

Teaching Ideas for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Award Shortlist 2019

Title: Ocean Meets Sky

Author: The Fan Brothers

Illustrator: The Fan Brothers

Publisher: Lincoln Children's Books (2018)

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:

Collect together a range of art materials that will allow the children to engage in the activities exploring illustration, for example: cartridge paper, sketching pencils 2B-4B, watercolour paints, marbling inks and a variety of brushes.

In order to engage fully with the layers of meaning and the details within the illustrations, it is advisable to ensure that you have access to a visualiser or similar device to enable you to share images from the text with the pupils on a large scale.

Suggested Activities:

Session 1: Investigating the messages we can read in an illustration

Start by sharing the book as an object with the children. You may wish to provide some questions to focus and develop their responses, for example; *what do the children see? What does it make them think? How does it make them feel? What does the title, in collaboration with the illustration make them think about this book? What kind of book do they expect it to be? What does the quality of the production suggest?* Children make pick up on the copper foil used for the lettering and the thickness of the dustjacket that gives the book a luxurious feel, an object to treasure. Think now about the title, *Ocean Meets Sky*. What can the children see in this title and the accompanying illustrations that gives them a suggestion of the story that lies ahead? The children may notice that the title is set within a compass; what might this tell us? They may comment on the large blue whale running through the compass and dominating the front cover; *what do you already know about this creature? How do you think it might fit within the story?* They may know the names of some of the ships and other vehicles on the front and back covers; *what do these suggest about the story themes or events? Does it remind them of anything they have read or seen before?* Scribe children's suggestions around a copy of the front cover or allow time for them to scribe their thoughts on post-it notes to stick around a copy of the cover.

Now remove the dustjacket to reveal the book cover underneath. What effect does this have on them? What do they see here? How does it compare with the dustjacket? What else does it make them think about the story? Add to their previous thoughts with any new ideas.

Turn to the front endpapers; *what can they see here? How do these illustrations differ from those on the dust jacket and book cover?* Look at the colour, style and use of line; *what does this make them think of?* Allow time for the children to look back at the cover art on the dustjacket; *what recurring images can they see?*

Now turn to the title page; *what can they see in this double page spread? Who do they think the figures are? How are they positioned in this space?* The children may comment on their size and place in the composition, how the vast empty space lies before them, the pale, muted colours that have been used; *What do we think it feels like to be there? What makes you think this? What is the small figure gesturing towards?* Look at how the lines of the page take us on the journey towards the page turn; the character's gaze and body position, the line of the shoreline, the birds flying in the direction of the page turn. Investigate the effect of the illustrators placing us behind the character's, so that they are facing away from us. *What does this do for us as a reader? What do we think the facial expressions of the characters look like? What makes us think this?* Give children time and pace to think and use their own faces to represent what they think these characters look like at this point of the narrative; *why did they choose this expression?*

Now read aloud the text on the first double page spread and give time and space for the children to explore the illustration; *what do we learn about the boy and his relationship with the sea and with his grandfather from this spread?* Here the children may look at the boy's facial expression, body position and gaze from his window out into the ocean, the props the illustrators have chosen to place in his relatively sparse room, his hat, the toy boat, that points out towards the ocean as if it wants to leap out and sail, flag flying in the breeze and the picture in the frame that very directly faces us. *Who do we think this is? What do we know about them from this photograph?* Now look at the words on the page; what is the effect of the first sentence? Re-read this so the children can hear this again. Although the sea is not personified as a proper noun, *how does this sentence show the equality and harmony of their relationship?* Now re-read the second sentence; *what does the effect of the word 'would' in this sentence have on us? Why do you think the illustrators have chosen a limited colour palette here, with the sepia tone of the browns and the only colour coming from the red used for the boy's t-shirt and the flag on the boat? What does this colour represent for them?* Talk with the children about what they think might happen next in the story, allowing them to write their predictions on post-it notes to stick around a copy of the illustration.

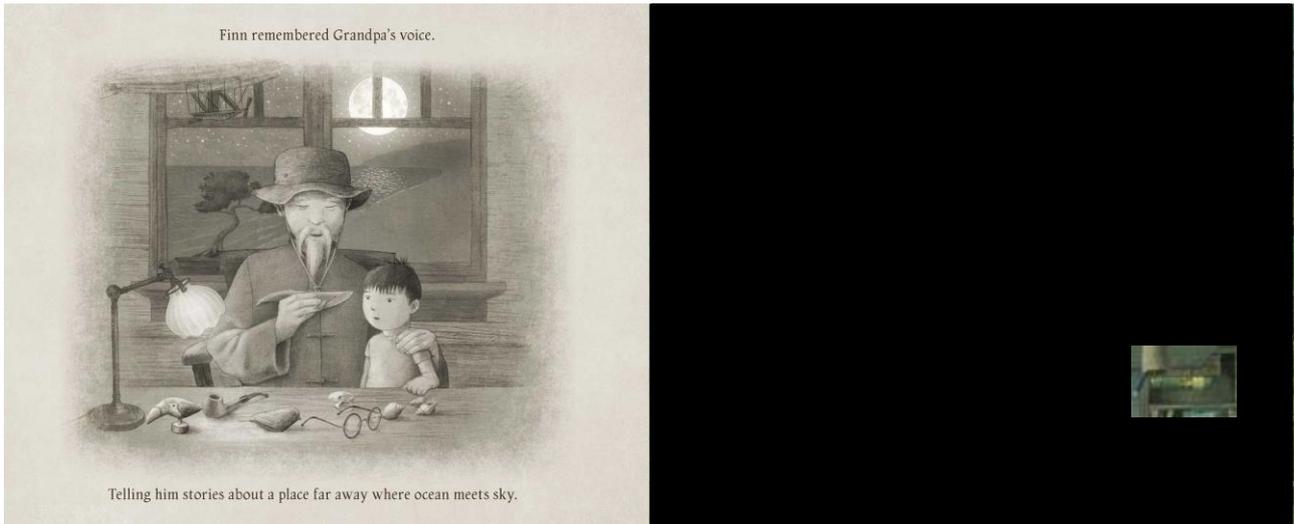
Session 2: Exploring detail in an illustration, colour, props and visual links

Re-read the first spread and on to, *'His grandfather would have been 90 years old today.'* What does the repetition of *would* and the choice of *remembered* suggest? How does this link with the illustration? The children may pick up the use of black and white in the left hand spread versus the colour in the right hand spread. They may look at the focal point of the empty chair in the centre of the spread, in front of the window where we can see on to the beach. *Where is this place? What do we notice about the positioning of*



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the objects across the two spreads? What do we know about his grandfather from the objects left behind? If there is too much to focus on at once and the children find it hard to focus in on the smaller details, provide them with a viewfinder to investigate parts of the illustration more closely. This is simply a piece of A4 card or paper – black or white if possible – with a small square or rectangle cut out, the children can then move this around the illustration to see if they can spot these smaller details and then talk about what they might say about the objects observed, e.g.



If you have explored other texts by the Fan Brothers, the children may notice the owl on the shelf from *The Night Gardener*, the jellyfish reminiscent of the front cover art of *The Thing about Jellyfish*, written by Ali Benjamin.

Now focus on the contrast between the indoors and the outdoors. *What do we notice about the use of colour? What is happening outside the window? How do we know this is the boy?* Explore the visual links with the props in the first spread, the hat, the red t-shirt. Look at how he is balanced in the frame against the bonsai in the left hand side of the window, *what do the boy and the tree have in common?*

Turn the page to zoom in on the boy and his actions, why do you think the illustrators chose to use cut away vignettes on the left hand side of the page, before panning out to a full single spread on the right? What effect does this have on us as a reader? Look at the choice of the word *honour* in the first sentence, what does that tell us about the boy's feelings towards his grandfather? Why do you think the boat needs to be '*fit for a long journey*'? What is the effect of the final sentence on us as readers?

Now turn the page and look at the impact of the page turn. *How does the illustrators' choice to share a close up, large vignette of the boy, fast asleep, cocooned by the inside shell of the boat make us feel about him?* Read the text on this page aloud; *why do they think the boat building was hard work?* Now move onto the second side of this spread and compare the restful sleep on the left hand side of the page to the alertness on the right hand side. Read the text aloud, before focussing back on the boy's facial expression.

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What do you think he is looking out at? What clues are there in the text on the page and in what has come before? Provide the children with appropriate art materials, soft drawing pencils, coloured pencils and watercolours and give them the time and space to visualise and draw what they think the boy sees. Give time for the children to plan and work up their ideas to a finished quality, then put these up around the room for the children to explore and reflect on. Does everyone's look the same? Did anyone choose the same view? Explore in more detail the effect that the work produced has on you as a reader; which images do you think are most effective? Why?

Now turn the page. Are they surprised by what they see? What visual links are there to things we have seen already that anticipated this scene? Compare the illustrators' choices to their own. *What were the similarities? What were the differences?* Now explore this spread in more detail. Read the text aloud; *what is the effect of making this sentence an exclamation? How does it make us feel about the journey? How does this compare to how the illustration makes you feel?* The children make talk about the size of the boat in relation to the expanse of sea and sky, the scale of the shapes in the clouds in relation to the boat, the visual links between the shapes in the clouds and things we have already seen in previous spreads, how the boat's handmade nature feels to us now it is on the wide open sea. *How do they think he feels, embarking on this journey? Why?* Note children's ideas around a copy of the illustration. Now turn the page and compare their ideas to how the boy feels on this page. *How are his feelings shared with us?* The children might focus in on the boy's facial expression and body position, made clear by the shift from a wide to a close-up perspective. They may talk about the change in tone in the colour palette, everything shifting to grey tones, the illustration on this page being slightly blurred around the edges. Then move to the second part of the spread and look at the contrast in colour and tone. They may look at how the moon shines behind the fish, the colour and size of the fish on the page, the playful bubbles in the foam around the fish. *What do they notice about the fish itself? Does it remind them of anything else they have seen in the book?* Allow them to revisit previous spreads to support their dialogue around this image.

Now turn the page again, look at the symmetry across the spread as the boy now faces the fish head on. *What do you think they are thinking as they face each other? How do you think the boy feels now?* The children may notice that the moon is now bathing the boat in light, *what does this make us think? How does it make us feel?* Read the text on these two pages aloud. What can you infer from what you have seen in the text and illustration? *Why do you think Finn asks about where ocean meets sky? Where have you heard this phrase before? Why do you think the voice the fish answered in 'made Finn's boat shake'? How do you think the fish knows the way to the place where ocean meets sky? What links can you make in the story up to this point?*

Session 3: investigating setting, props, scale and perspective and what these add to our understanding of the story

Re-read the story so far, and on until '*...where a hundred bookish birds were roosting.*' *What is the effect of this page turn? What does it make you think? How does it make you feel? What have the illustrators done to make you feel this way?* The children may explore the dramatic change in colour palette, from cool

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blues, to warm pinks, reds and yellows. Or how the vast expanse of sea and sky has now been filled by the *Library Islands* and their inhabitants. Look in detail at the things you can see on the page. *What links can you make with objects you have already seen?* Depending on the age and experience of the children, you may investigate the titles on the spines of the books, and whether any of the stories are familiar to them and whether there are certain themes within these books that link to the story here.

Read on and continue to link each new setting with objects previously seen in the story; the *island of giant shells*, *the sea of moon jellies dancing*. Look at the size and scale of the boy in comparison to the objects on the page and how we are positioned as the reader to view him – looking up to him climbing the shells where he appears high on the page, looking down on the scene with the jellyfish, aware that the huge fish is with him, leading the way. How do these choices make us think about the boy and his journey? Note children's observations around copies of the illustration.

Session 4: Exploring the interplay between words and pictures to develop deeper meanings

Re-read the story so far and on to the next spread. What is the effect of starting the first sentence with the word 'But'? and the next two sentences being questions? Compare the effect this has on us as readers with the choices made in the illustration. The children may comment on the shift from everything being so huge, and objects filling the page, them being placed once again in a wide expanse of sea, the objects in the sky being small and seeming far away, the boat and the fish also seeming so small on the page compared to the previous spread. What do all these things make us think? How do they make us feel? What do you think will happen now? Record children's predictions around a copy of the illustration. Now turn the page and explore, once again, the change in the colour palette, from cool blues to warmer pinks. Read aloud the text on the page, what is the effect of the ellipsis and of making this sentence a question on us as a reader? How does this marry with the choice to show the journey of the boat? Encourage the children to look closely at the position and direction of the boat as it rises. We clearly see the boy's reaction in the first image, but not in the second or third. How do you think he is feeling here? You could encourage the children to undertake a piece of writing in role, as Finn, at this point to record their thoughts and feelings.

Copy the next three wordless spreads for small groups to explore and discuss together. What are their thoughts and feelings about this part of the story? Why do you think The Fan Brothers chose to make this section of the text wordless? What effect does this have on us as readers? Encourage them to closely read the illustrations in this section, exploring techniques and devices seen so far in the text and the effect that the illustrators' choices have on us as readers. Allow the children time and space to discuss their ideas, annotating the spreads to share their thoughts and feelings. They made need access to extra copies of the text to re-read, and revisit pages, exploring links and choices made. Allow time for them to feedback as a larger group to compare and contrast their ideas. *What do they think this place is? Why do you think Finn's journey led him here? What is the significance of the golden fish being the one to guide him here?*

Session 5: How illustration can evoke an emotional response and empathy for a character

Re-read the book so far, and on to *'The golden fish swam towards the moon.'* What is the effect of this simple sentence on us as readers, when viewed alongside the illustration? Look at the palette change back to shades of grey and white; what might this suggest? Compare the three step journey of the fish towards the moon to the previous journey of the boat. What is similar? What is different? Do you think there is a significance to this?

Now look at the next spread, reading the text aloud. Revisit the illustration together. What has happened to the golden fish? What is the effect of not being able to see Finn's face in this spread? What does it force us to do as a reader? Look at the face in the moon; how do you think this face is feeling? Do you think Finn's expression will be similar or different? Why?

Turn to the next spread and talk about the significance of the page turn. What do we notice about Finn as he nears the end of his journey? The children may note how the palette is more colourful in this spread, how the multitude of fish, including the flying fish, surround him, so that he is not lonely, referencing back to the spread on his outward journey. How the breath of the moon is powering his journey – what does this tell us about the relationship between Finn and his grandfather and the influence he had on him? They may also note the position of the boat on the page, directing us to the page turn, but also almost suggesting that he is about to burst free from the book. Come back to the spread where we saw him framed alongside the bonsai tree, what might this suggest about his personal journey of discovery? Who do you think the 'voice calling to him from far away' belongs to? Read on to *"I made Grandpa's dumplings"*, were their predictions correct? Does this part of the story remind them of anything else they have read before? Some children may make links to Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, where Max returns from his boat journey in a fantastical world to find his supper waiting for him *'...and it was still hot.'*

Read to the end of the book. Why do you think the illustrators have chosen to return to the sepia palette, highlighting only the boy's red t-shirt? The children may be interested in this reflection from Terry Fan on their intentions for the book from their 'In Conversation' interview for *Publisher's Weekly* <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/76649-in-conversation-the-fan-brothers.html>

'We decided to explore our Asian heritage in this story, so there's the theme of connection and family. Family—and remembering and honoring relatives—is a big part of Asian culture.'

Ask the children if they are aware of the significance of the colour red in Asian culture, they may have knowledge of this if they have experienced celebrations of Chinese New Year. Why might the Fan Brothers have chosen red as a significant colour associated with Finn in the book?

Look at the impact of the final illustration where, once again, we see the face of the moon, but not of Finn. Provide the children with cartridge paper, soft pencils and coloured pencils and referencing the Fan Brothers' other illustrations give time and space for the children to visualise then draw their idea of what

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the boy's expression might look like at the end of the book. You could explore one of the Fan Brothers' original sketches, such as this one, taken from the same *Publisher's Weekly* interview:



Give time for the children to plan and work up their ideas to a finished quality, then put these up around the room for the children to explore and reflect on. *Does everyone's look the same? Did anyone choose the same expression? What influenced their choices?* Explore in more detail the effect that the work produced has on you as a reader; *which images do you think are most effective? Why?*

Re-read and discuss the text as a whole with the children, opening up discussion so that the children can share their likes and dislikes, any questions they are left with and share connections with other stories they have read or seen. *What do you think this story was really about? Does it remind you of anything else you have read?* Look at the final endpapers, with the publication details. Compare this with the initial endpapers. *Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to leave the story here? What do you think is the significance of the whale imagery that appears throughout the text?* You may wish to share this insight from the Fans in the *Publisher's Weekly* interview:

Terry: Lastly, it's about my love of drawing whales.

Eric: Let's talk about that.

Terry: Maybe it's because we lived by the ocean in Hawaii when we were little. Remember how we decorated our bedroom as an undersea world, with drawings of fish and whales on the walls?

Look at how family experiences have been a particular influence in this book, and how their love of drawing has continued from their childhood into a career.

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After reading you may wish to explore other texts illustrated by The Fan Brothers, looking at similarities and differences in their style across texts. Through looking at these afterwards, they can then come back to *Ocean Meets Sky* and explore where familiar motifs are represented from their other texts. You may also wish to read *Where the Wild Things Are* and discuss intertextual links if the children did not already notice these, such as the dinner waiting for him when he returned from his journey, the wordless section of the book, the fact they both go on a journey by boat as well as the direct comparisons in the shapes of Finn's and Max's boats, the significance of the moon in both texts.

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

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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