



Streamlined Literacy Adventure:

Stories Without Words

Reading and Creating Wordless Picture Books

Aventura de alfabetización: 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!
Additional participant goals for this Literacy Adventure:

- Encounter a variety of wordless books
- Explore how wordless books can actually inspire readers to use plenty of words
- Experiment with making wordless books of their own



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 Own Story:
 - [Brainstorming Our Story](#) Come up with characters and setting for our story
 - [Drawing Our Story](#) Draw individual pictures for our story
 - [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. Appropriate images may be found at:
 - [What's Going On In This Picture?](#)
 - [10 Intriguing Photographs to Teach Close Reading and Visual Thinking Skills](#)
 - [Pics4Learning](#)
 - For more image resources, see [Image Suggestions](#) in the [Variations](#).
- Large **flipchart or whiteboard** for the facilitator to write on, and appropriate markers.
- Large poster, whiteboard or projection of the [three VTS questions](#). (See [Hook](#) below.)
- Paper and drawing supplies.**
- The [Three VTS Questions handouts](#).
- [Simple blank books](#) for participants to take home. (For example, [6-page mini-books](#) or [simple stapled books](#). For more blank book links, see [Blank Books](#) in [Variations](#).)



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?



ICON KEY



KEY ELEMENT



TIP



KEY STRATEGY

Adventure Plan

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

Let's Think About This! Show the group an [image](#) of visual art or a stand-alone illustration.



TIP: Project the image or otherwise make sure it's large enough for the group to see details.

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.*

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)

"Wordless book" in Spanish = libro sin palabras

Before Reading

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

While Reading

VTS questions: As you read the story, invite participants to help tell the story using the three VTS questions.



TIP: Use VTS at your discretion so as not to interrupt the flow of the story.



TIP: Paraphrase participant responses to increase the richness and accuracy of the language. (E.g. "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!")



TIP: Welcome and invite responses in any languages.

Caregiver Literacy Message: "We use these three simple VTS questions because they help kids develop critical thinking and communication skills."

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: Wordless Books (5-10 min)



TIP: “Mentor texts” help beginning writers by providing examples.



TIP: Got more time? Let participants pair up to share what they've found.

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

Caregiver Literacy Message: “Kids read more and develop lifelong reading habits and strategies when they have the chance to choose their own books.”

Book Browsing Intro

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.)*

Book Browsing 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!

4a. Activity: Brainstorming Our Story (5-15 min)

Group decides on character and setting for story.

“Character” in Spanish = la/el protagonista
“Setting” in Spanish = el escenario



TIP: Short on time? Write some character and setting ideas on slips of paper to draw out of a hat.



TIP: Need to split a large group or divide into language groups? See Variations.

Caregiver Literacy Message: “Talking with your kids and asking them what they think about complex ideas helps them strengthen their thinking skills and vocabularies.”

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).



TIP: 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. Model drawing with some of these suggestions.
 - **Examples:** 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.

If you have time, discuss **setting** in a similar way.

Mini-brainstorm, to help the participants get started.

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

- **Examples:** 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.

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

Group draws illustrations for the story.

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].*

- **What else you could say:** *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.



TIP: If some participants finish early, you could suggest they draw an additional page. See Variations for more ideas.

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

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

Some Ways to Read the Story:

1. 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).
2. 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!



TIP: Refer to the questions written large on your flipchart (or whiteboard, etc.) to help everyone remember the questions.

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.

“Title” in Spanish = el título
 “Title of our story” in Spanish = el título de nuestra cuento

Activity Extenders (see [Variations and Extended Learning](#) for more ideas)

- 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?
- Volunteer “authors” could take turns directing the arrangement of the story. (Good for older groups)

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 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 Materials:

- [Blank Books](#)
- [VTS Three Questions handout](#)
- Today's drawing
 - Participants can take theirs home to be the first page in a new book.
 - Or, keep and display the drawings in your programming location so that others can enjoy the group book.



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!)



Adventure Variations and Extended Learning

Please see [Stories Without Words: Variations and Extended Learning](#) for a wide variety of research-supported tips for engaging participants of various ages, cultures, languages and abilities.

Tips include: Ways to shorten or extend the program; ways to work with pairs and with groups of different sizes, ages, and language mixes; additional activities; discussion ideas and sentence prompts; DIY stations and other passive program ideas; vocabulary extension activities; what to do if participants finish early; ideas for K-3 storytimes; and suggestions for family engagement.

For a more detailed adventure plan, please see [Stories Without Words: The Extended Version](#), which includes a complete script and more supporting information.



Vocabulary

Spanish Vocabulary

“Picture book” = *libro de cuentos ilustrado*

“Wordless” = *sin palabras*

“Wordless picture book” = *libro de cuentos ilustrado, sin palabras*

“Main character” = *la protagonista (female) or el protagonista (male)*

“Setting” = *el escenario*

“Title” = *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.



Additional Resources:

[Images resources](#): see [Variations](#)

[Blank Book](#) templates: see [Variations](#)



Wordless Picture Book Suggestions

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

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

Sharing wordless picture books:

- [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.



VTS Handouts: see Variations

- [VTS handout: streamlined](#)
- [VTS handout for caregivers](#)
- [VTS handout for families and kids](#)

Supporting Research

- **Library & Afterschool Program Models: Key Finding 1:** Libraries are experts at making reading fun.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 3:** Centering books & reading in programming improves children’s attitudes toward reading & 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 & 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

Credits



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