

## Teaching Ideas for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Award Shortlist 2019

**Title:** The Day War Came

**Author/illustrator:** Nicola Davies/Rebecca Cobb

**Publisher:** Walker (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:

In preparation for exploring this text in the classroom, children will need access to a variety of art materials such as cartridge paper, soft drawing pencils (2B+), coloured pencils, charcoal and soft pastels for them to be able to explore the effects of the media used in the illustrations in this text for themselves.

This is a sequence of sessions aimed at Upper Key Stage 2. Although at first glance this may appear to be a picture book for younger readers, the content and themes of the book require a higher degree of understanding and emotional maturity to engage with the content.

It is advisable to give careful consideration as to whether or not all members of your class have the emotional maturity to engage with this text in light of the sensitive nature of its focus. Teachers must also be mindful and sensitive to the prior experiences of their children and use this to inform the extent to which they deem it appropriate to explore the themes addressed.

This teaching sequence focusses on the power of the illustrations in the book and how they are used by the illustrator to make key points and to tell the story. The notes could be used to plan a sequence of work in English lessons but would equally lend themselves to PSHE lessons.

The origins of the book are also explored in the sequence and it is advised teachers read around this to support their delivery of the sessions. Supporting information can be found on the following websites:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/apr/28/the-day-the-war-came-poem-about-unaccompanied-child-refugees>
- <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2018/june/the-day-war-came-telling-the-story-of-child-refugees/>
- <https://nicola-davies.com/blog/?p=661>

You may also want to explore Rebecca Cobb's work prior to beginning this sequence, exploring her artistic style and the ways in which she creates her images as well as exploring the different titles that she has illustrated. Supporting resources can be found here:



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- <https://tjink.co.uk/interview-rebecca-cobb/>
- <http://www.rebeccacobb.co.uk/index.html>

## Session 1

Organise the children into small groups and begin by looking at the endpapers from the book which depict a series of empty chairs. Do not reveal the front cover or the title of the book as this will be discussed later in the sessions. Allow the children time to look at the illustration in depth and pose questions or thoughts about the images of the solitary chairs. Consider what an empty chair may symbolise or what associations they may have with this image. For example, an empty room awaiting an audience, someone may have just got up or left the seat, possibly death or the absence of someone or something. Consider also the colour used for the endpapers, *what significance could this colour choice have? Also, why do they think all the chairs are different? What could this suggest about the story that may lie ahead?* Ask the children to annotate copies of the endpapers with post-it notes and then develop the discussion starting with the children's ideas.

Following this, read aloud the dedication in the book and ask the children whether this changes or confirms their initial thoughts about the book. Consider: *Why do they think Nicola Davies has placed the dedication at the start of the book? What significance could the quote have? Why might it relate the story? What could the story be about?*

Reflect on what relevance the chair may have now that they have read this dedication, particularly what the solitary chair could signify in this context. For example, perhaps these chairs are waiting for children to arrive so that they can occupy them. Display the children's initial thoughts and responses to the illustration and dedication on a working wall so that the children can refer back to this in following sessions.

Now reveal to the children the title of the book and the title page, which depicts a single empty chair, smoke, an explosion and scattered pencils and drawings. Ask the class to reflect on both the image and the title of the book. *How does this compare with their initial predictions and expectations of the story?* Encourage the class to look carefully at this illustration and the layout of the image. For example, thinking about the way the title is depicted as a shadow from the chair, the scattered and broken pencils, the child-like drawings floating in the air, the cloud of smoke emerging from left to right suggesting it is about to spread across the rest of the page and submerge the chair in debris. *What do they predict will happen when they turn the page to begin the story?*

Subsequently, share with the class the first two images in the book of the family sitting around a dining table eating breakfast and the little girl at school, but omit the text that accompanies these pages initially. In their groups invite the children to consider:

- *What do they notice?*

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- *What aspects of the illustrations they like and are drawn to and why?*
- *What aspects of the illustrations they dislike and why?*
- *What puzzles them and what questions the illustrations prompt?*
- *What connections they make, for example can they connect the solitary chairs to this image? Why? Why not? Are the chairs the same ones in these illustrations? Do the chairs belong to this family? Or this group of children? Why might they be empty at the beginning of the book?*
- *What do the illustrations remind them of? They might reference previous experiences, other books, film, animation or art as part of their reflections.*
- *Why might the illustrator have chosen to set the opening scenes here? How might it be relevant to the story?*

Invite the class to note their discussions around the illustrations and then use these notes to inform a whole class conversation.

Compare and contrast the images of the little girl at home and at school with the preceding image from the title page. Ask the children to think about whether they think this comes before or after the image on the title page. *What tells them this?* For example, they may notice the helicopters in the background of the second image which alludes to the coming danger and destruction.

Explore what aspects of the illustrations indicate a sense of routine, stability and normality. Consider the colour choices in the images of the little girl in her life before the outbreak of war such as the bright blue sky, the bright clean washing, and bright white buildings and how this juxtaposes with the dark cloud spreading across the page they viewed earlier. The children may notice the way in which the family and the house are depicted such as the blooming flowers on the window sill, the contentment depicted on the baby's face, the family's smiles and relaxed body language. Reflect on how this makes the class feel. *What sense does this give you as a reader? How do you feel looking at these images? Are you worried about what might happen to these characters? Why?*

Read aloud the first two pages of the book up until 'I drew a bird' and allow the children time to respond to what they have heard. The children may make links to their own family and daily lives at this point in the story. Discuss what the choice of words and phrases suggest about the little girl's life before the war came.

Now read aloud 'Then, just after lunch, war came.' Consider the way in which the idea of war is introduced, as if it were just another ordinary everyday event that could happen. Reflect on why the author may have chosen to introduce the idea of war in this way and what impact this choice has on them as readers.

Reveal the front and back cover of the book (which creates a whole image when laid out flat) and invite the children to discuss what they notice and how this reinforces, varies or alters their earlier impressions of the book. Explore how it feels now to see the little girl in this image (the same image from the title page). Particularly the way in which the smoke and debris from the explosion are moving across the page as if they

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are chasing the little girl and how her posture, covering her ears with her hands, reinforces her vulnerability. The children may also be able to make further inferences about the image of the chairs that they have explored already.

## Session 2

Re-read the book from the beginning and on until *'then all smoke and fire and noise that I didn't understand.'*

Explore the image that accompanies this page together, considering why the cloud of smoke from the explosion is now on the reverse of the page compared to the title page. *Why has this switched? Does this mean that this is the journey she is now facing? Why is the little girl shown on her own? What do you notice about the chairs laying scattered on the ground? Also consider what happens to the density of the shading as the page moves deeper into the cloud of smoke. How do they think this effect has been created? What impact does it have to create an image that gets darker and darker? What does this suggest about the image we might see on the next page?*

Read aloud the words on the next page without revealing the illustration and ask the children to draw their own interpretation of what they have heard, drawing on Rebecca Cobb's style, using soft drawing pencils, coloured pencils, black pastel or charcoal. Re-read the text several times while the children visualise and then create their own images. You may want to precede this with allowing the children time to explore making darker and lighter marks on a page using the drawing materials that you have available so that they can experiment with the same techniques that Rebecca Cobb has used.

Once the children have created their own images share the spread from the book and look at what Rebecca Cobb chose to include, to exclude, and reflect on why they think she made these choices. *What effect does it have? Why has she chosen the perspective she chose? What effect does this have on us?* The children may notice the outline of the chairs that are barely visible through the smoke as well as the silhouettes of people in the darkness, as well as the girl being the only discernible child in the picture. *How does it make us think and feel?* They may also reflect on the way in which the text and illustrations support one another. For example, the blackness spreading across the page as the conflict turns from a 'spattering of hail' into something that 'brought the roof down'.

Re-read the opening of the book aloud until 'I was ragged, bloody, all alone' and explore the accompanying image. The children may notice the smashed plant pot and flowers that are the only visible link back to the original illustration in which we see the little girl's home, the colours and shape of the flowers mirroring the fire from the explosions across the city. Consider the contrast between the darkness of the previous spread with this much lighter spread, *what might this suggest?* Again, reflect on the fact the little girl is the only person seen in this spread, *why has the illustrator done this?*

## Session 3:

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Re-read the book from the beginning and on until *'It had taken possession of my heart.'*

Explore the illustrations and consider the different techniques used across the different pages such as the framing used to convey the sense of passing time and distance as the little girl escapes from the war. Consider with the children why they think Rebecca Cobb has used frames to split the spread into three long sections, a technique she has not used so far in this book. Reflect on the depiction of the contrast between the burning city and pink sky, the wide, empty fields, the endless road and the long lines of rain that span the whole bottom frame. *What does this all tell us as the reader?*

The children may also notice the amount of people travelling, but the absence of the little girl's family, the way in which the life-vests mirror the colour of the flames in the top image, the floating tiny red shoe and the one washed ashore separately, as well as the little girl's gesture of covering her mouth with her hand, *what do all these things tell us about the journey she has undertaken?* Some children may be able to link these images to real images that they have seen in the news. Sensitively guide and support their discussion of the themes and issues that this consideration may bring forth.

Now explore the contrast in the next double page spread where there is an absence of colour and the scale and perspective used in this scene differ from the previous images. In this scene we are looking on at a distance to a sprawling refugee camp on the outskirts of a densely populated city. Only a few people are visible in this image in contrast to the many people depicted travelling in the panels before. Consider how small the girl looks in this scene and why we cannot see her facial expression. Draw out through discussion how the children think the little girl feels having found herself alone in an unknown place far from everything and everyone she loved.

Re-read the text from the beginning and on until *'and turned away.'* Look closely at the images that accompany this moment in the story and consider the scenes portrayed. For example, considering if the streets depicted look familiar to the class. Consider the use of colour in each frame which intensifies as she walks away from the refugee camp, as well as the impact of the frames panning closer and closer to her. *What do you notice about the other people, where and how is their gaze directed, what does this make you think and feel? How do you think she thinks and feels? What do they notice about the people's facial expressions and body language, what do they notice about the scale of the little girl in the images and her body language?*

Explore together the responses of the children to the people in the images who shut their doors and turn away from the little girl. *Why do they think she is shut out, ignored and feared?* You may want to provide the children with thought bubble templates or a copy of the illustration upon which to draw thought bubbles and encourage the children to note down what they think the different characters featured in the illustrations are thinking in that moment, exploring the kinds of prejudices and fears that can exist in relation to refugees.

To support this discussion you may also wish to share the video 'I am a human' produced by The Red Cross which further explores the type of reaction that some refugees and asylum seekers are faced with and particularly the type of language used in certain parts of the media to describe the 'refugee crisis':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqMLmNqPulQ&feature=youtu.be>

Read aloud the next page until '*drawing birds*'. Compare the scene depicted in the classroom with the earlier image where we saw the little girl in her own classroom. *What is similar about the two scenes? What do the children notice about the position we have been placed in as a reader, looking in as the little girl is? What is the significance of the large window blocking the girl's entry into the classroom? What do they think is the significance of the illustrator not showing the central character's face at this point?*

Following this, ask the children to visualise the little girl's facial expression at this moment and then to sketch this replicating Rebecca Cobb's simple style, using soft pencils and coloured pencils. Provide fleshtone pencils for the children to use. Once the children have had time to sketch this, ask them to share and compare their own illustrations. *What different expressions have they drawn? Why do they think this is? How do they think she feels looking in at the classroom scene?*

Read aloud next page until '*war had got here too*'. Reflect on the accompanying illustration, contemplating on the scale of the little girl in comparison both to the teacher and to the children who are all placed above her on the page, *what might this suggest?* Consider also the way in which the teacher's arm is placed across her body, providing a barrier and the way she is holding the door so that it doesn't fully open as well as the expressions on the children's faces, *how does this all make us feel? How do we think the little girl feels now, how does this compare with her initial feelings at seeing the classroom?*

Re-read the book from the beginning and on until '*It seemed that war had taken all the world and all the people in it.*' Look at the spread of girl under the blanket and contemplate the darkness that engulfs her both literally and metaphorically. Consider why we can't see her face in this image as well, *what is this forcing us to do as the reader?* Also consider the scale of her enclosed in the blanket and the fact she is tightly squeezed into the corner of the room. *What do all these things make us think and feel?*

Ask the children to respond to what they have heard and seen in the book so far and the feelings that this may have stirred in them. Following this, allow the children to respond in a free writing session. The children may want to write in role as the little girl, they may want to write poetry, or a letter, or perhaps just a stream of consciousness.

#### Session 4

Reveal the next spread in the book in which the little boy brings a chair to the girl, but do not yet read the accompanying text. Ask the children to look carefully at this spread and to contrast it with the previous spread

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in which she was surrounded by darkness. *What do they notice about the use of light and shade in this spread?* For example, how the page moves from the darkness on the left to the light on the right. *What does the light of the open door behind the little boy suggest about how the story will culminate? What does his expression reveal to us about his actions? What can we tell by looking at her face again? How do all of these things make us think and feel?* Explore the fact that the page gutter still separates the little girl from the boy, *what might this make us think?*

Turn the page and explore the effect of the page turn on the children, the move from darkness to colour, the fact we now see the little girl's full facial expression, the move back to the simple background and scenery that we saw at the beginning of the book, the path paved for her by the chairs. Consider how this contrasts with the first path she had to take. *What does this suggest to us about the next part of her journey?*

Read the end of the story. Discuss the children's responses to the ending of the book and engage the children in book talk to explore their responses to the story. For example, considering the act of kindness shown by the boy in the story who brought the chair to the little girl. Share Nicola Davies reflections on the book: 'The message of *The Day War Came* is so simple, as simple as an empty chair: we need to be kind; we need to share. Because we could be next. Because every person matters. Because that's what makes us truly human.' Reflect on this idea and how it may resonate with the children.

## Session 5

Introduce the origins of the book and the campaign that Nicola Davies, Jackie Morris and Petr Horáček began in response to the UK Government's decision in 2016 not to give sanctuary to 3000 unaccompanied child refugees by reading aloud the information at the end of the story and allow the children to respond to what they have heard.

Re-read the book from the beginning and in its entirety and consider the contrast in the childlike innocence of Rebecca Cobb's style of illustration with the content of the images they have explored. Ask the children to consider the following: *What impression does this give the reader? Did you expect the story to unfold in this way based on the original illustrations? Why? Why not? Do you think the simple drawings were a good style choice for this particular story? How does this complement the nature of the story and the perspective we see the story through? What did you like and/or dislike about the illustrations? What questions do you have about them?*

Return to the children's initial discussions about the empty chairs and ask them to reflect on the meaning of these chairs now that they have heard about the origins of the book. Consider the different meanings an empty chair can take on and what meaning it has in the story so far, *what does the empty chair mean to them?*

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Share Nicola Davies' reflections on the symbolic nature of the empty chair and why this became the image attached to their campaign: '...an empty chair is a clear and powerful symbol, with many meanings: it is empty because there is no one left to sit in it; it is empty because those who might use it are shut out; or it is empty, only for the moment that it takes one of us to offer the spare chair at the table to someone who needs it, or to get up so that someone less able to stand, may rest.'

Show the collection of images that people created in response to the campaign and give the children time to reflect on the images: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2016/may/11/your-3000-chairs-for-child-refugees-in-pictures#img-23>

After this, allow the children the opportunity to make their own images in response to the story so far. They may wish to draw an empty chair or they may be inspired to create another image which has symbolism for them in relation to the themes and issues explored so far for example, a pair of child's shoes. They may wish to replicate the style of Rebecca Cobb's illustrations or they may wish to use other media, for example creating a sculpture.

Reflect on the overall message given to the reader at the end of the book; the notion that friendship, solidarity, hope and kindness can 'push the war back'. *What do they think about this idea?* In conjunction with this, look at the endpapers which show the once empty chairs filled with children reading, drawing and thinking. Compare and contrast this image with the initially empty chairs, *how does it make them feel to see the chairs occupied?*

### Beyond Session 5

The following sites can support research and extension of study relating to the refugee experience:

- [http://www.starnetwork.org.uk/index.php/refugees/facts\\_figures](http://www.starnetwork.org.uk/index.php/refugees/facts_figures)
- <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/refugees-welcome>
- <http://refugeeweek.org.uk/info-centre/educational-resources/classroom-resources>
- <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/Lesson-plans/Refugee-week-2016>
- <http://www.tracesproject.org/>
- [http://www.risc.org.uk/files/refugee\\_assembly.pdf](http://www.risc.org.uk/files/refugee_assembly.pdf)
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01k7c4q/clips>
- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/booklists/refugee-booklist>

The children might also be interested in exploring human and children's rights following engagement in the sessions. Some texts and resources you might use with the children are:

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- *We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures* by Amnesty International (Frances Lincoln)
- *My Little Book of Big Freedoms* by Chris Riddell and Amnesty International (Buster Books)
- *Dreams of Freedom* by Amnesty International (Frances Lincoln)
- *I Have the Right to Be a Child* by Alain Serres, illustrated by Aurélia Fronty, translated by Sarah Ardizzone (Phoenix Yard Books)
- <https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>
- <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/fiction-primary-school-teaching-human-rights-literature>
- <https://clpe.org.uk/library/booklists/human-rights-day-booklist>

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](http://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](http://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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