Extended Literacy Adventure: Stories Without Words

Reading and Creating Wordless Picture Books

Aventura: Cuentos y Libros Sin Palabras
Leyendo y haciendo libros sin palabras

Age Range: K + up  Group Size: flexible  Time Range: 45-90 min
Adventure Goals:
Our goal in every adventure is for children to have fun with books and reading! In this adventure kids will be introduced to a variety of wordless books; explore how wordless books can actually inspire readers to use plenty of words; and experiment with making wordless books of their own.

Measurable Objectives and Outcomes:

**Objective:** Participants will recognize wordless books and that the wordless format creates opportunities for oral language.

**Outcome:** Participants will explore and talk about a variety of wordless picture books, and create their own.

**Objective:** Introduce the three questions of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).

**Outcome:** Participants apply VTS questions to think and talk more deeply, in their most comfortable language(s), about a story’s images.

*Note: See [Supporting Research](#) for details on how these objectives and outcomes support the reading processes of K-3rd grade readers.

Adventure Outline:
Books without words create opportunities for oral language. This adventure includes:

1. **Hook: Reading Stories Without Words:** Practice “reading” an image
2. **Wordless Book Read-Aloud:** Read a wordless picture book together
3. **Book Browsing Time:** Browse wordless picture books and select some to read/take home
4. **Activity:** Making Our Story
   a) **Brainstorming Our Story:** Come up with characters and setting for our story
   b) **Drawing Our Story:** Draw individual pictures for our story
   c) **Reading Our Story:** Create and “read” our wordless picture book together
5. **Wrap Up: Review VTS questions; hand out blank books**
Supplies:

☐ Enough wordless picture books for all participants to have browsing choices to match a range of interests. (See Wordless Picture Book Suggestions in the Additional Resources.)

☐ An interesting image (for example, an illustration or visual art piece), large enough for the group to see and discuss. The image might also be projected. (See Image Suggestions in the Additional Resources.)

☐ Large flipchart or whiteboard for the leader to write on, and appropriate markers.

☐ Large poster, whiteboard or projection of the three VTS questions. (See Hook.)

☐ Paper and drawing supplies.

☐ The Three VTS Questions handouts.

☐ Simple blank books for participants to take home.

Considerations for Planning:

• Where will participants create their drawings?

• Would you rather have tables set up with supplies, and move to those when it’s drawing time?

• Will the group be seated at tables throughout, and you will hand out drawing supplies later on?
Adventure Plan

1. Hook/Getting Started: Reading Stories Without Words (10 min)

Say: Did you know you can read a book out loud — even if it has no words at all?
   We can practice with this picture.

Let’s Think About This! Show the group an image of visual art or a stand-alone illustration (project the image or otherwise make sure it’s large enough for the group to see details).

Invite discussion using the three open-ended VTS questions:
   1. What’s going on in this picture?
      ¿Qué está pasando en esta imagen?
   2. What do you see that makes you say that?
      ¿Qué ves que te hace decir eso?
   3. What else can you find?
      ¿Qué más puedes encontrar?

2. Reading Aloud: Sharing a Wordless Book (10 min)

Before Reading
Encourage the group to make predictions about the story by looking at cover.

While Reading
VTS questions: As you read the story, invite participants to help tell the story using the three VTS questions. (Use these techniques at your discretion so as not to interrupt the flow of the story.)

Paraphrase
You can paraphrase participant responses to increase the richness and accuracy of the language.
   - Welcome and invite responses in the language(s) or language mixture in which participants feel comfortable.
   - Try to enhance language without making participants feel corrected.
Examples:
- Correcting and enhancing word usage:
  “The cat is more bigger than the mouse.”
  “Yes, I see that, the cat certainly is bigger than the mouse. The mouse must think that cat is enormous!”
- Correcting facts:
  “The cat is smaller than the mouse.”
  “Yes, you’re noticing that the cat and mouse are different sizes! We can see that the cat is big, and the mouse is smaller than the cat.”

- Things to try: validating individual views; connecting observations; restating with rich vocabulary; and pointing out differences of opinion.

Transition

Say: Thanks for helping me tell that great story! This group has lots of interesting insights and ideas. Today we’re going to use all our imaginations to create our own wordless story together! Everybody will have a chance to make one of the pages. And at the end of today’s adventure, you’ll get a blank book to take home, so you can tell any story you like.

3. Book Browsing Time: Browse Wordless Books (10 min)

A child’s literacy development is dependent on the interconnection between reading and writing. Make time for books!

Say: To get some ideas, the next thing we’ll do is spend 10 minutes looking through these wordless picture books (and/or graphic novels). Everyone find at least one book you’d like to spend time with later. Keep an eye out for pictures and styles you like. Maybe you’ll find ideas for when you draw your picture for our book! (Example: Here’s a book that has illustrations I like. I might try to draw like this illustrator did, with dark outlines that I fill in with bright colors.)

Open Exploration
Move around the room to help participants find books they find interesting and understandable. Encourage participants to:
- Try out multiple books to figure out a book that will work for them.
- Read a little bit, silently or with a caregiver/companion.
- Pick a book or two to borrow!

Tip: Your modeling of interactive reading can encourage adults in the room to interact with kids when reading with them.

Tip: Try saying a caregiver message during the read aloud.

“Mentor texts” help beginning writers by providing examples.

Choice: Kids read more and develop lifelong reading habits and strategies when they can choose their own books.

Got more time? Try a Neighbor Share (in Variations) - participants pair up to share what they’ve found.
4a. Activity: Brainstorming Our Story (5-15 min)

Group decides on character and setting for story.

**Say:** We’re going to make our own wordless picture book, together. Everyone will get to draw one illustration for the book. Before we begin drawing, we’ll need to agree on some basic elements of our story: our main character and our setting.

**Say:** Who should our main character be?
Write the group’s ideas on your big flipchart or whiteboard. Help the group decide on a main character (or two).

- If they need a jumpstart, ask them to think about interesting characters they saw in the books they were just browsing, or throw out some example ideas (e.g. snake; detective; alien).

**Say:** How might we draw that character?
- Ask for suggestions from the group about how to draw the character. (E.g. just draw the head; without drawing the character, draw a scene the character is looking at, from their perspective; draw them from the back; show just their tail leaving the page.) Model drawing with some of these suggestions.

**If you have time:** Discuss setting in a similar way. (Look for suggestions in Variations.)

Mini-brainstorm, to help the participants get started.

**Say:** What are some ideas of what our character could be doing in our setting?

- (E.g. What could the Hippo be doing at the beach? Maybe she could build a sand castle. She could have a barbecue. She could go swimming and meet a stingray. Etc.)

4b. Drawing Our Story (10-30 min)

**Drawing the illustrations**

**Say:** Now we will take some time to draw our pages. Each person will draw one page showing our character doing something [in our setting, if a setting was chosen]. Our ideas might all be different, or some of them might be the same. Both ways will work, because lots of things can happen in our character’s adventure, and sometimes a book uses more than one page to show an event in a story. If you want, you can look at one of the books you liked for ideas of what or how to draw.
Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Invite participants to draw illustrations for the group book. Offer encouragement as needed. Let the group know when there are 5 minutes left in the drawing time.

4c. Activity Conclusion: Reading Our Story (20 min)

Say: Now we’re going to read our story and find out what happens!

Read the Story: Help the group form a row, holding up their illustrations. Maybe participants will want to look at one another’s drawings and make choices about story order; maybe the order can be random. Once the row is established, go down the line, having each illustrator “read” their illustration, saying what happens to the character(s).

Alternative: Have participants place their pictures on the floor or a long table in an order they like. The leader then “reads” the story with help from the group.

Practice New Skills: Help participants use the three VTS questions to engage with the story and practice their new skills! Refer to the questions written large on your flipchart (or whiteboard, etc.) to help everyone remember.

Name the story
Say: What should the title of our story be?
Write up suggestions on the whiteboard/flipchart and help the group make a decision about the title.

If there’s time
Did the group think the story made sense?
Now that they’ve heard the story, would they like to rearrange the illustrations and read it again in a different order?

Option for older groups: Volunteer “authors” could take turns directing the arrangement of the story.

5. Wrap-Up: Review and Take Home:

Say: Today we have blank books for you to take home if you’d like to create a whole wordless story yourself. Or maybe you’d like your friends or family to join you in creating a wordless picture book together! You can help them

Teaching Oracy:
Purposeful dialogue focused on the exploration of complex ideas extends student thinking.

“Title” in Spanish = el título

See Variations for additional ideas.

Tip:
Options for today’s drawings:
1) Participants take it home to be the first page in a new book.
2) Or, keep and display the drawings in your programming location so that others can enjoy the group book.
learn more about your story by teaching them the three open-ended questions of Visual Thinking Strategies. Do you remember what they are?

1. What's going on in this picture?
   ¿Qué está pasando en esta imagen?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
   ¿Qué ves que te hace decir eso?
3. What else can you find?
   ¿Qué más puedes encontrar?

Take Home:
- **Blank books**
- **VTS Three Questions handout**
- Today's drawing

Say: I hope everybody had fun today learning about wordless books and coming up with our own wordless story. Now, at the end of an adventure, I like to ask these three very important questions! I’ll give you a hint: the answer to these questions is always… ¡Que sí! Or Yes!

1. Are we happy to help you find good books to read? (Yes!)
   ¿Nos gusta ayudarte a encontrar buenos libros para leer? (¡Que sí!)
2. Do we love to talk about books with you? (Yes!)
   ¿Nos gusta conversar sobre los libros contigo? (¡Que sí!)
3. Is all reading good reading? (Yes!)
   ¿Toda lectura es buena lectura? (¡Que sí!)
Variations and Extended Learning

Consider some of these tips for engaging participants of various ages, cultures, languages and abilities.

Shortening the program

Do the Hook, Getting Started, and Book Browsing together as a program. Kids will leave the program with wordless books to borrow and read, and the wordless book template/handout to create their own at home.

Read all but the last few pages of your read-aloud book. Have the group close their eyes and think about how they would finish the story. Each participant can then draw their own ending.

See more ideas in Brainstorming and Sharing Our Story: Variations.

Book Browsing & Neighbor Share

Tip: Book browsing time is an opportunity for a low stress, less structured part of your activity. It can provide great opportunities for connecting with and listening to families.

Extended Learning:

- Try a wordless book neighbor share: After Book Browsing, gather the group back together and invite participants to share with another participant about one of the books they found interesting.

- Say: Take a minute to share with your neighbor or someone you know about one of the books you found interesting. You might want to tell them why they might want to read the book, and share a favorite picture, recipe or page. If you have trouble thinking of what to say you could try [read these prompts and write them so everyone can see]:

  - Name the book you looked at and liked.
    I looked at _______.

  - Why someone should want to read the book.
    You might like reading this book because _______.

  - Show and tell about your favorite part of the book.
    This is my favorite part of the book (so far) because _______.

Note on Sentence prompts: Sentence prompts give structure that supports young children, reluctant speakers, and those learning English to share their ideas. You can allow participants to alter and/or deviate from prompts depending on their need.
Brainstorming and Drawing Our Story: Variations

Discussion notes: Discussion on a topic that interests children provides authentic and meaningful language opportunities – the perfect environment for language acquisition! Remember to allow for plenty of “think time.” And, if it fits in, letting participants discuss in pairs before (or instead of) discussing with the whole group allows opportunities for deeper thinking and more communication opportunities.

“Pair sharing” is an opportunity to deepen children’s thinking through think time and partner discussion. Reporting back/sharing with the whole group allows for practice sharing prepared ideas in front of a larger group. Both help with language acquisition!

Short on time?

- **Character/setting shortcuts:** Instead of deciding on character and setting through group discussion, write some character and setting ideas on slips of paper to draw out of a hat.

Extended Learning

- **Discuss setting:**
  - **Say:** What should our setting be? (First, what’s a setting?) (Where the story takes place; where the story is set.)
  - Write the group’s ideas on your big flipchart or whiteboard. Help the group decide on a setting.
  - If they need a jumpstart, ask them to think about interesting settings they saw in the books they were just browsing, or throw out some example ideas (eg. Desert; grocery store; playground; the Moon).

- **Extensions after “reading” the story as a group:**
  - Did the group think the story made sense? Now that they’ve heard the story, would they like to
- Would the group like to read again, in additional languages?
- Volunteer “authors” could take turns directing the arrangement of the story.

- **Discuss elements beyond character and setting**: In addition to character and setting, your group could decide to consider and decide on a genre (e.g., adventure; mystery; romance; fantasy; etc.); the beginning and end of the story; one event that happens (e.g., Hippo takes a hot-air balloon trip); or even a basic plot for their story before drawing.

- **Drawing assignments**: Volunteers could be appointed specifically to draw certain parts of the book, such as the beginning and end illustrations.

### Working in small groups

#### Variations

- **Ways to make small groups**: You can ask participants if they would enjoy being grouped with family members, friends, or by taking into account languages that they have in common.

- **Each small group makes a book**: Instead of creating a single book encompassing the whole group, maybe each family, groups of families, or other combinations of participants in the room would like to create their own book together. Each group could then share their creations with everyone at the end.

- **Small group discussions of character and setting**: Instead of having one big discussion about character and setting, you could post the questions (Who is our character? What is our setting?) and then smaller/family groups could decide on their group’s story details in small-group discussion.
If some participants finish early

If some participants finish early while others are still working, you could suggest they:

- Draw an additional page;
- Draw decorative endpapers;
- Work on their author bio page (e.g., a self-portrait and some words/pictures describing their life);
- Think of and draw a new character for a new story they might like to continue later.

Passive program ideas

On a bulletin board or wall, display the three Visual Thinking Strategies questions and an image of a page from a wordless book. Post a sign inviting people to “read” the image and imagine the rest of the story. On a table next to the display, invite people to draw their own page for a collaborative wordless book and add it to the display, perhaps gathered in page protectors into a binder. Include VTS handouts (found in Resources) for people to take home. You could also choose a few of the Caregiver Messages (found below) to post in talk bubbles or posters above the display.
Vocabulary Extension Activities

Introducing new vocabulary provides many opportunities for extension activities. Here are a few you might try:

- Write the word on an index card or small poster so children see the word as well as hear the word.
- Say and use the word as many times as possible and reasonable during your introduction to the word and throughout the activity.
- Ask the children to say the word aloud. Turn to a partner and say the word. It’s important that they get used to pronouncing the word.
- Playful interactions with the word help reinforce comprehension. Ask children to make a face that looks like the word, act it out, draw it in the air, etc. If there is a antonym (word with opposite meaning) ask the children to act/draw this out as well.
- Using the word in context is the single best way for new word learning to solidify. Try to use the word throughout your activity. Encourage the students to try out using the word as well. Celebrate student’s attempts as a whole group.
- Invite the children and families to try using these words throughout the rest of their day when possible.

Beginning Reader Storytime Ideas

You could incorporate elements from this adventure into a storytime for beginning readers. For example, during read-alouds for this age, try asking the VTS questions about the cover or a particularly interesting page. Help your audience practice noticing. Reflect back what they say, increasing the richness and accuracy of the language. For the caregivers in attendance, include literacy-supporting messages (see Family Engagement: Messages for Caregivers).
Adventure Supports

Vocabulary

“Picture book” in Spanish = libro de cuentos ilustrado
“Wordless” in Spanish = sin palabras
“Wordless picture book” in Spanish = libro de cuentos ilustrado, sin palabras
“Main character” in Spanish = la protagonista (female) or el protagonista (male)
“Setting” in Spanish = el escenario
“Title” in Spanish = el título

VTS = Visual Thinking Strategies, a research-based method that uses works of art to stimulate critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy. The Whole Book Approach (WBA) is a storytime model incorporating the three open-ended questions of VTS. More information about VTS can be found in the Research Review and at the VTS website.

Introducing new vocabulary offers many opportunities for extension activities. See Variations and Extended Learning for a few activity options when introducing vocabulary.

Family Engagement

Family Engagement Suggestions

Encourage adult participants to support their young readers/writers by asking open-ended questions about their work.

You could write discussion prompts such as these for adult participants to see and use with their young writers:

• Tell me about...
• I noticed you added…
• What do you think you could add?
• How would you draw that?
• What words do you know that describe that?
• Can you picture it in your head?
Family Engagement: Messages for Caregivers

A book is a language playground
A book is a kind of language playground, where children and adults can talk and wonder together!

Choice builds engagement
Kids read more and develop lifelong reading habits and strategies when they are allowed to choose their own books.

Open-ended questions
Asking kids open-ended questions helps them develop critical thinking and communication skills. Open-ended questions are questions with no one right answer -- they can’t be answered with “yes” or “no” or “it’s green.” Because they require more thought, they encourage children to use more complex language.

Ask what kids think
Talking with your kids and asking them what they think about complex ideas helps them strengthen their thinking skills and vocabularies.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) help kids develop communication skills through visual literacy
Asking kids what’s going on in an image, what they see that makes them say that, and what else they see, are three simple questions that help to stimulate critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy.

Additional Resources

Blank book templates

- The Changing Phase blog provides links to directions for making many kinds of mini-books (little 6-page books made from one piece of paper).
- Illustrated directions for making a six-page mini-book from one piece of paper.
- Easy DIY blank books for kids.
- Three easy-to-make books from Early Learning Ideas.
- Tools from ReadWriteThink.org: The stapleless book creator from Readwritethink.org - You may want to use the creator to make a set of mini-books ahead of time.
  - The stapleless book planning sheet may help you organize your mini-book’s content.
Wordless Picture Book Suggestions

Some engaging wordless picture book titles (you may select others):

- **A Ball for Daisy/Una pelota para Daisy**, Christopher Raschka, 2011
- **Chalk**, Bill Thomson, 2010
- **Flashlight / Linterna mágica**, by Lizi Boyd, 2014
- **Flora and the Flamingo**, Molly Schaar Idle, 2014
- **Flotsam/Flotante**, David Wiesner, 2012
- **Imagine a Day**, Sarah L. Thomson & Rob Gonsalves, 2005
- **Journey**, Aaron Becker, 2015
- **The Lion and the Mouse**, Jerry Pinkney, 2010
- **Museum Trip** by Barbara Lehman, 2017
- **Sidewalk Flowers / Un camino de flores** by Arno Lawson, 2015
- **Spot, the Cat** by Henry Cole, 2016
- **Time Flies** by Eric Rohmann, 1997
- **Tuesday / Martes**, David Wiesner, 2008
- **Wave**, Suzy Lee, 2008

Some longer or graphic novel wordless titles (you may select others):

- **The Arrival / Emigrantes**, Shaun Tan, 2014
- **Belinda the Unbeatable**, Lee Nordling, 2017
- **FishFishFish**, Lee Nordling, 2015
- **Owly**, Andy Runton, 2004
- **Polo and Lily**, Regis Faller, 2004

Wordless picture book articles:

- **Sharing Wordless Picture Books (Reading Rockets Article)**
- **Video: Read a Book Without Words** - A librarian from Allen County Public Library demonstrates reading the wordless picture book Chalk interactively.
- **VTS video**: Teachers at Spokane Public Schools talk about how they use Visual Thinking Strategies to help kids think and talk about art and strengthen their writing skills.
Images: some resources

What’s Going On In This Picture? The Learning Network at the New York Times
Every week The Learning Network at the New York Times posts a new photograph (an image from the week’s news, with the caption stripped) along with the question “What’s going on in this picture?” Participants are invited to join the moderated conversation in the comments, and read what others have posted.

• 10 Intriguing Photographs to Teach Close Reading and Visual Thinking Skills - Ten of the most popular images from “What’s Going On in This Picture?”: images “that may make viewers say ‘huh?’ on first glance, but that spark enough curiosity to make them want to dig deeper.” Includes ideas from students and teachers who have engaged with these images for ways to use them, or images like them, to teach close reading and visual thinking skills.

• 40 Intriguing Photos from the same collection

The Kid Should See This: “Smart Videos for Curious Minds of All Ages”
Freeze an interesting image, or use the cover image, from one of the videos in this collection curated by a mom and her 7- and 10-year-old kids.

Integrating Technology and Literacy: Five Card Flickr Stories
This educator’s blog post describes a storytelling game called Five Card Story that encourages storytelling based on an assortment of pictures. The idea of the game is to combine digital images to spark storytelling ideas. The game lends itself to creative brainstorming using the three core questions of VTS.

Five Card Story also develops digital literacy by:

• Connecting digital images to storytelling; and

• By pointing players to images that are stored in the photo-sharing site Flickr under the Creative Commons License, helping players consider what images on the Internet they can legitimately use.

Pics4Learning: From the website: “Pics4Learning is a curated image library that is safe and free for education. Teachers and students can use the copyright-friendly photos and illustrations for classroom projects, websites, videos, portfolios, or any other projects in an educational setting.”

VTS and the Common Core Standards: a video showcasing practical use of Visual Thinking Strategies in the classroom.

VTS teaching guide: a four-page guide in using VTS with students, from the Castellani Art Museum.

VTS website: https://vtshome.org/
Author/Illustrator Grace Lin: a few printable examples of her art: http://www.gracelinbooks.com/inner.html

International Children’s Digital Library: Browse, search, display and/or print the covers and content of books for various ages. https://bit.ly/2NA8885

Handouts

- VTS handout for caregivers
- VTS handout for families and kids
Supporting Research

- **Library and Afterschool Program Models: Key Finding 1**: Libraries are experts at making reading fun.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 3**: Centering books and reading in programming improves children’s attitudes toward reading and books.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 7**: Wordless picture books can benefit struggling readers and English language learners.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 8**: Paired reading programs in libraries can help struggling readers.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 12**: Oral storytelling programs help children develop literacy skills and honor cultures with strong oral storytelling traditions.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 16**: Performing children’s written stories, especially in partnership with schools, can strengthen students’ connection with the library and its programs.
- **Library and Afterschool Program Models Key Finding 18**: The Whole Book Approach (WBA) uses Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) in storytime to support participants of all reading levels in developing verbal literacy through visual literacy.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing: Key Finding 5**: Access, choice and time reading and discussing engaging text increase reading achievement.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 6**: Interactive Read Alouds Increase Reading Engagement, Vocabulary and Comprehension.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 7**: Ensuring children are immersed in language and reading aloud helps develop reading readiness.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 11**: Teaching oracy is instrumental to better reading and writing.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 12**: Opportunities for Oral Language are Essential for Reading Development in the 2nd Language.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 14**: First language development is deeply interrelated with second language and cognitive development.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 17**: Translanguaging acknowledges and utilizes the bilingual child’s complex language repertoire as a resource.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 18**: To acquire language children need to be immersed in meaningful and authentic language opportunities.
- **Equity Key Finding 7**: Latino families from a range of backgrounds have a preference for activities that build and maintain cohesion within the family.
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