

Light of Inspiration: Making the Most of a Picture Book

Feature

I enjoy sharing picture books with my students. Within the covers of these "everybody" books, we have found the best stories—funny, quirky, inspirational and thought-provoking ones that connect us all. I have brought them so many—from *Mango*, *Abuela*, and *Me* to *The Adventures of Beekle* to *We Found a Hat* and more!

So when the Caldecott winners are announced each year, I pay close attention—not just because I am an ALA member but because I know the potential of these books to engage my students.

When *Hello Lighthouse* was announced as the 2019 Caldecott Medal Winner, I flashed back immediately to the previous summer. On our vacation, my husband and I traveled to Maine, and one of our designated stops (one I insisted upon) was the Portland Head Light in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. I had a motive! I'd brought along a galley copy of *Hello Lighthouse*, and I intended to pose in front of it with the book.

The Book

Why this book? Besides appreciating the artwork of Sophie Blackall, I've found that lately, I've developed a love for the sea and the calm of ocean waves (even if I don't live near them). I've read many books with settings in Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard. To live near the water and hear the waves roll against the rocks, to look out and have an ocean view, would be a dream! The deep blues and rich reds in this book also captured my attention, but I was especially intrigued by the story of a lighthouse keeper who dutifully tends his post even in the face of loneliness. When I read *Hello Lighthouse*, I felt as if the lighthouse were calling out to me as well: appreciate, pay attention, and be ready!

I wanted to share this story with my third graders, but February came and went—with a book fair in the mix—and the moment never seemed right. As other librarians will understand, so many other more pressing tasks came up (research units, an author visit, etc.). I knew I would share it before the end of the year, so I put it on my backburner—that infamous list of must-do tasks all librarians have.

The Conference

In the blink of an eye, it was the middle of April, and I still had not shared the book. Thankfully, an experience at the Texas Library Association (TLA) Annual Conference helped me see exactly how to do so. Here, among authors, fellow librarians, and fabulous sessions, my idea of how I would share *Hello Lighthouse* began to take shape. I attended so many great presentations, but the one that made the biggest impression on me by far—and the one that sparked my idea—was a session entitled "Pairing Picture Books and Primary Sources" with librarian Tom Bober.

In this session, Bober spoke about pairing primary sources (such as photos and documents) with nonfiction picture books. As Bober shared his work, I could see the power of connecting picture books with sources of the time period pertaining to the book's subject. What a layer of understanding it added to the picture books he shared with his students! I had read some of the same picture books Bober recommended in his session, yet I hadn't thought to look for any photos or dig deeper. I had definitely missed something!

Just fifteen minutes into the session, I knew I would implement part of this new learning in my own library. I bought Bober's book *Elementary Educator's Guide to Primary Sources: Strategies for Teaching* that very day. In fact, I walked straight to the Libraries Unlimited booth after the session and did just that!

The Lesson

When I returned from the TLA conference, my plan—a very rudimentary one—began to take shape, and I carried out my lesson the next week even though I hadn't worked out every detail. First, I did a quick image search on our Britannica ImageQuest database for lighthouses. I found a relatively modern one to display on screen. I had this image ready to go.

Then, at the beginning of my third grade class one Friday afternoon, I modeled Bober's questioning, asking learners to share what they saw in the photograph. To bring in life connections, I asked: "Who has heard of a lighthouse?" "Have any of you ever seen one?" I shared my own story about visiting Maine that past summer. Reflecting on the database image, I asked: "What would it be like to live there?" Some said it would be peaceful to hear the waves all day, while others said they would miss being around other people. Interestingly, others asked if lighthouses had wi-fi!

Next, I introduced *Hello Lighthouse*, mentioning, of course, that it was the 2019 Caldecott winner. Students were as mesmerized by the colors and detailed illustrations as I was. In particular, they were fascinated by the circular interior shape of the lighthouse on the back cover of the book. Before reading the story, I displayed a Britannica

School database article about lighthouses. The facts in this resource showed students the purposes of lighthouses as well as their history and gave more information about lighthouse keepers.

Next came the read aloud, which I purposefully made quiet and strong. As I turned the pages, paused at the right page turns, and revealed the story, I saw that it had captured their attention. Blackall's narrative is well paced, detailing life in and around the keeper's day to day duties. Looking back now, I can see that sharing the database article and image had prepared my students for the book. Because I had shared this article, my students understood the importance of the lightkeeper's work.

The Results

I was pleased with how the lesson flowed, although I applied my learning from Tom Bober's session differently, using a fictional story rather than nonfiction. I tied in resources, creating wonder and establishing background knowledge for the picture book. I also showed students that there are many many ways to view a story. The database article, images, and my own personal anecdote all worked together to broaden their understanding.

My application of the learning from that TLA session was simple—nothing any school librarian couldn't have done. But, Bober's session has caused me to see picture books (and our digital resources) in a new way and will lead to further work in this area, especially as I continue to collaborate with teachers in their instruction. I have made it my goal to one day implement Bober's ideas as he did, and because I took one step towards the goal, achieving it is now more attainable.

I look back at the trip to the lighthouse in Maine fondly—not just for the scenic, peaceful visit but the way it served as inspiration for a library lesson this year. I especially appreciate how I could incorporate my own learning with my professional learning to the benefit of my students. My experience with this lesson showed me that the stories in our lives have a way of connecting, if we pay attention to them!

Works Cited

Bober, Tom. *Elementary Educator's Guide to Primary Sources: Strategies for Teaching*. Libraries Unlimited, 2018.

Blackall, Sophie. *Hello Lighthouse*. Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018.

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