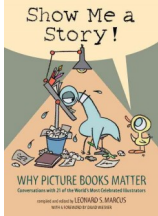


# Show Me a Story! (Why Picture Books Matter)



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Before they read words, children are reading pictures. In picture books, the illustrations work in concert with the text in a way that is unique among art forms.

In the forward to *Show Me a Story! Why Picture Books Matter: Conversations with 21 of the World's Most Celebrated Illustrators*, award-winning author and illustrator David Wiesner explains why we celebrate National Picture Book Month in November (actually, MCPL Children's Services Librarians celebrate them year-round! Here's more from Wiesner about why we love picturebooks?):

"Picture books tell stories in a visual language that is rich and multi-leveled, sophisticated in its workings despite its often deceptively simple appearance. It is through the book's images that a child first understands the world of the story — where it is set, when it takes place, whether it's familiar or new. They read the characters' emotions and interactions in facial expressions and body language. They may notice secondary pictorial storylines happening alongside the main action, like a secret for them to follow. And nowhere is visual humor explored more fully than in the picture book. — Such visual reading is as important to a child's development as reading written language is."

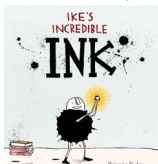


Mo Willems expertly conveys emotion in facial expressions and body language in the picture book *Knuffle Bunny*. Both children and parents recognize how emotionally distraught Trixie is over the loss of her stuffed rabbit — from the tear she wipes away to her body going limp and "boneless," to her flailing arms as her father attempts to carry her home.

And Jan Brett is famous for the wordless illustrations in the borders of her picture books, such as *The Mitten*, that show us, "like a secret," more of the story depicted in the main scenes.

Two of the three Caldecott Awards that David Wiesner has received from the American Library Association have been for the wordless picture books: *Tuesday* and *Flotsam*. While some wordless picture books are aimed at pre-readers, allowing them to follow a story without having to read text, some wordless picture books, such as *Flotsam*, are better suited to older children who have developed their ability to imagine and think creatively, or who may bring a wider background of knowledge to a story to help understand its meaning.

The contextual clues that pictures provide can aid a reader's ability to decipher written language. But picture books also help build a child's appreciation for and enjoyment of written language. In addition to all the reasons Wiesner notes above, we encourage parents and teachers to share picture books with children as read-alouds because picture books frequently feature words we don't use in our everyday conversations. Picture books help introduce children to new words and expand their vocabulary. Even in a short silly story like *Ol' Mama Squirrel* we find some delightful "S" words, such as: slink and scold, scrabbled, scamper and sprang.



To learn more about books which have received the Caldecott Award for most distinguished

Library Service to Children. You can also see our [Flickr account](#) for pictures of MCPL Children's Services staff with some of our favorite picture books. One of my recent favorites is a new book called *Ike's Incredible Ink*. Sometimes we enjoy picture books because they show us a piece of ourselves. *Ike's Incredible Ink* helps explain why I am just now posting this homage to picture books at the end of November, instead of at the beginning of the month, as I had intended. Perhaps it's one that other procrastinators may enjoy, too?

What are some of your favorite picture books? Old, or new, we'd love to hear from you!

Posted by Lisa C. on November 25, 2013

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