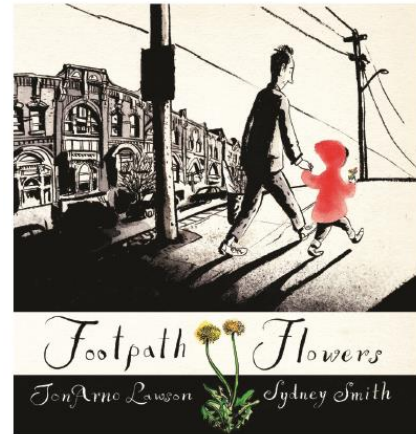


2016 Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist: Visual Literacy notes

Title: Footpath Flowers
Illustrator/author: Sydney Smith
Author: JonArno Lawson
Publisher: Walker Books



First look

Try to ensure that each member of the shadowing group has a chance to look through *Footpath Flowers* before working on the book with the group.

The whole experience of this book depends on the attention paid to the images as there is no written text. Books such as these are often described as **wordless** but the images generate meanings in the mind of the reader (and the meanings are internally expressed through words).

Get the group to tell the story to each other as they look at the pictures.

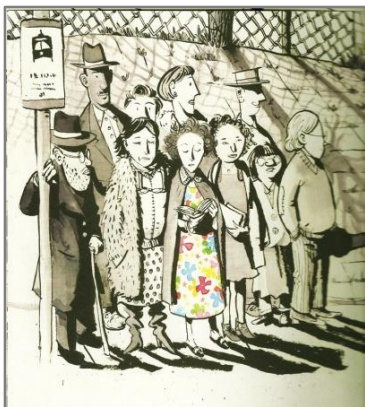
Chat in pairs or as a group about whether they felt *Footpath Flowers* is a good book for young readers. What did they like or dislike about it and why?

Look again

When the group have discussed their first responses, return to the book; look, think and talk more about the artwork. The drawings have a free and fluid style – just right for showing the urban setting of the story. The artist, Sydney Smith, combines line drawing with shades of grey and washes of gentle colours.

Look at the front cover. There are big houses (are the windows like faces?) and high wires stretching along the road. Two figures are walking away from the reader. They are moving from shadows and darkness towards the white sky ahead.

Turn to the first endpaper. What a contrast! A double page spread is covered with delicate little flowers, birds and insects in soft pastel shades; no strong black lines at all.



Consider the use of colour

At first the pictures seem dominated by the use of black and white. At the start of the story any colours are just bright patches in a monotone world. A particularly interesting use of colour is in the picture of a group of people queuing for a tram. They are all unsmiling. No one is chatting. They are all dressed in grey except one who is wearing a dress made of material covered with brightly coloured flowers. Is it just coincidence that she is



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lost in a book? The images in her head may be reflected on her dress.

Does the use of colour change? Go through the book looking at the different colours on each page. What happens to the colours from the picture of the dead bird to the end? The little girl starts as a spark of red in a dark landscape. What colours are there at the end of the story?

Look at everything

Talk about all the visual aspects of the book including the endpapers, font choices, title page and layout. How do these 'extras' to the story 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.

Art

There are shadows and reflections throughout the book. There are also plants (flora) and creatures (fauna). By looking at these things and the way people are dressed can you work out what season it is in the story? For example, strong shadows mean there is sunlight but the little girl is wearing a hooded jacket it probably is not a warm day. Look at the trees in the park. Do they have leaves? What about the trees in the garden?

Birds and butterflies

Some of the creatures in the pictures are familiar to us in the UK but others are not. How many creatures in the little girl's garden can you recognise and name?

Give your opinion

Despite there being no words to direct your thoughts, this book says some profound things about being a child and being a parent. Write down what you understand when thinking beyond a straightforward description of what happens. Would you recommend this book to teachers or librarians who work with younger children? How old do you think children need to be to understand this book?

Visit a website

See more about the artist and his work on *Footpath Flowers* online at <http://groundwoodbooks.com/sidewalk-flowers-a-love-letter-to-toronto-from-illustrator-sydney-smith/>



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