

Teaching Ideas for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Award Shortlist 2018

Title: A First Book of Animals

Author: Nicola Davies

Illustrator: Petr Horáček

Publisher: Walker, 2016

These notes have been written by the teachers at CLPE to provide schools with sessions which focus on the importance of illustration in building a narrative and supporting children's response. They build on our work supporting teachers to use picture books to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. The teaching notes show how picture books can be used in schools to enhance children's reading comprehension and composition of their own creative writing. We hope you find them useful

Before beginning this sequence:

This is a sequence of sessions aimed at Key Stage 1. In this rich and sumptuously produced text, Nicola Davies offers scientific observations about animals within a poetic text and uses a well-chosen blend of descriptive and technical vocabulary that both delights and astounds. Her poems demand to be read aloud, lifting the language and meaning off the page; each one celebrating the dazzling variety of wildlife with whom we share the planet. Petr Horáček's illustrations add depth and richness to this gorgeous book, exuding a sense of place and illustrating the individual character of each animal.

In preparation for exploring this text in the classroom, you will need to gather together a variety of non-fiction texts about animals from your book corner or school library, along with any other books illustrated by Petr Horáček. Children will also need access to a variety of art materials (cartridge paper, soft drawing pencils (2B+), oil pastels, watercolour paint, acrylic paint) for them to be able to explore the effects of different media for themselves. To provide you with background knowledge about how the illustration process for the book worked, it would be useful for you to watch the illustrator, Petr Horáček, talk about how he worked on the book on the Walker Books YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMIPojwzpo8>

You may want to collect some garden snails in preparation for the first session then involve children in keeping and caring for them in the classroom for the time you need them. Advice on keeping snails indoors can be found at: <https://snailsandslugs.wordpress.com/2010/10/04/terrarium/>

Session 1

Exploring the book as an object: How words and illustration work together

Explore the front cover of the book and its title *A First Book of Animals*. Look carefully at the front cover illustration; *do the children know what this animal is? What do they already know about this animal?* Note their ideas around a copy of the front cover on your working wall or in a shared journal. *What sort of book do they think this is? Why do they think this?*

Ask the children to predict what other animals they might find inside the book. *What other animals would they most like to see?* Now slip off the dustjacket to reveal the illustrations underneath. *Did any of the children predict these animals? Do they know what they are?* Ask the children how they think these illustrations were produced and note down their ideas. Reveal the illustrator's name on the dust jacket, Petr Horáček; have the children seen any other books in which his illustrations feature? Look at a selection of books written and illustrated by Petr Horáček, such as *A New House for Mouse*, *Blue Penguin* and *Elephant*. *Do the animals in this book look the same as in these books? What is different? Why do they think this is?*

Investigate the contents page, looking at the list of animals and comparing these with the children's predictions. *Which are they most interested in now?* Read and explore one page of interest to the children so that they can experience how the words and illustration work together on the page. *Is this like other information texts they have read before? Why or why not?* Compare the style of writing and illustration with other non-fiction texts you have in the reading area or school library.

Encourage the children to look carefully at the illustration on the chosen page. Although not a photograph, the illustrator has keenly observed each animal and depicted them in a true to life style, which differs significantly from the anthropomorphised animal characters in his fiction books. Note children's observations about the illustration, prompting with questions to draw out ideas if necessary; *how has the illustrator captured the creature? What features has he drawn out? How has he placed them on the page? What colours have been used?*

Explain to the children that they are going to be illustrators of some everyday animals they can easily closely observe; snails. Collect some common garden snails and place them in an environment that supports their needs. Read Nicola Davies' words that accompany Petr Horáček's illustration of a snail in *Snail Shells* on page 52, giving the chance for the children to closely observe his illustration on a large scale, using a visualiser or some kind of camera projection device. Look at the title: *Snail Shells*; Petr Horáček has drawn the shell, but has also drawn the snail out of the shell and a leaf pile or bush. *Why do you think he has chosen this composition? What has he picked up on in the words to shape his ideas for the illustration?* Explore words and phrases in the text such as *curly, spiral shell, protects the snail from drying out, allows a snail to roam*. Look at the effectiveness with which he has brought the words to life in the illustration, and shared the story of the text so that readers can see not only what the words show but also be invited to ask their own questions to extend their thinking around this animal. Ask the children what questions they have after reading the text and exploring the illustration. Make a note of these around a copy of this page of the text on your working wall or in a shared journal.

Now give time for the children to observe and draw the snails they see. Oil pastels would be a fantastic medium for this, allowing the children to work fairly fluidly and replicate some of the techniques used by Petr Horáček in merging and blending colours for the shell and body of the snail. They can also use pencils

to etch in finer details such as the eye spots and tentacles. Depending on children's prior experience of using oil pastels, you may want to model technique first and also draw alongside the children as they work, perhaps under the visualiser so they can see your movements and actions clearly.

After drawing, they might be inspired to write their own poetic lines about the snails, based on their observations. Support the children in drafting, refining and presenting these. The free verse style that Nicola Davies uses throughout the book is very freeing for children in writing their own lines. Focus on where lines could be broken to form verses and where more than one verse may be split on the page, going back to the original text and re-reading to support. A poem is like a snapshot of a moment or experience, using the most judicious language to describe. Help children to see where writing is too verbose and where it could be pared down to capture the essence of what they are trying to encapsulate for their reader. Encourage the children to read their writing aloud as they work, so they can hear the rhythms in their language as well as checking for sense and meaning. When they are happy with their compositions, give time for them to publish these using presentation handwriting or on a word processor and publish in an anthology alongside their illustrations that can be kept in the reading area and enjoyed again and again.

You could use this as an opportunity to look more closely at snails as part of the wider curriculum. In linked science sessions, you could also investigate the life cycle of a snail, its habits and activities, explore its habitat and its place in common food chains using high quality information texts and finding out the answers to some of the children's own questions about snails. This episode of the BBC's *Come Outside* series focusses specifically on snails and contains a wealth of information presented at an age-appropriate level: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJVzdl1jhOo&list=PLC95324D719678397>

Look at the final line of *Snail Shells*:

*But if you take one from your garden,
It will find its way back home.*

What does this tell us about the snails? Where do they really belong? Once the children have had the chance to closely observe the snails and their behaviour through drawing and discussion, release them back safely into their natural habitat outdoors. *Why is this the right thing for them?*

Session 2

Exploring scale

Start today's session with another animal that children can easily see in their everyday environment and relate to; ants. Use the contents page to find the poem *Ants* on page 20, sharing how this book doesn't necessarily need to be read cover to cover, the children can delve in as they wish.

Spend time closely observing the illustration on this page, before focussing on the accompanying text. Explore with the children the way the illustrator has composed the piece to show us the size of the ants in

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the scale of the forest. He has placed three ants firmly in the foreground, as if we have just come upon them by chance. Their features are very sharp and crisp in comparison to the blurrier, less defined forest and the trail of ants leading our eye into the undergrowth. He has carefully thought about the size and scale of the ants in relation to the leaves and has contrasted the darker ants against a lighter toned leaf, bringing our focus more sharply onto them. The rest of the illustration is filled with trees, but we only see the bottom of the trunks, exemplifying how small the *stream of ants* is in reality. Using different hues and tones of brown shows us how easily ants can hide in their natural environment and be quite difficult to spot. The children may not even spot the stream on first looking.

Read the accompanying text and look at what the illustrator has chosen to focus on in the words and how. The detail of the *legs whizzing, feelers touching, tasting* can be seen in the larger ants in the foreground, the *stream of ants flowing to the food and back to the nest* can be seen in the background. Also look at what the illustrator has chosen to leave to our imagination; he has not, for example shown the *tiny tunnels underground* or *the queen laying eggs*. If the children have no prior experience of ants and their tunnels to visualise this part of the poem, you may wish to extend the children's knowledge through some well-chosen video clips such as:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er-OnJCn1gg>

Look at a variety of spreads from the Big and Small section, with the children working in mixed groups on different spreads, encouraging them to explore and discuss how meaning is conveyed by the illustrator through the use of scale, such as *Song of the Biggest and the Smallest Bird* (page 8), where the relationship in size between the ostrich and hummingbird is exemplified by only seeing the huge head of the ostrich whereas the hummingbird is seen small and in full, with part of its setting also shown. Or *Blue Whale* (page 6), where the illustrator has used the diagonal plane to represent the whale at as large a scale as possible. Or *The Bumblebee Bat* (page 10), where the bat is presented at a smaller scale against an immense sky spread across the double page spread. Also in *Big Lions* (page 16), where the whole single spread is taken up with just the lion's sleeping head or *Elephants* (page 14), where the elephants creep across the double page spread.

When the children have had time to explore and discuss the illustrations, let them read and re-read the words, exploring which the illustrator has particularly drawn on and why. When they know the words well, allow time for the children to practise performing their poem in a group, thinking about how they could use their bodies to illustrate the animals and bring the words to life. Have them think carefully about how they will perform the words to enhance the meaning, just as the illustrator does with his drawings. Will they read parts in one voice? Two voices? In chorus? How will they vary their volume and tone? Will they include action or movements?

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When children have had the time to rehearse, allow time for them to showcase their work to each other, commenting on and refining their performances before presenting to another audience such as invited parents or other classes in the school.

Session 3

Creating life and movement in illustration

Throughout the text, Petr Horáček uses a variety of different techniques to bring the animals to life on the page, this is particularly evident in the *Animals in Action* section of the book. He chooses his poses carefully and uses varied compositions and artistic techniques to bring scenes to life and make the reader feel as if they are part of the action. Closely observe some of the spreads that focus on different ways of representing movement, for example how does he show the force and speed of the cheetah in *The Dinner That Got Away?* (page 84). Look at how its legs are tucked under its body and it is literally raised from the ground, as if it is flying towards its prey. Look at how its eyes are closed to protect it from the breeze whirling back into its face, whilst its head remains up and poised for action. Compare this with the jump of the antelope escaping off the page; *who looks faster?* You may also want to explore how this can be done using music. Hans Zimmer's incredible soundtrack to the BBC *Blue Planet* series has a composition entitled *Lions vs Giraffes*, accessible via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgDbva--VqY>

You could then compare this to the *Slow, Slow Sloth* (page 89), looking at the relaxed pose chosen for the sloth, who is literally '*hanging around*' as depicted in the words. Look at how loose his limbs are in comparison with the muscular action-packed movements of the cheetah. Look at how his eyes droop and his mouth drops into a relaxed pose. Compare this to the sharp focus of the cheetah. Listen to a comparative piece of music to feel how this could sound in comparison to *Lions vs Giraffes*. Hans Zimmer's *Sloth* from the *Blue Planet* soundtrack can be heard at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPhiQe4xQ8> Compare how the change of pace in the music matches the change in pace seen in the movement of the animals in the illustrations. You could also explore the impact of how Petr Horáček has portrayed the mass movement in *Arctic Tern* (page 86). *How does looking at this illustration make the children feel? What do they think it would be like to be watching this scene for real? What would they hear? See? How would they feel?* Compare this with the slow, silent glide of the *Barn Owl* (page 94). Look at how its scale on the page, its wide open wings and huge eyes show the juxtaposition of the owl's grace and power. *How would it feel to be here, watching? What would you hear, see and feel? How is it different from the previous spread?* You could go on to look at how other kinds of movement are portrayed, for example the flickering lights of the *Fireflies* (page 90). Look at how Petr Horáček has used his materials to make some lights look brighter than others, capturing the '*on-off!*' effect of the words on the page, and how he has used so many dots of bright yellow to show the amount of fireflies and impact of watching them.

Give groups the opportunity to discuss the concepts explored for themselves in other spreads such as *Monarch Butterflies* (page 96), *Koala Lullaby* (page 88), *Dancing Bees* (page 92), *Emperor Penguins* (page 76), *Kangaroo Birth* (page 78), *Wolves Howl* (page 50) in a gallery walk. Copy and pin up these spreads

around the room at differing intervals. Start the walk with small groups of children in front of each spread and give them chance to closely observe and discuss the illustrations, in particular, the use of colour and media before moving on to the next spread and doing the same until they have seen each spread in turn. Allow time for the children to reflect on what they have seen with the group as a whole, describing what they liked, what was effective and the feelings the illustrations evoked within them.

Come back together and read *All in the Bite* (page 100) without revealing the illustration to the children. Clarify any unknown vocabulary – *do they know what a viper is? What fangs are? Have they seen a snake attack prey before?* Read it again and ask them to describe the picture of the snake they can see in their head, how it is positioned, what movements it is making. Now reveal the illustration by Petr Horáček. *Does this come as a surprise? Why? Why do you think he has chosen to portray the still moment just before the viper attacks? What does this build or leave space for the reader to do or feel?*

Now read the words to *Jellyfish Go with the Flow* (page 56) without revealing the illustration, whilst sharing a video of jellyfish such as: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmfbP17xyqQ>. Re-read the words two or three times so the children can put them together with the images they see. Give time for them to discuss words that allow them to describe the movement and attributes of the jellyfish, then give each child a copy of the words printed out and an A3 sized piece of heavy cartridge paper. Provide a range of different materials such as different materials, drawing pencils (2B+), oil pastels, watercolours and acrylic paint and allow children to create their own illustrations to accompany Nicola Davies' words. Depending on children's prior experience of using these materials, you may want to model technique first and also illustrate alongside the children as they work, perhaps under the visualiser so they can see your movements and actions clearly.

When the children are finished, pin up all the illustrations around the room and allow children to respond to and discuss each other's ideas. *Are the illustrations all the same? Should they be?* Ensure children know that it is important that they all have a unique response which shows what the words mean to them and how they want to encapsulate them in images is as relevant as everyone else's ideas, including the illustrator himself. Add his illustration to the wall now and give time to discuss what is similar and different in all the different portrayals.

Session 4

Exploring use of media and colour

Across the collection, Petr Horáček uses colour and media in thoughtful and creative ways to add to the storytelling in the words and children's understanding of the animals and their habitats and the scientific processes that are explained throughout the text. Explore spreads such as *Birds of Paradise* (page 40), where he draws on the author's words to create a bright and colourful depiction of these beautiful birds placed against the vivid green background of their natural habitat. *What feelings do these colours evoke in the children?* Compare this to *Whale Shark* (page 22), where the use of a palette of deep blues almost

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camouflage the shark. Again, investigate the feeling associated with the use of colour – you could explore the idiom ‘feeling blue’ and look at how the colour not only directly references the habitat but also exemplifies the loneliness echoed in the words. *Why do you think he has chosen such a dark blue? Could this be linked to a potential threat – other fish, who may be preyed on by this animal may not see it coming?* Investigate the use of colour and pattern in a spread such as *Beetles* (page 26), exploring and investigating the lines and marks made to give each beetle its unique decoration and thinking about the fine detail the artist has created here. *How might he have done this? What materials might he have used?* Look at the contrasting use of pink and blue in *Flamingos Think Pink* (page 30). *How does the colour contrast make these flamboyant birds stand out as much as their scale and mass?* Compare these with a more muted deliberately restricted palette, such as in *Camels and their Humps* (page 38), where the artist has chosen to place the animal in white space with only a small sense of setting to draw attention to the features of the animal described in the text. Now look at one of the spreads that explores a scientific concept, such as *Parasites* (page 62). *How are the illustrations different on this page? What media has the illustrator used? What effect does this give? Why do you think he has chosen to illustrate these pages so differently from the other spreads?*

Give mixed groups the chance to discuss the use of colour for themselves across different poems in the collection with different uses of colour, such as; *The Swiftest Sailfish* (page 98), *Elephant* (page 14), *Giant Leaf Insect* and *Chameleon Song* (pages 32-33) *Tiger, Tiger, Orange Striped* (page 28), *Corals* (page 102) *The Nightingale and the Humpback Whale* (page 104), *Tool-Using Animals* (page 106). You can either do this by giving mixed groups an illustration each to work with or repeat the gallery walk approach from the previous session.

Now encourage children to pick an animal they are interested in and want to illustrate themselves. Give time for them to research the animal and collect photographs as frames of reference to compose their illustration on the page. Draw them back to what they have learnt so far in regards to close observation, use of scale and colour in gathering their ideas for their own piece. Encourage the children to think about what medium will allow them to best represent what they want to say about the animal in their illustration, referencing ideas from the initial discussion and gallery walk. Allow plenty of time and space for the children to explore and experiment with different materials, drawing pencils (2B+), oil pastels, watercolours, acrylics. What do the different media allow you to do? Draw and work alongside the children, exploring ideas and vocalising techniques, ideally under a visualiser so they can clearly see your movements and experimentations.

When they are happy, they may want to compose some words to accompany their illustration. Once again, help children to refine initial ideas to capture the essence of what they are trying to encapsulate for their reader. Encourage the children to read their writing aloud as they work, so they can hear the rhythms in their language as well as checking for sense and meaning. When they are happy with their compositions, give time for them to publish these for a wider audience.

Session 5

Engaging an emotional response through illustration: exploring perspective

In this session, support the children in finding out more about the author, Nicola Davies, and her motivations for writing about animals. Watch her talk about her love of animals on the video on her webpage: <http://www.nicola-davies.com/about.php>

Use some of the spreads to explore how Petr Horáček, as the illustrator, has clearly understood her passions and captured her love of animals and her desire to conserve them through the use of perspective in the spreads. Come back to *Big Lions* (page 16). Ask the children how Lions are usually portrayed in non-fiction texts. *What images do they associate with lions? What words or phrases might they use to describe them in the wild?* Now look at Petr Horáček's illustrations and read the words again; *what feeling do we get about lions from hearing and seeing this?* Look at how in *Giraffes* (page 12), the animal is looking directly at you, *what impact does this have on you as a reader?* In lots of the illustrations, creatures are huddled together, such as in *Little Lions* (page 17), *how does this make us feel about these animals?* In other illustrations, such as the cover art from *Panda Song* (page 42), the animals take on a relaxed pose, as if they are comfortable with you being there, giving you a glimpse into their private world, *how do you feel looking in?*

Many of the other spreads feature animals with their young, such as *First Day Out* (page 64), *Baby Gorilla* (page 68), *The Tender Crocodile* (page 80). *How does this make us feel about these predatory animals?*

Ask the children to select one of these poems that evokes particular feelings within them about the animal. Ask them to note their feelings about the animal around a copy of the poem, on post-it notes, exploring what the illustrator has done in the pictures or what words the author has used that evoke empathy for the animals. Come back together to talk about what the purpose of the book might be. *Is it just to learn about these animals or does it do more for us as readers? How have the words and pictures worked together to create this impact on us as readers?*

Allow lots of time for the children to explore the book independently following these sessions. They may want to re-read favourite poems or explore some of the poems they haven't read yet. They may continue to be inspired to create their own illustrations, allow time and space and access to art materials and reference photographs or videos to allow children to do this. You may want to get extra copies of the book to explore in group reading sessions or for interested children to borrow from the reading area or school library and read together.

This sequence of activities was designed by CLPE for the Greenaway shortlist. To access more free resources from CLPE, visit: www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources

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In depth teaching sequences for over 200 other high quality texts can be found at:

www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading

Further resources to support children's understanding of picturebooks for all ages and research on the importance of using picturebooks across the primary years can be found at:

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures>

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