

Pairing Classics and Contemporary Tales

When signs of spring appear, do you reach for a classic like Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings*? It is a treasure not to be missed, yet it might be left on the library or classroom shelf if you don't make an effort to include classic picture-book tales in your read-aloud fare. Have you thought of following this classic with a more contemporary title on another day? One option might be Nancy Tafuri's *Have You Seen My Duckling?* Conversations will blossom when you encourage students to think about the similarities and differences between noteworthy pairings such as these.

In this column, we reintroduce a handful of picture-book classics and pair them with contemporary titles on a similar topic or theme. As we present the pairings, we will share ideas about how to build comprehension, polish visual literacy, and spark listening enjoyment through treasures from the past and present.



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Thoughtful Conversations

One effective way to improve comprehension is through conversation. Guided by your questions, students will generate thoughtful responses as you evaluate each book pair together. Start the talk by examining pairings using the story elements. Students in the primary grades might follow the C.L.A.P.S. formula (Characters, Location, Action, Problem, and Solution) suggested by author Candace Fleming and found in our book *Literature Is*

Back! To prepare for this lesson, make a large chart labeled with the five elements so you can compare the stories side by side. After reading each book, guide students' conversations with the following questions:

- Who are the main characters in the book?
- Where does this story take place?
- What happens to the characters?
- What problem do they have to solve or what goal are they trying to reach?
- How did the characters solve their problem?

Then, when you compare the two stories, ask students to think about the "big idea" or theme of the tale. Do the stories have similar themes? Invite students to think of other stories with parallel themes. Two books that come to mind to illuminate this idea are P. D. Eastman's *Are You My Mother?* and *Where's My Mom?* by Julia Donaldson.

Extend thinking by asking students to explain why they preferred one book over the other or perhaps liked both. Model how you use an example or two from a book to support a decision that you made to teach younger think-

ers to say more than "I just liked it . . ."

If you select Watty Piper's *The Little Engine That Could*, you will hear echoes of "I think I can!" days after the reading.

Partner it with the brand-new *I Can Do It Myself!* by Diane Adams, about a little girl who takes every opportunity to show how grown up she is (often with mixed results).

Readers in the intermediate grades can use characters, setting, plot, problem, solution, point of view, and theme to stimulate their higher-level thinking skills. Rather than looking at a book on a similar topic, it can be eye-opening to read a classic version of a popular tale and compare it with a recent retelling. Begin with a folk or fairy tale such as Hans Christian Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, illustrated by Marcia Brown. Partner it with David Jorgensen's recent retelling to examine any changes over time. When comparing Marcia Brown's version of *Stone Soup* with Ying Chang Compestine's *The Real Story of Stone Soup*, the changing point of view may surprise readers.

Joyful Reading

One of the many reasons we share enticing books with our students is to promote reading as a joyful, lifelong pastime. We can think of no better way than to introduce classic tales that have stood the test of time. Young readers will marvel when you read aloud a book such as *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss that was written more than 60 years ago. To them this seems like an eternity. Pair this simple tale of a boy's determination to grow a carrot seed with *Thea's Tree* by Alison Jackson, where Thea plants a mysterious purple seed for a science project.

Kick off a discussion about creativity and imagination with the timeless tale *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson. Guided by his imagination and his purple crayon, Harold draws his adventures on a moonlit walk. After reading about Harold, explore *A Day with No Crayons* by Elizabeth Rusch, where Liza discovers the vibrant colors in her surroundings after her mother takes away her treasured crayons. *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds is another possible partner, appealing to imaginative readers across grade levels. Finally, select an illustrated autobiographical title, *The Art Lesson*, to show readers that Harold shared Tomie dePaola's early passion for drawing. DePaola went on to a phenomenal career writing and illustrating memorable books that are now favorites of many librarians, teachers, and young readers. (For an interview with this author-illustrator, turn to p.32.)

Visual Literacy

In a well-crafted picture book, the words and illustrations work together to tell the story. The illustrations typically fill in details not described in the text. Thus, to understand the whole story, children need to "read" the pictures as carefully as they do the words. Focus on valuable visual literacy skills by asking students to carefully examine the art in a pair of picture books. While there are a number of artistic elements to consider, the following list offers a good starting place:


- **Color:** Is the color palette bright, conveying a happy feeling? Are the colors darker and more serious in feel?
- **Space:** Are the pages filled with illustrations from edge to edge? Is there white space around the figures? What difference does this make?
- **Shape:** Are the shapes used large or small? Angular or

rounded? Are there borders? How do these choices affect your reaction to the story?

- **Texture:** Is there a texture to the artwork? How would you describe it? What difference does this make between one book and another?

Compare and contrast how the artists have used these four elements, discussing how effectively they work to tell the story. Both primary- and intermediate-grade students can sample the art in Virginia Lee Burton's *The Little House* and compare it with Audrey Wood's *The Napping House*. Point out how bright and happy the colors are at the beginning of *The Little House* and how changing circumstances are reflected in dark, dreary colors as the city engulfs the house. Then discuss the gray "rainy" colors in the beginning of *The Napping House* and the use of bright yellow as the sun comes out near the end of the storm. Another pair to sample is *Rain Drop Splash* by Alvin Tresselt and *Come on, Rain!* by Karen Hesse. Next, compare how collage is used in *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats and in *Snowballs* by Lois Ehlert.

Students in the intermediate grades will be fascinated with the possibilities pop-up books offer when they study Robert Sabuda's recent masterpiece adaptation of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. It would be wonderful if you could find an early copy of Barrie's story to compare it to. More practically, students can compare the pop-up to the version illustrated by Scott Gustafson, which follows Barrie's original version. Not a picture book in this case but an illustrated classic too good to miss.

With stunning new picture books constantly arriving in bookstores and libraries, it's easy to get caught up in their artistry, dazzle, and inventiveness. Many new titles have much to offer today's primary and intermediate readers, yet there's something to be said about the tried and true. We see such potential in integrating the classics into library and classroom activities to educate our students about the exceptional art and writing that pleased children in years past. This is not a case of trying to judge one as better than the other, but rather of valuing quality in both the past and present. No doubt you are already thinking of new possibilities to partner with a few of your favorite classics. 

Maria P. Walther and **Carol J. Fuhler** are the coauthors of *Literature Is Back! Using the Best Books for Teaching Readers and Writers across Genres* (Scholastic, 2007). For a complete list of the books mentioned here, turn to "Comprehensive Bibliography" on p.47.