

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

**Title:** The Lost Words

**Author/Illustrator:** Robert Macfarlane/Jackie Morris

**Publisher:** Hamish Hamilton 2018

*These notes have been written by the teachers at CLPE to provide schools with sessions which focus on the importance of illustration in 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 children in Key Stage 2.

In preparation for exploring this text in the classroom, children will need access to a variety of art materials such as drawing pencils, watercolours and appropriate brushes in a range of sizes for broad brushstrokes down to fine detailing. It would also be wonderful to give the children access to gold paint, gold markers or colouring pencils as this is a predominant colour in the book.

It might be useful to have a visualiser or a projection device to be able to share the images from the text with the pupils on a large scale, to allow for close reading of the images.

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.thelostwords.org/>
- <http://www.jackiemorris.co.uk/blog/book-list/the-lost-words-a-spell-of-words-by-robert-macfarlane/>

Through their reading and exploration of the book, the children will encounter new language and vocabulary. You may therefore want to dedicate a section of a working wall to collecting examples of vocabulary used in the text that the children are less familiar with or that is new to them. They can look up the definitions and find synonyms that they do use. The children can also examine the way English has evolved over time and will keep evolving. This can provide a starting point to explore the morphology and etymology of certain words.

### Session 1

Start by sharing the book as an object with the children. Look at its size and scale and focus in on the front cover. Give groups an A3 copy of the front cover to discuss in pairs or mixed groups and ask them to annotate the image with their thoughts about it. You may wish to provide some questions to focus and develop their responses, for example, *what do the children see and how does it make them think and feel? What does the*

*title, in collaboration with the illustration make them think about this book? What about the size and scale of the publication? What kind of book do they expect it to be? What does the level of production suggest?*

Come back together as a class to feed back on the children's initial ideas and compare these with the thoughts of the illustrator, Jackie Morris, who when interviewed said that 'I do rather love the type. And the space. There's gold foil, and I'm hoping the texture and the weight of the book feels good in the hands. I love the size of it. You can judge a book by its cover. It takes teamwork to produce something beautiful.'  
<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2017/designing-the-lost-words/>

Ask the children to reflect on what they already know about gold. *What words would they associate with it? What does it make them think of or feel?*

Look again at the images used on the front cover, *do the children know what these birds are?* Introduce them as goldfinches if the children do not recognise these already and explore why these birds might have been chosen to feature. Consider the directionality and movement in the birds on the front cover, they are all in motion, flying towards an unknown destination, and consider this in contrast to the fragility of the dandelion head. *What does this make you think or feel?*

Explore what the author, Robert Macfarlane says about the choice: 'Gold is this book's main colour: Jackie has used gold-leaf throughout to give a magical sheen to her images - they have shades of medieval illuminated manuscripts, or of Russian icons. So it seemed right to have goldfinches - goldies, as they're affectionately known - shimmering across the front of the book.'

Then reflect on what the author and illustrator wanted to create: 'Jackie and I have always thought of *The Lost Words* not as a children's book but as 'a book for all ages' - or perhaps a book for children aged 3 to 100. We wanted it to be quite unlike any other book that exists: to catch at the beauty and wonder - but also the eeriness and otherness - of the natural world. So the cover needed somehow to speak of this strangeness, too, rather than trying to mimic an existing style. That's how we came to this final design: ghostly in the windspun seeds of the dandelion head, lush in the charm of goldfinches that flit across it.' Ask the children to reflect on whether or not they think they achieved the desired effect.

Now discuss in more detail, the title of the book, *The Lost Words*. Ask the children to discuss their responses to this title and how or why they think it might be connected to the image that they have explored together. Consider: *What could be 'lost' about the words? How could words become lost? How could we get words back if they have been lost? Do they think this is a fiction or non-fiction text? Why would it be important to create a book about words if they have become lost? How does the illustration support the meaning of the word lost?*

Read aloud the start of the introduction to the book which shares the reasoning behind the creation of the book, until '*fading away like water on stone.*' Ask the children to reflect on the notion that words have vanished from the language of children. *Do you think this is true or a fictional story? What do you notice*

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*about the phrase 'once upon a time'? What does this suggest? If it is true that words have disappeared, what do they think this means? How could this happen? What impact could this have on children?*

Read aloud the rest of the introduction to the children and discuss their responses to what they have heard.

Explain that the book is a collaboration between the illustrator Jackie Morris and the author Robert Macfarlane and that their collaboration grew out of the decision to amend the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* to remove certain words related to nature, because children no longer used these words frequently. Consider with the children how they feel about the idea that they are losing the language to describe the nature that exists around them.

Ask them to reflect on the types of words that might have replaced the words that were removed, such as words related to modern technology. *Why might these words be more common?* Reflect on the notion of the book as a 'spell book' which will conjure the language back into their vocabulary, *how do they think this will work? What could it mean to have to 'seek, find and speak'?* *What will the spells sound like? Would they like to read some?*

Reflect on the notion of a charm of goldfinches mentioned in the introduction, exploring the collective noun for this group of birds as well as the meaning of the word 'charm'. Think about the word charm and the predominance of gold, *what does all this suggest about the author's and illustrator's feelings about the subject matter?*

## Session 2

Share the double page spread which depicts the absence of magpies in the trees and landscape. Allow the pupils time to look at the illustration in depth and pose questions or thoughts about the image. You may want to support their discussion with some question prompts. For example, *what do the children notice about the colours used in the illustration? What mood or atmosphere is created by the use of these colours? Why do they think only the outline of the bird is shown in the image? What relevance could this have? Are you able to identify the bird it is from its outline? What do they notice about the details in the picture such as the letters? What do they notice the differently coloured letters spell out? Did the children know this word? Would they be able to recognise a magpie if they saw one? Why? Why not?*

Return to the idea that the book is a spell book and talk about the word 'spell' and its multiple meanings. *Does this page give you any more depth of meaning of what the creators mean by a spell book? Could this have multiple meanings here?*

Allow the children to go out into the environment and take their own photographs of trees, once these images have been printed or the children have sketched images based on their photograph, ask them to draw the silhouettes of the magpies over the top.



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Following this, use craft knives or scissors to carefully cut these out. They may also want to cut out any birds that happened to be in their photographs. Ask the children to reflect afterwards on the effect the physical act of cutting the shapes away had on them. *How does it make you feel about the birds? What does it feel like to have an absence of something?*

Whilst outside, you could also see if you can spot any magpies, if you can hear them calling to one another and to observe their behaviour. Otherwise, you can play the children the call of the magpie via the RSPB website: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/magpie/> when you return to the classroom.

Return to the book and read aloud the text – the 'spell' that accompanies this section. Re-read the spell again but this time ask the children to close their eyes and invite them to try to visualise the scene in their mind's eye. Ask the children to reflect on the spell that they have just heard. *Was this what they expected? What do they feel or think when they hear this? What do they notice about the spell? Have they seen text like this before? Are they aware of the nature of an acrostic? What aspect of the magpie does the spell capture? What does the spell suggest about the nature of magpies and their behaviour?* Think back to the recording you heard of the magpie and discuss the way in which the spell has captured the sounds and the ways in which they interact with each other and other birds.

Provide the children with an array of photographs of magpies in different positions and doing different things and ask the children to pick one that evokes a feeling within them and allow time and space for the children to complete close observational drawings of them. Model for the children how to sketch this out first lightly, until they are confident with the scale and proportion, then encourage the children to become more confident with their lines. Give children access to watercolour paints and practise mixing tones and shades to capture those of the magpie as Jackie Morris has done. Allow time for the children to finish their images of the magpies.

Following this, reveal the image of the magpie against the gold background in the book. Ask the children to respond to the image. Draw the children's attention to the colours used in the illustration if they haven't already talked about this, considering how Jackie Morris has captured the iridescent plumage of the magpie and the depth of colour in the feathers. Discuss the use of gold as a backdrop and the significance of using this throughout the book.

Looking at the illustration and text together ask the children to think about what the impact of this is. Reveal the second spread in which a pair of magpies are building their nest, now firmly back in the landscapes, no longer just an outline. *How does this compare to the initial image they explored? Which do they prefer and why?*

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Now give the children the opportunity to place their painted magpie images 'back' into the landscape from which they cut them out, layering up the images to create a whole scene of magpies filling the trees. Ask the children to reflect on how the book so far has helped them to 'seek, find and speak'.

As an extension to this session you may want to explore magpies further, considering the superstitions and myths that exist in British culture relating to the magpie, as well as facts and information about them, you may also want to explore why the collective noun for a group of the birds is a 'mischief of magpies' comparing this to the idea of a 'charm of goldfinches', adding the collective nouns to the language bank on your working wall.

### Session 3

Show the children the double page spread in which an adder is absent from the landscape. Ask the children to look closely at the image, considering as before the use of colour, the use of lines and shapes, the letters scattered across the page, what they spell and finally the empty white space between the ferns where the snake should be. Ask the children if any of them are familiar with adders, allow the children to talk about what they know and would like to know about this creature.

Read aloud the spell 'Adder' to the class. Read this aloud again and this time ask what images this spell conjures up in their minds. *Which choice of words or phrase helped them to see the scene in their mind's eye most easily?* For example, 'hank of rope' or 'diamond slides'. Ask the children to talk about what they imagine, clarifying, recasting and enriching their descriptions and drawing on those in the text. Clarify and explore the meanings of any language that the children are unfamiliar with and add any new language to your growing working wall.

Give the children appropriate and available art materials such as water colours, and then ask the children to sketch, paint or draw the scene they pictured. Re-read the spell again several times while the children draw their pictures. After they have completed their drawings the children could annotate the pictures with key vocabulary or phrases from the spell and their own ideas which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, 'adder glides' or 'adder hisses'.

Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them, *what made them so vivid or memorable? What effect is created by the author through the descriptions?* What did you pick up on most as an illustrator? Read aloud some of the children's annotations, discussing particularly effective words or phrases that either confirm or add meaning to the artwork. Give the children time to share their artwork with one another and to compare and contrast their images. Invite children to comment on what is similar and what is different about the way they have illustrated the adder and why they think this is. Display the children's artworks on the working wall.

Show the children the images of the adders in the book and discuss the impact of these illustration on the children's understanding and interpretation. Compare and contrast these images with the images that they

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have created. Ask the children to look closely at the images considering the choice of colours, shapes, lines, patterns, how much space the animal takes up on the page, the positioning of the animal's body, the impact of the single versus the double page spread and so on. Ask them to consider which techniques they think Jackie Morris has used and why she may have used this medium over another one.

You may want to extend this session by exploring adders further. Supporting resources can be found on the following website: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/reptiles/adder>

#### Session 4

Show the children the double page spread in which a kingfisher is missing from the water's edge, only a ripple left as an indication that the bird was ever there. Allow the children time to explore the image, discussing what they notice and generating any questions they have about the image and the bird.

Explain to the children that they are now going to have to perform the spell in order to conjure the kingfisher back into the picture. Put the children in smaller groups and give the different parts of the spell to the different groups, for example each group taking a line of the spell. Ask the children to prepare a performance reading of the spell or poem. The children can then work together to decide how to perform the text creatively. For example, considering:

- *Which parts might be read in unison?*
- *Which bits might be read with one voice/two voices?*
- *Which bits might be read loudly/softly/echoed?*
- *Might you include sound effects? Or actions?*

Following their group work the children can now perform the work as a whole class, putting their separate sections together. After this, ask the children what language was highlighted during the performance reading and consider together author intent and purpose in making the language choices that have been made. For example, the way in which the use of repeated kennings creates an impression of the kingfisher for the reader.

Re-read aloud the spell 'Kingfisher' and ask the children to respond to the text considering was there anything they liked, was there anything that they particularly disliked, was there anything that puzzled them and were there any patterns or any connections that they noticed. Again, clarify and explore the meanings of any language that the children are unfamiliar with and add any new language to your growing working wall.

Now reveal the conjured bird as depicted in the illustrations and look closely at the images, recording the children's observations. Draw attention to the details, such as the colours and the way in which the water is now rippled by the kingfisher emerging with a fish caught in its beak. Consider how the illustrations complement the spell, revealing to the reader the way in which the bird watches, waits and finally dives into the water to catch its prey.

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As you continue to investigate the book ensure that you give the children the opportunity to explore the other spells through performance reading, working in small groups, partners or even individually. As they read encourage the children to observe the words on the page and the illustrations, carefully discussing how the vocabulary and illustrations draw us into the beauty of the natural world and encourage us as the readers to empathise with and care for the creatures we meet.

Look at how precise choices of verbs, adjectives and other figurative language exemplify the beauty and power of nature (e.g. in *Bramble*) in the text and the illustration. Explore the composition, scale, perspective, lines and colours in the illustrations and the effect these have on us as readers. Give time and space for children to annotate copies of the illustrations with their thoughts.

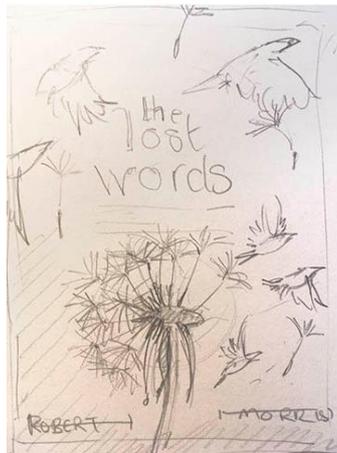
### Session 5 and beyond

Continue to explore the book together as a class and allow plenty of time for the group to read and discuss the charms as well as to consider the accompanying illustrations in the manner in which you have done so already. At this point you may also want to explore Jackie Morris' process and consider the way in which her connection to the outdoors and to nature influences and shapes her artwork. Supporting information can be found here:

- <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2017/designing-the-lost-words/>
- <http://www.jackiemorris.co.uk/paintinglilies.htm>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoneZadf5IQ>

Alongside this exploration, give the children time to make observational drawings and sketches of the birds, animals and plants that they can find in their local environment and also birds, animals or plants that interest them, which could be developed into final pieces of artwork for a final display or gallery based on your exploration of the book. You may want to allow additional time in cross-curricular lessons in order to complete this.

Encourage the children to look at Jackie Morris's own sketches, and how she works up from rough sketches to the finished pieces in the book. Look at this example of one of the preliminary sketches of the front cover:



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Encourage the children to engage in first-hand observation in their own gardens, the school grounds, parks or the local area. Provide the children with their own sketchbooks or help the children to create their own in the form of a simple handmade origami or zig-zag book. As the children sketch in the open ask them to consider: *What do we gain from making first hand observations? How do we capture things quickly in rough sketches and what details do we need to revisit when we come to the finished pieces? What might be difficult about finding some birds or animals? Which kinds of animals do we think we would find in the school outdoor environment or locally? What about plants? What kind of information would you want to collect when making notes in your field journals?* Support the children's ideas by looking at a range of examples, books and nature guides for children.

Provide opportunity for regular visits outside and support the children to record what they are finding out, helping them to record as much detail in their observations as possible. Using photographs to make their own drawings as their rough sketches are worked up to finished pieces of artwork will also draw the children's attention to detail, allowing their spoken and annotated descriptions to be more precise. Encourage children to take their own photographs but also source others for them to look at in case their own do not come out clearly. Ensure when you are outside that you are working in your own sketchbook, modelling the process of working in rough to make preparatory sketches and introducing descriptive vocabulary when discussing observations alongside children. Both the RSPB and the Woodland Trust have excellent resources that the children can use to support them to identify and label what they observe:

- RSPB: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-kids>
- The Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>

Following this, support the children to use their journal notes and sketches to feedback as a whole group. *What did you observe here? What did you hope to see? What have you found out about local wildlife? Is this what you expected? Why? Why not? Do they think you looked at the world more closely? Why? Why not? What did you observe that you hadn't notice before? What language have you acquired and used that you may not have done before? How did you seek, find and speak?*

Following this outdoors exploration, allow the children time to work these sketches up into finished pieces of artwork for display or to place into their own class book. The children can also write their own charms or spells celebrating the nature that they have investigated inspired by *The Lost Words*.

Allow the children to return to their observational sketches, research and final images to support their writing, considering what they would like to communicate about this bird, animal or plant to those viewing their artwork.

Give the children time to draft, edit and publish these poems and to consider how they might present them. Either based on the style and presentation in the book, or in another way that feels right based on the subject matter that they are writing about.

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You may also like to offer the children the opportunity to write a poem based on another child's artwork and vice versa. So that the children can consider how it feels to illustrate someone else's words or to write in response to someone's artwork. The children can then consider which experiences they preferred and also how the whole process supported their writing and composition.

You may also want to conduct an author/illustrator study of Jackie Morris, particularly considering how her interest in the natural world, her connection to animals and the landscape in which she lives influence and shapes her work. Supporting resources can be found here:

- <https://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists/jackie-morris-booklist>

A folk album has been created in response to the lost words featuring various musicians, you may want to explore this music and consider the way in which other artists have been inspired by the book:

<https://www.thelostwords.org/spell-songs/>

If you wanted to explore the book further beyond the sessions an 'explorer's guide' to *The Lost Words* containing a wide variety of activities can be found here: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

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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