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“...the inherent narrative power of the images can bridge cultural and linguistic barriers”

Silent Books Sweden

Literature project at public libraries and refugee centres

In 2012, IBBY Italy launched a project called: “Silent Books: from the world to Lampedusa and back”. The project focused on a collection of wordless picture books, on the understanding that the inherent narrative power of the images could bridge cultural and linguistic barriers. Everyone could share in the same story, no matter where they came from or what language they spoke.

IBBY Sweden launched a Swedish variant of the project in autumn 2015. The aim is to develop methods of working with wordless books in collaboration with public libraries and refugee centres. This book has been put together by Rose-Marie Lindfors from Skellefteå as a source of support and inspiration. She has experience of both Silent Books and language teaching for immigrants. Rose-Marie is a drama teacher who uses storytelling as a method of language development. A working group has also selected a range of wordless picture books that can work well in Sweden. The books have been sent to a number of municipalities where the handbook is being tried out. A report will be written about the experiences from these trials and this will be published on IBBY Sweden’s website.

IBBY Sweden hopes that the literature will help to promote communication and language development for everyone involved, and to bring a joy of life and of storytelling to children, young people and adults alike.

Ulla Hjorton, Chairperson IBBY Sweden

Cay Corneliuson, project manager Silent Books Sweden

Why Silent Books?

The refugee situation and the reception that prompted new solutions, providing something to look forward to, something to long for, and that sent ripples across other countries.



It all began in Lampedusa, an island in southern Italy where many refugees have been arriving after long and hazardous boat journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. The people coming here carried with them fear, anxiety, grief and longing. The situation created the conditions for a new means of refugee reception.

*unforgettable
meetings between
people, books and
stories”*

In Lampedusa, wordless books packed with pictures and stories were selected in a project called “Silent Books”, and it was so successful that it is now being spread all over the world via IBBY. They are reaching out to people from all cultures, irrespective of which language they speak.

The books have no text, but they are particularly rich in their visual language, a language that everyone has access to, and a language that makes it possible for us to dream and to imagine. Wordless books can tell simple and linear tales or complex stories, and they push the boundaries of artistic and creative expression.

Librarians, volunteers from around the world and the local islanders set up reading sessions that became unforgettable meetings between people, books and stories.

It soon became clear that the books and the stories gave comfort and security, an opportunity to disappear into a story and escape the difficulties of life for a moment. This was a place where people could share worlds and experiences with each other. The books provided a fast route into the new language, and sparked a desire to read.

” The wordless books generate an interest in exploring what a story can be

Encounters with Silent Books

A few reflections from Mariella Bertelli, librarian and storyteller, with experience from Lampedusa and coordinator of the IBBY International Silent Books Exhibit Tour in Canada:

The wordless books generate an interest in exploring what a story can be. I discovered that the stories can:

- tell a tale with a beginning, a middle and an end
- be playful and open the way for games, improvisation and guessing
- prompt discussions about diversity, differences and new perspectives
- throw up new words, sentences, associations
- pave the way for imaginative journeys
- inspire interpretations and discussions about art and illustrations

The quiet feeds the mind and creates presence – a tip on how you might get started:

Choose a book, sit together (2 people or 20), show each page – you don't need to say anything. Be open to what the participants say, let them say what they need to say.

You'll be surprised by the presence and concentration that can occur. When the book is finished, ask for a word that sums up the book.

Sometimes the session leaves behind a sense of peace and calm, while also being concrete and anchored in the experience.

Discover and discuss

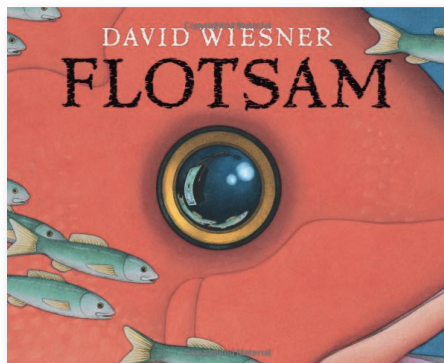
On the possibilities of wordless books.

Welcome on a journey of discovery through many different visual worlds. Books without words draw readers in via the pictures, and then we can start creating the stories. The books offer so many opportunities to be read.

“Look, the girl’s drawing a red door, and now she’s going through it, she’s stepping into a world full of life,” says a young woman who is encountering the book *Journey* for the first time. For her, the wordless books offer a way to find more routes into the new language. But this also offers an opportunity to dream and to imagine. “Imagination and dreaming give me strength as I wait to find out whether or not I can stay,” she says.

As language teachers, we need to be curious about and interested in the pictures and stories in the books. When practising the language, it is important to begin with something you share, with pictures that talk about a reality you can put into words together. Repeat the words, repeat the sentences, place the words in the contexts provided by the book.

Begin with the concrete and then progress to imagining and heading off on a new adventure. Encourage associations and personal creativity. Note: Be aware that the children may have had traumatic experiences, and think about how these can be handled when choosing a book!



The book Flotsam explores what is in and by the water. Everyone has different experiences and memories of water: sunny, fun, sad, painful. The story can be read in small or large groups. The book is a source of inspiration for personal creativity using various materials.

Questions to open with:

What can you see in the pictures?

Share your experiences of being on a beach.

Continue asking questions based on what you can see and put words to everything. Repeat.

When the film in the camera is developed, what happens?

This can prompt guesses, dreams, playfulness and associations.

Who might that be, sitting on the other shore?

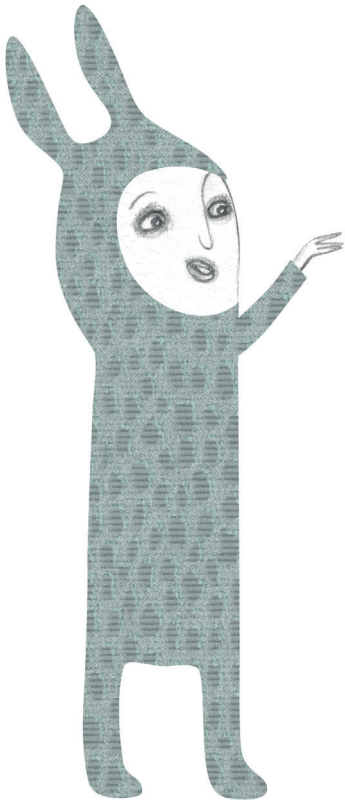
What’s happening now? Create brand new journeys, to new places in the world.

Imagine and dream

On the power of the imagination and how important it is to all of us

“During the long walk, when none of us knew what was on the other side of the mountain, when I was freezing cold and the food had gone. Then there were moments when I imagined I was on my way to a country where no bombs fall, where there is a place for me, where there is food for everyone, where I could live a good life, in a warm house, where my children could be born.”

Young person, seeking asylum in Sweden



“... moments when I imagined I was on my way to a country where no bombs fall...”

Our capacity to imagine and dream about a future means that we can picture what we don't yet know. This gives us the strength to cope, to take courage and to trust that everything can be better.

Everyone shares the capacity to imagine, and it grows out of our experiences, drawing nourishment from the reality of our lives.



“Our brains are designed to create and to take in stories”

Storytelling

A historical and traditional pastime

Storytelling is something we share with all of humankind across the globe.

Our brains are hard-wired to create and to take in stories.

It is our way of sharing experiences, preserving our history and explaining the world. Storytelling is therefore a successful way to meet across cultural boundaries, and to work on diversity and inclusion.

Everyone has a story to tell, everyone can take part.

Oral storytelling...

- creates common ground between people of all ages with different backgrounds, abilities or interests
- develops language, vocabulary and the ability to understand each other
- strengthens our ability to listen and to speak
- helps us to think and to remember
- creates motivation and a desire to read and write
- develops social skills, strengthens identity and self-esteem

Stories

Stories have always been part of us. It began with the oral tradition, dancing and singing. Then we created cave paintings and everything migrated onwards from generation to generation. Now we live in a world filled with books, images, films, theatre, dance, YouTube, Facebook and so on, and we continue the storytelling.

Stories give us answers about what it is to be human. We can share memories and experiences, create ideas about the societies we want to live in, things we dream about and long for.

Whether the stories are verbal or on the page, we use the words, the rhythm and our empathy to paint pictures of environments, people and events.

The storyteller or author makes it possible for the listener to create their own understanding, to play the film in their head.

The person doing the storytelling uses their own language to convey the story. The storyteller is the instrument of the story.

“Stories give us answers about what it is to be human”



Storytelling tips

Sometimes you need a warm-up to ease you into the books and the stories. Here are a few tips on various exercises that make it easier for the storytelling to get started. It is important for everyone to train up their ability to express themselves.

From four questions – storytelling together

(2 or more people)

Since no one knows what this story will be, you can openly and inquisitively put questions to each participant, making it possible for everyone to answer and so make their contribution to the story.

Start with:

- 1: One upon a time.... Who is the story going to be about?
Where did that person live, and with whom?
- 2: Every day.... What was done every day?
- 3: But one day..... What happened?
- 4: So today... What is going on today?

What was the story in the end? Retell it.



Let your imagination fly

The group sits in a circle, and the person who starts (no. 1) says to their neighbour (no. 2) "you don't know what I have in my pocket". The neighbour replies "Yes I do, you have a"

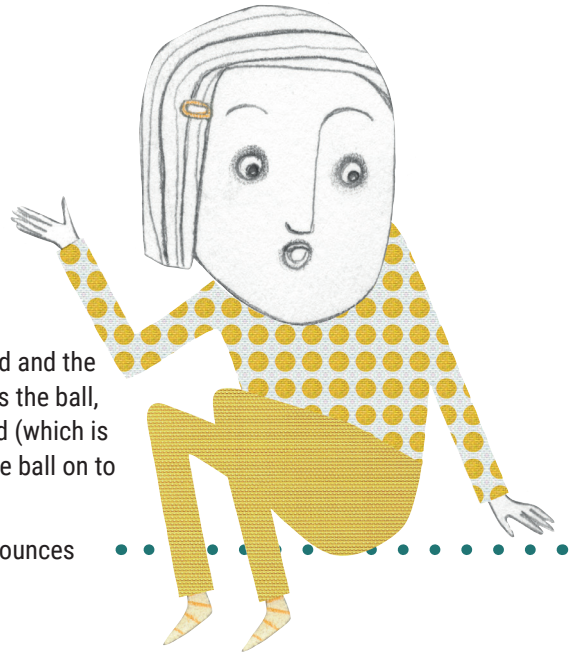
The answer is based on a theme, which in this case is "enormous things".

So the neighbour comes up with something enormous that would really not be found in anyone's pockets usually.

No. 1 then answers: "That's right, and I have it because....."

This leads to many fun stories that encourage joking and laughter.

The theme can easily be changed: Things that live in the sea. Things that can fly in the air. Things that are found in the forest, etc.



Associations

Whoever starts has a word and a ball. The word and the ball are thrown to the next person, who catches the ball, repeats the word and then chooses a new word (which is the first word they think of) and then throws the ball on to someone else, and so on.

This throws up many new words, as laughter bounces around the room.

The photo that tells a story

Lay the photos out on a table. Ask the participants to go around and look at the photos, and then choose one they like. Then everyone gets to talk about their own picture and listen to each other.

The exercise encourages people to express themselves, generating long stories based on their own experiences, places they have been to, and their own life story.

The object that tells a story

Fill a suitcase with various different objects that belong in different places and in different environments. Begin by naming them. Use the objects as triggers to create stories both from reality and the imagination.

1: Choose an object that reminds you of an incident from childhood, tell the story.

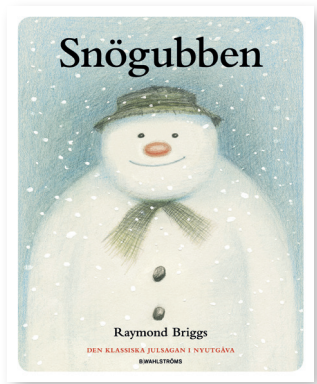
2: Created a fictional story in which the object plays a key role, tell the story.

3: Tell the group a memory from a house you once lived in. Choose an object that looks interesting and give it a meaning in your story that is based on your imagination.

Mix up fact and fantasy.

Good examples and practical tips

On what you can do with Silent Books



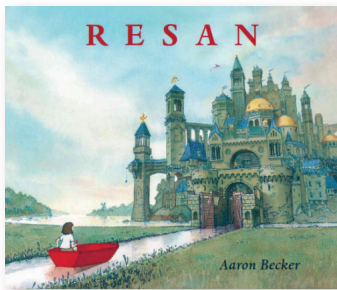
THE SNOWMAN

by Raymond Briggs

About a boy who makes a snowman that comes to life. One night the boy invites the Snowman to experience his life indoors, complete with TV, lights, stove and balloons. They even go out in the car. The Snowman then introduces the boy to the world outside, which is filled with snow, air and opportunities to fly.

- This can easily be linked to the migrants' own experiences of coming from one world and suddenly being invited into someone else's world. How can you understand the world you've ended up in?
- With whom can you share the experiences and questions that arise? Which of the worlds do you belong to?
- Start by talking together about what is happening in each picture.
- What are the participants' experiences of snow and winter?
- Talk about all the new things the Snowman discovers.
- Talk about all the new things the boy discovers.
- What happens at the end?
- Start from the beginning of the book, go from picture to picture and let the adults retell the story.
- Invite the participants to shout "Stop, I was there", and then the person who shouts gets to tell the story as if they were really there. Using their imagination, they explain what it was like being in that particular picture. Encourage them to use all their senses in the description. What could you hear?
- What could you feel in the air? What could you smell?
- What could you see, that isn't in the picture?
- What about taste? Balance?
- Give it plenty of time, let many voices be heard, let everyone get involved in fleshing out the story.

“Can lead to discussions about longing and dreams...”

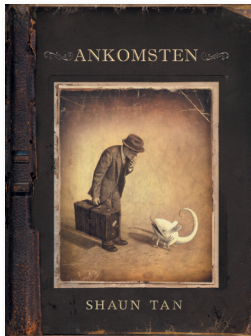


JOURNEY by Aaron Becker

About a lonely person who fights to be seen and listened to and then, with the help of a red crayon and some imagination, moves on, finding tricks to overcome difficulties, and who eventually finds a friend who has also discovered a magic crayon and a capacity for imagination.

A book about the most important thing we have, our imagination, which can take us far and carry us over life's hurdles. A hopeful tale of survival, of finding new paths when the old ones are closed.

- Read the book together. Recount what you can see together.
- Questions to ask:
- What does the child want, do you think?
- What happens when the red crayon is found?
- Who has the purple crayon?
- What happens next?
- Where does the journey take us?
- What can you see?
- What do you think about it?
- Populate the place, who lives there?
- What's happening? What does the child see?
- What do you think the child thinks about the bird in a cage?
- What happens next?
- How does it end?
- This can lead to discussions about longing and dreams, the power of the imagination, helping and receiving help. It creates opportunities for everyone to express themselves – verbally and through drama, images, music, dance, film and writing. Ask at the library about inspiring books on creativity.



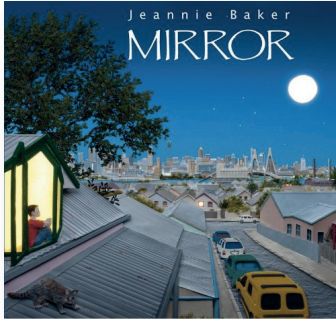
THE ARRIVAL by Shaun Tan

A man leaves his wife and child in a poor town, seeking something better in an unknown land on the other side of a large ocean. He soon finds himself in a confusing city of strange customs, remarkable animals, curious floating objects and unreadable languages.

With nothing but a suitcase and a handful of money, he must find a place to live, food to eat and some form of work. He is helped along the way by sympathetic strangers, each with their own unspoken narrative: stories of struggle and survival in a world of unfathomable violence, chaos and hope.

A book about the migration in the world, then, now and in the future. A story about the common problems that refugees have, whatever their nationality. It is about language, about being understood and understanding, about homesickness, poverty and separation from your family.

- As the story is being told, you have an opportunity to imagine what it might be like to live life as a stranger in a new land. It opens up a chance to explore what it would be like to come to a new country as a foreigner. What would you do to achieve a sense of belonging? Where would you find contexts to become part of?
- Tell the story the way you think it wants to be told.
- How does the story begin?
- Who is it about?
- What is happening?
- What do you think each person in the family thinks about it?
- What is the threat?
- Where does the father go in the boat?
- What is the boat journey like?
- Is there any sense of longing, loss, grief in the story?
- Where does he end up?
- What happens in the new town?
- What happens next?
- Who is the animal-like being who seeks a friendship with the man?
- What is it trying to tell us?
- The story is best told orally, or performed as theatre. Write texts to accompany the story, perhaps poetry or some other literary genre.
- Book tip: *Skriv om och om igen* (Write and re-write), Katarina Kuick and Ylva Karlsson.
- *Dramabok* (Drama book), Högglund/Fredin.



MIRROR by Jeannie Baker

Meet two families who live in very different worlds, one in Australia, one in Morocco. Their lives appear to be so very different, but there are many things that connect them.

The book reflects these differences and similarities. It shows that, no matter where we live in the world, most things in life are quite similar.

We need our family, we want to be loved and to belong. We need to sleep, eat, work, shop and help each other. We are all part of a big world where we can share experiences, memories, places and dreams.

“Create your own pictures of places you have lived”

- Enable the participants to talk about their own background, their everyday life, celebrations, school, relatives, friends and everything else that makes up our lives.
- What other worlds might we share? What other pictures of everyday life might we share?
- Create your own pictures of places you have lived.
- Say more on the theme “this is where I am in Sweden today” in pictures, text and oral stories.
- Find inspiration for your own pictorial creativity and collages at: www.nationalmuseum.se/sv/Skola/Arbeta-med-konsten-pa-egen-hand/
- [Materialtips-/](#)

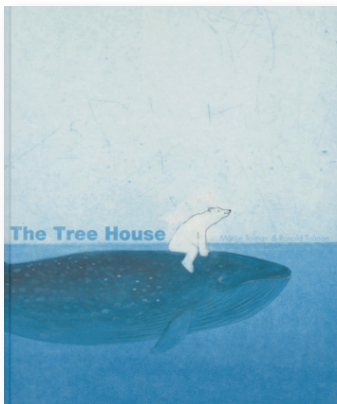




THE LION AND THE MOUSE

by Jerry Pinkney

Meet one of Aesop's famous fables, now exclusively in pictures, so that the old tale can once again be told orally. The little mouse is fleeing for its life and runs straight into the lion, but the lion chooses to let the mouse live. Later hunters capture the lion in a rope net. Now it's the mouse's turn to help the lion.



THE TREE HOUSE

by Marije & Ronald Tolman

The book carries us off to a big tree and a little house.

- What other fables and legends have been handed down as cultural treasures? Which ones do you know?
- How can you find more? What can you search for in books or on the internet?
- What are the stories trying to tell us? Are there any proverbs or sayings that describe the content of the story?
- Tell each other, create environments where you can easily share the old stories with each other.
- Book tip: *Aesop's Fables* by Piet Grobler/Beverley Naidoo.

- Begin by looking at the pictures.
- Talk together about who you can see in the picture.
- What time of year is it? What is the weather like?
- To give the words meaning, you can start creating a story "Once upon a time..." based on the words provided by the participants. The story will probably be about a bear who encounters a tree where there is a house... But what happens next?
- Explore every angle based on your senses: what can you see, hear, feel, smell and what tastes are there in the pictures? What encounters occur in the pictures, what happens then?

Book list Silent Books

PUBLISHED IN SWEDEN:

- Andersson, Lena:** Kanin-paket
(Rabén&Sjögren)
- Becker, Aaron:** Journey (ABC förlag)
- Briggs, Raymond:** The Snowman
(B. Wahlströms)
- Drews, Judith:** Stockholm – Vimmelboken
(Lilla Piratförlaget)
- Forslind, Ann:** Bäbis kär (Alfabeta)
- Tan, Shaun:** The Arrival (Kabusa)
- Tjong-Khing, Thé:** Where is the cake?
(En bok för alla)

PUBLISHED IN OTHER COUNTRIES:

- Baker, Jeannie:** Mirror (Australia)
- Banyai, Istvan:** Zoom (USA)
- Berner, Rotraut Susanne:** The Winter Book
- Handford, Martin:** Where's Waldo? (USA,
original UK)
- Pinkney, Jerry:** The Lion & the Mouse (USA)
- Tolman, Marije & Ronald:** The Tree House
(USA, original Netherlands)
- Wiesner, David:** Flotsam (USA)

IBBY Sweden

IBBY Sweden works to raise awareness of Swedish children's literature abroad and to introduce foreign children's literature into Sweden through IBBY's network in over 70 countries.

IBBY Sweden is open to EVERYONE who is interested in literature for children and young people and who wishes to support IBBY's core objectives: to let children's books build bridges between people and to ensure that children all over the world have access to books.

Our mission includes:

- promoting intercultural understanding through children's literature
- promoting children's access to literature of high literary and artistic quality
- promoting the publication and distribution of children's literature – particularly in developing countries
- promoting the education and training of those who work in children's literature
- promoting research and academic work in the field of children's literature

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The boundless possibilities of wordless books

This book was written by drama teacher Rose-Marie Lindfors for the Silent Books project in Sweden, based on a selection of wordless picture books chosen by IBBY Sweden. The aim is to provide inspiration and guidance for everyone who wants to try using Silent Books to prompt discussions with children and young people.

The idea originally comes from IBBY in Lampedusa, where there are many children and young people with different linguistic backgrounds fleeing from war and oppression. The handbook and the selection of books are being trialled in collaboration with public libraries and asylum centres in around 10 Swedish municipalities. Mariella Bertelli, a librarian and storyteller with experience from Lampedusa, describes Silent Books as follows:

The barrier-free nature of these wordless books – outside of language, culture, age and intellectual ability – adds a totally democratic element to the reading experience. This fundamental concept goes hand in hand with IBBY's mission that it is through children's books that we can create more tolerance and understanding among the people of the world.



Cay Corneliuson, project manager IBBY Sweden