

## 2016 Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist: Visual Literacy notes

Title: **Something about a Bear**

Illustrator/author: **Jackie Morris**

Publisher: Frances Lincoln Children's Books

### First look

Try to ensure that each member of the shadowers' group has a chance to look through *Something about a Bear* before working on the book with the group.

Look through the book together. Ask the group whether they think this book is fiction or non-fiction? Do the illustrations or written text help you to decide?

Chat in pairs or as a group about whether they enjoyed *Something about a Bear*. What did they like or dislike and why?

### Look again

- When the group have discussed their first responses, return to the book; look, think and talk more about the artwork.
- There is only one bear in this book which is not a real animal. Which one is it? Clue: it only appears at the beginning and end of the text. Why do you think this bear is included in this book?
- Eight types of bear are featured in this text, one on each double-page spread. Jackie Morris has painted her very realistic pictures of each bear surrounded by the plants and creatures that share the bear's environment. How successful do you think she has been? Do the pictures give a clear sense of the creatures in their wild habitats?
- The writing that accompanies each picture uses language in a poetic way rather than the more matter-of-fact style of traditional reference books. Look at the choices of vocabulary and sentence structure. They are more like poetry than information but they are still providing knowledge about the bears. For example, how much can you learn about the polar bear in this extract:

*Swimming through the water, where the ice flow meets the ocean, lives the great white Polar Bear.*

*Hunting seals on silent paws, hushed as gentle falling snow.*

*Skin black, hollow fur, warm bear in a world of ice.*

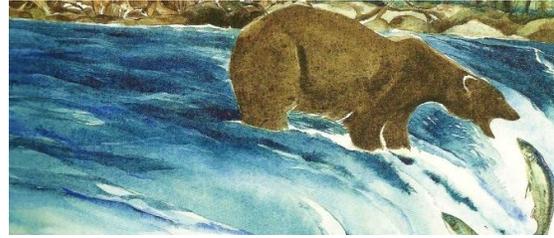
Discuss the grammar and punctuation. Are these lines conventional sentences? Does it matter that facts are expressed through poetic language?



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### *Look at everything*

Talk about all the visual aspects of the book including end papers, font choices, title page and layout. Find all the further pictures of bears on the title page. Name any other creatures that feature in the main illustrations. How do these additions to the text contribute to the overall impact of the book?



### **Interpreting the texts**

It is always beneficial, when studying a book, to find ways to get youngsters to fully engage with the whole text. This can be achieved through exploratory tasks and creative responses such as drama and art. The following suggestions may help young readers to become absorbed in the book.

#### *Compare and contrast*

One way to determine that this book is a non-fiction text is to look at the realism of the illustrations. Jackie Morris has set each picture of a bear pictures in its natural environment. The writing is descriptive – evoking the atmosphere of each bears daily life in the wild. Now look at *There's a Bear on My Chair*. How does the depiction of a bear differ in this book? Which book is intended to inform you and which to purely entertain?

#### *Research*

At the back of the book there is more traditionally written information about each type of bear. There are also several websites for readers to visit for further research into the conservation of bears in their natural habitats. Visit the websites to help you gather more information about the bears.

#### *Write*

Choose **one bear** as your focus for two short pieces of writing. The first piece should be straightforward non-fiction, presenting the reader with factual information. The second piece of writing should be more lyrical in its language; a short piece that turns the facts into an expressive description as Morris has done for each picture.

#### *Art*

Using your chosen art materials (e.g. crayons, paint, collage etc.), create your own picture of one of the bears in the book.



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