50 Ways to Use Picture Books in ELA Classrooms

Sheree Springer
University of Utah

1. As an interest-enhancing hook to engage readers (Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001)
   - Enhance students’ interests in ELA with The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus, A River of Words, The Book-Eating Boy, Exclamation Mark, Eats, Shoots, and Leaves, or Punctuation Takes a Vacation

2. To make cross-curricular connections with science, social studies, or math (Bloem & Padak, 1996)
   - Try making connections with books from the National Council for the Social Studies' Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People list or the National Science Teachers Association’s Outstanding Science Trade Books list

3. To teach literary analysis and close reading (Treasury Islands, 2012; Wright, 2015; Martinez, et al., 2009)
   - Use a complex picture book to analyze, such as Woolvs in the Sitee, The Lost Thing, The Arrival, The Wall, or Black and White

4. To teach differences in author’s style, such as syntax, diction, and tone
   - Use a text set to teach students about style, such as this set about wolves: The Wolves in the Walls, Woolvs in the Sitee, Wolf Wanted, Virginia Wolf, Big Wolf and Little Wolf, and Wolves

5. To teach extended metaphor and allegory (Wolk, 2004)
   - Choose an allegorical or metaphorical picture book to analyze with students, such as The Book-Eating Boy, Zero, The Dot, Terrible Things, or Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge

6. To teach the elements of comedy and to introduce satire as genre (College Board, 2004; Maddox)
   - Share one of the following hilarious picture books and discuss the elements of comedy to lighten up your curriculum: Chester, The Composer is Dead, It’s a Book, Bad Day at Riverbend, or I Want My Hat Back

7. To introduce postmodernism as a genre (Anstey, 2002; Goldstone, 2004; Pantaleo, 2014)
   - Choose a variety of postmodern books to discuss, such as Black and White, The Three Pigs, Come Away From the Water, Shirley, Battle Bunny, or The Stinky Cheese Man

8. To develop background knowledge
   - Use picture books as a quick way to build background knowledge before reading a more complex text. For example, before reading Things Fall Apart, share A Is For Africa, The Distant Talking Drum, & Here Comes Our Bride, and How the Leopard Got His Claws (Taliaferro, 2009)

9. To teach inference (McGee & Tompkins, 1983; McCann, 2007)
   - Use complex, wordless picture books like Tuesday, Flotsam The Arrival, Mr. Wuffles, Rules of Summer, The Farmer and the Clown, Ballad, Zoom, ReZoom, Sector Seven, Tuesday, and The Mysteries of Harris Burdick

10. To immerse students in various cultures and easily include diverse perspectives (Landt, 1996; Mathis, 2002)
    - Help students experience the world with If the World Were A Village, Tibet, Jamela’s Dress, Going to School in India, Akkisi, and Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit

11. To learn poetic techniques (Matthews et al., 1999)
    - Pair picture books with poetry to introduce poetic terminology with Fredrick (Bennet, 2013), One Leaf Rides the Wind, Forgive Me, I Meant to Do it, A Kick in the Head, or The Death of the Hat

12. To analyze characterization
    - Analyze author’s use of indirect and direct characterization with memorable characters in My Name is Yoon, Chester, The Man Who Walked Between the Towers, Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker, or El Deafo

13. As a scaffold to further understand longer stories
    - Begin with a picture book version of a complex story, such as Sundiata, Beowulf, or Walking with Henry Thoreau

14. To learn about oral tradition, such as folk tales and fables
    - Teach students about oral tradition around the world with Swamp Angels, The Lion and the Mouse, Stories from the Billabong, The Great Snake: Stories from the Amazon, or Fables.
15. Teach students to determine **tone** by analyzing the relationship between words and pictures
   - Give students a variety of picture books featuring symmetry, complementary, enhancement, counterpoint, or contradiction to analyze tone (Martinez, Roser, & Harmon, 2009).
16. To discuss how authors make choices that affect **mood**
   - Choose books with distinct and varied moods, like *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish, My Father’s Arms are a Boat*, and *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, in order to teach students about authorial intent.
17. To learn **literary elements**, like simile, metaphor, allusion, or personification
   - Choose books with rich language, such as *The Promise*. Also see Susan Hall’s *Using Picture Storybooks to Teach Literary Devices, Vol. 1-3* for a more detailed list of literary elements in picture books.
18. **Comparing** different works that tell the same story (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014)
   - Choose books that students can compare and contrast, such as a variety of Cinderella stories from around the world.
19. To **analyze quality** in written works (Galda et al., 2010; Bond, 2006)
   - Improve students’ critical evaluation skills with any complex picture book
20. To **evaluate the cultural authenticity** of international or multicultural picture books
   - Use international or multicultural books such as *A Fine Dessert, Arrow to the Sun, or Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* and a checklist for cultural authenticity and/or racism (NCCLR; Short, 2015)
21. To **evaluate books for sexism** and discuss gender issues in literature (Narahara, 1998)
   - Choose books that examine gender stereotypes, like *Princess Smartypants, Barbie: I Can Be A Computer Engineer, or The Dangerous Book for Boys*; and pair them with nonfiction articles on the *Let Books Be Books* movement and checklists evaluating sexism in children’s literature (Flood, 2014)
22. To analyze **artistic techniques** and styles (Neal & Moore, 1991)
   - Teach students about various art styles with *The Little House* (Cleaver, 2015), *Seen Art?, or Willy’s Pictures* (Serafini, 2015).
23. To interpret **multiple meanings**
   - Pick books that are open to multiple interpretations, like *My Father’s Arms are a Boat, Rules of Summer, Slog’s Dad, or Black and White* (Henry).
24. To highlight **universal themes** (Neal and Moore 1991; Matthews et al., 1999; Mathis, 2002)
   - Picture books with a distinctive theme can help students learn to complete a thematic analysis: *The Heart and the Bottle, The Scar, The Sweetest Fig, My Name is Yoon, Home, Gaston, Mr. Tiger Goes Wild, Hug Me*
25. As a **read-aloud** to practice listening skills (Albright, 2002; Giorgis 1999)
   - Choose an engaging text, such as *We Are the Ship* or *Shackleton’s Journey*, to improve students’ listening comprehension
26. To teach the **writing and publishing process** with student-created picture books (Conrad, 2005; Matthews et al., 1999; Wright, 2015)
   - Have students create ABC books on a complex topic you’ve recently covered (Schoch, 2011)
   - Pair with an elementary class to give students an authentic audience
27. To teach **visual literacy** and **multimodal literacy** (Read and Smith 1982; Serafini, 2014)
   - Pantaleo (2015) recommends teaching students about color, point of view, framing, line, perspective, typography, and conventions with books such as *The Red Tree, Sidekicks, The Man Who Walked Between the Towers, or Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word, and Music* (Cairney, 2014).
28. As a way to teach targeted **writing skills** (Beckman & Diamond, 1984; McElveen, 2001; Spandel & Culham, 1994)
   - See Dawn Little’s website or Ruth Culham’s book, *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits*
29. As a **model** or inspiration for their own writing (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Eti, 2013, Koutras & Kurststedt, 2000; Bennett, 2013)
   - Choose a book like *House Held Up By Trees, The Memory String, or The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* to jumpstart students’ writing process
30. To teach three types of irony (Matthews et al., 1999)
   - Teach students about verbal, situational, and dramatic irony with Princess Smartypants, The Stinky Cheese Man, The Sweetest Fig, or Pink and Say
31. To help students understand point of view (Neal & Moore, 1991; Matthews et al., 1999)
   - Try using a text set with different perspectives of the same event, such as Encounter, Where Do You Think We’re Going, Christopher Columbus?, and Coyote Columbus (Desai, 2014), or a book from different points of view, like Voices in the Park
32. As a topic for argumentative writing
   - Read The Conquerors and have students debate if books for children should be political (NYT, 2014)
   - Read In Our Mothers’ House or And Tango Makes Three, as well as some nonfiction articles on censorship in Utah (Rogers, 2012; Newlin, 2013) before writing an argumentative essay on censorship.
   - Read The Wolves in the Walls or Wolves in the Sitee and have students debate if books for children and teens should be dark (Li, 2014; Gurdon, 2011)
33. For author studies (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1997; Schoch, 2011)
   - Have students choose a picture book author/illustrator to learn about and analyze, such as Emily Gravett, Lane Smith, John Scieszka, Jorg Muller, Eve Bunting, Sean Tan, Neal Gaiman, or Anthony Browne
34. To inspire vocabulary development (Neal & Moore, 1991)
   - Use fun, vocabulary-filled books like 13 Words, Animalia, Baloney, or Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters, as models for vocabulary notebooks or for word-learning opportunities
35. To motivate reluctant readers and build classroom community (Anderson, 2013; Ripp, 2015)
   - Read an inspirational story like Thank You, Mr. Faulkner to motivate students’ reading
   - Build students’ self-efficacy and enthusiasm for literacy with short, fun, easy-to-read works such as It’s a Book, Chester, I Want My Hat Back, or Unicorn Thinks He’s Pretty Great
36. Paired with a challenging critical essay or author interview on the book
   - Try pairing an author’s book with an interview with them in Show Me a Story: Why Picture Books Matter
   - Give students a challenging critical essay on the book from The Lion and the Unicorn or The Horn Book (DeSena, 2015)
37. As a pair with nonfiction articles
   - Try pairing What There Is Before There Is Anything There: A Scary Story or The Dark with nonfiction on childhood fears/nightmares (Popova, 2014)
   - Try pairing My Teacher is a Monster with Tolstoy’s letters to Gandhi on why we hurt or an author interview on accepting the “other” (Popova, 2014)
   - Pair What Pet Should I Get with articles on the paradox of choice or FOMO (Konnikova, 2014)
38. As a way introduce reading comprehension strategies for STRUGGLING readers (Zimny, 2008; Cassady, 1998)
   - Use any picture book to teach struggling readers how to use strategies like visualizing, summarizing, clarifying, or questioning
39. To help students understand complex or abstract concepts (Bloem & Padak, 1996)
   - Teach Maslow’s hierarchy of needs with The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Meyerson, 2006)
   - Teach Id, Ego, and Superego with Cat in the Hat (Wright, 2015)
   - Introduce postcolonialism with Curious George (Cummins, 1997)
40. To spark dialogue about issues like racism, stereotypes, and democracy (Wolk, 2004)
   - Inspire discussion about important issues with Terrible Things, Smoky Night, The Other Side, The Long March, Stone Soup, Nelson Mandela, or Migrant
41. To humanize historical figures and events (Connor, 2003)
   - Help students connect emotionally with the past with books like The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo, Kids at Work, Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez, or Mama Miti
42. As a **jump-start to debate** or research (Matthews et al., 1999)
   - Discuss citizenship with *The Honest-to-Goodness Truth, Emily’s Art, & The Giving Tree* (Sebek, 2015)
   - Debate controversial issues with *In Our Mother’s House, Encounter, or Grandfather’s Journey*
43. To begin a discussion on **what “counts” as literacy** and get students to recognize their own out-of-school literacies
   - Read books with unusual formats, such as *It’s a Book, The Black Book of Colors, The Book with No Pictures*, or *Migrant*, to get students thinking about literacy in a new way.
44. To support **English Language Learners** (O’Loughlin, 2014)
   - Scaffold ELL learning with *Dave, the Potter* (Breiseth, 2015) or wordless picture books (Cassady, 1998)
45. For learning **grammar and mechanics** in a fun way (Schoch, 2011; Patrick, 2007)
   - Use the *Language Adventures* series by Rick Walton, the *World of Language* series by Ruth Heller, or Brian Cleary’s grammar picture book series, or *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really DO Make a Difference!*
46. To encourage **metacognition** and a **growth mindset**
   - Get rid of a fixed mindset with *The Dot, The Most Magnificent Thing*, or *Oh the Thinks You Can Think.*
47. To teach **academic language discourse and registers**
   - Choose a common story, like *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, and have them rewrite it to address the needs of different audiences or to imitate the style of different authors
48. To teach specific **academic vocabulary**
   - Choose 4-5 words from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) from your targeted picture book
49. To teach students how write **academic summaries**
   - Use this two-part lesson using biographical picture books to teach students to write academic summaries using textual evidence (Schoch, 2014)
50. To remind students of the **joy of reading!**
   - Grab a few of your favorites and share them with your students (Anderson, 2013). For more inspiration, check out the booklist below.

### General Reference Materials:


### References:

Booklist

A is for Africa by Ifeoma Onyefulu
A Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat by Emily Jenkins
A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms by Paul Janeczko
Akissi: Cat Invasion by Marguerite Abouet
A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams by Jennifer Fisher Bryant
A Rock is Lively by Dianna Hutts Aston
The Arrival by Sean Tan
Arrow to the Sun by Gerald McDermott
Abe Lincoln’s Dream by Lane Smith
And the Soldiers Sang by Patrick J. Lewis
And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson
Animalia by Graeme Base
A Sick Day for Amos McGee by Philip C. Stead
Bad Day at Riverbend by Chris Van Allsburg
Ballad by Blexbolex
Baloney by Jon Scieszka
Battle Bunny by Jon Scieszka
Black and White by David Macaulay
Bluebird by Bob Staake
Blueberry Girl by Neil Gaiman
Big Wolf and Little Wolf by Nadine Brun-Cosme
The Black Book of Colors by Menena Cottin
The Big Box by Toni Morrison
The Book with No Pictures by B. J. Novak
The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos by Deborah Heiligman
Brother Eagle, Sister Sky by Susan Jeffers
The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco
The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss
The Cats in Krasinski Square by Karen Hesse
Chester by Melanie Watt
Come Away from the Water, Shirley by John Burningham
Coming on Home Soon by Jacqueline Woodson
The Composer is Dead by Lemony Snicket
The Conquerors by David McKee
Coyote Columbus Story by Thomas King
The Dangerous Book for Boys by Conn Iggulden
The Dark by Lemony Snicket
The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish by Neil Gaiman
The Death of the Hat by Paul B. Janeczko
The Distant Talking Drum by Isaac Olaleye
Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference by Lynne Truss
El Deafo by Cece Bell
The Eleventh Hour by Graeme Base
Emily’s Art by Peter Catalanotto
Encounter by Jane Yolen
Exclamation Mark by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
Faithful Elephants by Yukio Tsuchiya
The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore by William Joyce
The Farmer and the Clown by Marla Frazee
Frederick by Leo Lionni
Forgive Me, I Meant to Do it by Gail Carson Levine
Fox’s Garden by Princesse Camcam
Flatsam by David Wiesner
Gaston by Kelly DiPucchio
The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein
Garibaldi’s Biscuits by Ralph Steadman
Go: A Kidd’s Guide to Graphic Design by Chip Kidd
Gone to School in India by Lisa Heydlauf
The Great Snake: Stories from the Amazon by Sean Taylor
Grandfather’s Journey by Allen Say
Harlem by Walter Dean Myers
The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers
Here Comes Our Bride!: An African Wedding Story by Ifeoma Onyefulu
Hidden: A Child’s Story of the Holocaust by Loic Dauvillier
Hidden Worlds: Looking through a Scientist's Microscope by Stephen Kramer
Home by Carson Ellis
House Held Up by Trees by Ted Kooser
How the Leopard Got His Claws by Chinua Achebe
The Honest-to-Goodness Truth by Patricia C. McKissack
Hug Me by Simona Ciraolo
If the World Were A Village by David J. Smith
The Incredible Book Eating Boy by Oliver Jeffers
In Our Mothers’ House by Patricia Polacco
It’s A Book by Lane Smith
I Want My Hat Back by Jon Klassen
Ish by Peter H. Reynolds
The Insomniacs by Karina Wolf
Jazz by Walter Dean Myers
Jamela’s Dress by Niki Daly
Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker by Patricia Hruby Powell
Kakapo Rescue: Saving the World’s Strangest Parrot by Sy Montgomery
Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor by Russell Freedman
The Lion and the Mouse by Jerry Pinkney
Lies and Other Tall Tales by Zora Neale Hurston
Little Bird by Germano Zullo
The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton
Looking Down by Steve Jenkins
The Lost Thing by Shaun Tan
The Man Who Walked Between the Towers by Mordecai Gerstein
The Most Magnificent Thing by Ashley Spires
Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya by Donna Jo Napoli
Maus by Art Spiegelman
The Memory String by Eve Bunting
Migrant by Maxine Trottier
Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker by Jose Manuel Mateo
Mr. Tiger Goes Wild by Peter Brown
Mr. Wuffles! by David Wiesner
My Name is Yoon by Helen Recorvits
My Father’s Arms Are a Boat by Stein Erik Lunde
The Mysteries of Harris Burdick by Chris Van Allsburg
My Teacher is a Monster! (No, I Am Not.) by Peter Brown
Nelson Mandela by Kadir Nelson
The New Way Things Work by David Macaulay
On a Beam of Light: A Story of Albert Einstein by Jennifer Berne
Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters by Oliver Jeffers
One Leaf Rides the Wind by Celeste Davidson Mannis
Oye, Celia! by Katie Sciruba
Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi
The Promise by Nicola Davies
Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole
The Rabbit Problem by Emily Gravett
Rad American Women A-Z by David Wiesner
The Red Tree by Shaun Tan
Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word, and Music by Matt Ottley
A River of Words by Jennifer Fisher Bryant
The Right Word: Raget and His Thesaurus by Jennifer Fisher Bryant
Rose Blanche by Roberto Innocenti
Rules of Summer by Sean Tan
The Scar by Charlotte Moundlic
Science Verse by Jon Scieszka
Sector 7 by David Wiesner
Seen Art? by Jon Scieszka
Show Way by Jacqueline Woodson
Sir Cumference and the First Round Table by Cindy Neuschwander
Slog’s Dad by David Almond
Smoky Night by Eve Bunting
Spoon by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
Steel Town by Jon Ath Winter
The Stinky Cheese Man by Jon Scieszka
Stories from the Billabong by James Vance Marshall
Sundiata by Will Eisner
Swamp Angels by Anne Isaacs
The Sweetest Fig by Chris Van Allsburg
Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco
Terrible Things by Eve Bunting
Tibet by Peter Sis
The Three Pigs by David Wiesner
Tuesday by David Wiesner
Two Bad Ants by Chris Allsburg
Unicorn Thinks He’s Pretty Great by Bob Shea
Varmints by Helen Ward
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
Virginia Wolf by Kyo Maclear
Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne
Wabi Sabi by Mark Reibstein
Walking with Henry: Based on the Life and Works of Henry David Thoreau by Thomas Locker
Willy’s Pictures by Anthony Browne
Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
What Pet Should I Get by Dr. Seuss
What there is Before There is Anything There: A Scary Story by Liniers
Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Book by Lauren Child
Willoughby & the Moon by Greg E. Foley
Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox
Woolvs in the Sitee by Margaret Wild
Wolves by Emily Gravett
Wolf Wanted by Ana Maria Machado
The Wolves in the Walls by Neil Gaiman
Zen Shorts by Jon J. Muth
Zero by Kathryn Otoshi
Zoom and ReZoom by Istvan Banyai
Picture Books in Middle School | Using picture books in your classroom can engage reluctant readers, help introduce a lesson, and build community. Check out tips & resources for using picture books in middle school from The Hanson Hallway at The Secondary English Coffee Shop. See more. Middle School Grammar.

Teaching short stories in your middle school ELA and high school English classroom is a great way to introduce and review literary terms. Here are four reasons why you should begin your year with short stories. #teachingshortstories #secondaryELA #highschoolEnglishlessonideas #shortstoryunit #shortstorylessonideas. Use Interactive Books To Bring Attention To Pictures. Have you tried interactive books in your classroom yet? Interactive books are like GOLD in my classroom!! If you aren't familiar with interactive books, these are books that have picture pieces that match the page in the book. The whole purpose is to focus in on the pictures. Making the text match the pictures is another great way to focus on the picture. One of the ways we do this in my classroom is through class scrapbooks. I take tons of pictures of my students engaged in different activities in the classroom. We then print them out and have the students write a sentence about the picture. The picture above is an example of the students writing about a science experiment that we did.