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com)), and discuss each point in relation to Rohmann's book.

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Form small groups and give each group a different Caldecott medal-winning book. After reading the book, the group should discuss the illustrations and write answers to each of the Questions for Award Consideration. The students will then share their insights, using a document reader to display a picture from the book that illustrates their points.

Through "Book Buddy" partnerships, intermediate students can share their insights into the illustrations with younger students; the older students will deepen their knowledge, while primary students learn about how pictures complement the text.

## Art Talk

(Grades 1–6)

Give students the opportunity to understand the intricacies of working with a specialized medium to produce illustrations. Choose three Caldecott-

## Simplified Caldecott Award Criteria

- The artist shows excellence in the use of the artistic technique.
- The pictures add to the story's plot or express the theme of the book.
- The style of illustration fits the story and theme.
- The characters, setting, mood, or other essential information is portrayed through the pictures.
- The pictures in the book appeal to children.
- The book is illustrated by an artist living in the United States and published by a US publisher.

GRADES  
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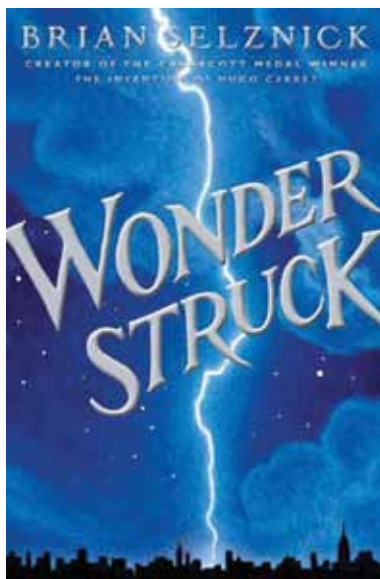
winning illustrators who use different artistic media (e.g., watercolor, pencil, collage, gouache). Read the stories (or excerpts) aloud to the class and look closely at the art. Introduce one to three appropriate art vocabulary words with each book. Demonstrate the art techniques and provide additional examples (you may want to work with the art teacher on this). Then let students work. Allow time for students to share their illustrations with tablemates and explain how their pictures display one or more of the new vocabulary terms.

This hands-on experience will give students an appreciation for various art forms and illustrators' skills.

## Read, Research, and Create

### (Grades 4–6)

Share biographies of award-winning illustrators with intermediate students. The Children's Illustrators series from ABDO introduces twelve illustrators in short books (twenty-four pages long) that give detailed information about each illustrator's early life and career journey (see Additional Resources on [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com)). **ONLINE** In the two-volume *Talking*



## Book Suggestions for Art Talk

- Brian Selznick, *Wonderstruck*: pencil, positive/negative space, depth
- Lois Ehlert, *Snowballs*: collage, pattern, texture
- Jerry Pinkney, *The Lion and the Mouse*: watercolor, harmony, color
- Denise Fleming, *Count!*: paper pulp, color, balance
- David Wisniewski, *The Secret Knowledge of Grown-ups*: cut paper, texture, depth
- Kevin Henkes, *Kitten's First Full Moon*: brushed ink, movement, contrast, shape

## Art Vocabulary

### Media

Pencil  
Pen and Ink  
Watercolor  
Pastel  
Charcoal  
Cut paper  
Collage  
Block or Wood Print

### Art Terms

Depth  
Harmony  
Color  
Contrast  
Pattern  
Texture  
Movement  
Rhythm  
Shape: Organic, Geometric  
Positive/Negative Space

*with Artists*, compiled by Pat Cummings, illustrators provide an autobiography and answer questions about their work process. Students can also search for biographical information on illustrators' websites.

After students learn about an illustrator's life, encourage them to experiment with one of the illustrator's media. Students may opt to view videos of illustrators explaining their artistic process before experimenting (see the suggested list of videos in this month's Technology column on p. 44), or they can use *Storybook Art* by MaryAnn F. Kohl and Jean Potter for ideas and inspiration.

## Choose an Illustrator

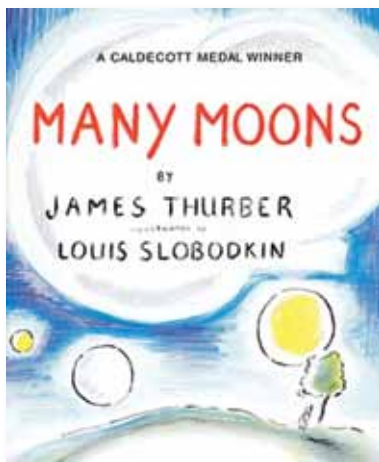
### (Grades 1–6)

Although some picture book authors both write and illustrate their books, picture books are often written and illustrated by two different people. Give students an opportunity to connect the text of a book to an illustration style. Choose an older Caldecott winner that most students won't

recognize, such as *Many Moons* written by James Thurber and illustrated by Louis Slobodkin, *They Were Strong and Good* by Robert Lawson, or *Once a Mouse* by Marcia Brown. Hide the cover and read the story without showing the pictures or divulging the name of the illustrator. Ask students to visualize the story as they listen. When finished reading, discuss the theme and mood of the text.

Provide small groups with a collection of picture books illustrated by various Caldecott medalists or honor book illustrators. As students peruse the pictures, have them consider which of the illustrators might be the best candidate to create pictures for the book that was read aloud. They should share their reasons for their choices with the whole class. Conclude by displaying the actual pictures in the book and comparing them to the students' choices.

Older students can also write several paragraphs to explain their decision, using some of the vocabulary terms learned in the Art Talk exercise.



## Depicting Mood

(Grades 2–6)

Picture books provide a good laboratory for identifying how an author's voice establishes the story's mood. In a Caldecott winner, the text and the illustrations need to work together to accentuate the mood. This pictorial interpretation is one of the criteria used in judging Caldecott winners.

Improve observation and analysis skills by involving students in interpreting how art enhances or detracts from the mood of the book. Read aloud *A River of Words* by Jen Bryant. Identify the tone or mood. Show the text on several pages and identify examples of phrases or sentences that show mood. Then study the illustrations and discuss the elements in the artwork that contribute to the mood. If time is available, repeat the activity using a book with a different mood and compare the two.

## Creating an Award-Winning Book

(Grades 3–6)

Designing a picture book requires many skills in addition to artistic talent. The illustrator may have to decide where the images and words are placed. Illustrator Marla Frazee states that determining where to place text "affect(s) the tempo and

rhythm of the book ... The turning of the page brings on a fresh start, a new mood, thought, or day. It accentuates the drama, anticipates surprises, and adds suspense." Visit her website (<http://marlafrazee.com/studio>) for additional insights into how an illustrator designs a book.

Read aloud a book illustrated by Frazee, and discuss what happens at each page turn. Distribute other books illustrated by Frazee (see Additional Resources at [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com))

ONLINE

to small groups of students. Instruct each group to read a book together. During a second reading, ask the group to identify the purpose for each page turn.

## Judge and Vote Read-a-thon

(Grades 1–6)

After an in-depth study of past Caldecott medal winners and honor books, students are ready to judge books for the 2015 winner.

Compile five to ten favorite picture books published in 2014. Solicit suggestions from your public librarian, search online for the books favored to win the 2015 Caldecott, or choose from the 2015 Mock Caldecott Book Suggestions on [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com).

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Have intermediate student readers practice reading the books aloud and compile written comments about the book. Then pair intermediate classes with primary grades for reading rotations. Set up a reading station for each book, manned by intermediate students. If possible, provide two copies of the book for each station: one held by the reader and the other held for the audience to view the pictures as the page is being read. The intermediate

students will read the book aloud to the primary students and then point out important characteristics of the illustrations. These comments might also include highlighting emotions shown in the character's expressions or focusing on how the art technique and colors complement the mood.

Primary students rotate through the reading stations every ten minutes until all the books have been read.

While in the library or back in the classroom, students will vote for their favorite picture book. Provide a slide show of each book cover for classroom teachers to display as students vote.

Create a display with the vote results, and announce the winner just prior to the actual Caldecott award ceremony at the end of January. Announcing the winner during an already scheduled assembly will increase the anticipation and make the students' vote seem more prestigious.

Share the announcement of the official Caldecott winner with the entire school and invite students to compare the Mock Caldecott winner with the actual award winner to see if they can figure out why the official committee chose the one they did.

*For additional activities, see "Meet the Authors: Caldecott Winners" and "Author Extensions: An Anniversary Celebration of Caldecott Winners" from the August/September 2013 issue of LibrarySparks.*



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