

# 50 Ways to Use Picture Books in Secondary Classrooms

Sheree Springer  
University of Utah

As an **interest-enhancing hook** to engage readers in content-area topics (Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, & Brant, 2001) such as...

1. **Literature**
  - Enhance students' interests in ELA with *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*, *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams*, *The Book-Eating Boy*, *Exclamation Mark*, or *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*
2. **Science** (Bloem & Padak, 1996; Fresch & Harkins, 2009)
  - Get students excited with *Science Verse*, *The New Way Things Work*, or any book from the National Science Teachers Association's Outstanding Science Trade Books list
3. **Social studies** (Albright, 2002)
  - Pique students' curiosity with *On a Beam of Light*, *A Fine Dessert*, or any book from the National Council for the Social Studies' Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People list
4. **Math** (Hellwig, Monroe, & Jacobs, 2000 )
  - Build interest in math concepts with *Math Curse*, *Anno's Math Games*, *Sir Cumference and the First Round Table*, and *The Boy Who Loved Math*
5. To teach **literary analysis** and **close reading** ([Treasury Islands, 2012](#); [Wright, 2015](#); Martinez, Roser, & Harmon, 2009)
  - Use a complex picture book to analyze, such as *Woolvs in the Sitee* or *The Lost Thing*.
6. To teach differences in author's **style**, such as syntax, diction, and tone
  - Use a text set to teach students about style, such as this set all about wolves: *The Wolves in the Walls*, *Woolvs in the Sitee*, *Wolf Wanted*, *Virginia Wolf*, *Big Wolf and Little Wolf*, and *Wolves*
7. To teach **extended metaphor** and **allegory** (Wolk, 2004)
  - Choose an allegorical or metaphorical picture book to analyze with students, such as *The Book-Eating Boy*, *Zero*, *The Dot*, *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, *Fox*, or *Terrible Things*
8. To teach the **elements of comedy** and to introduce **satire** as genre (College Board, 2004; Maddox)
  - Share one of the following hilarious picture books and discuss the elements of comedy to lighten up your curriculum: *Chester*, *The Composer is Dead*, *It's a Book*, *Bad Day at Riverbend*, *Battle Bunny*, or *I Want My Hat Back*
9. To introduce **postmodernism** as a genre (Anstey, 2002; Goldstone, 2004; Pantaleo, 2014)
  - Choose a variety of postmodern books to discuss, such as *Black and White*, *The Three Pigs*, *Come Away From the Water*, *Shirley*, or *The Stinky Cheese Man*
10. To develop **background knowledge**
  - Use picture books as a quick way to build background knowledge before reading a more complex text. For example, before reading *Things Fall Apart*, share *A is For Africa*, *The Distant Talking Drum*, & *Here Comes Our Bride*, and *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (Taliaferro, 2009). Before reading *Anne Frank*, discuss *Faithful Elephants*, *Rose Blanche*, and *Hidden* (Matthews et al., 1999).
11. To teach **inference** (McGee & Tompkins, 1983; McCann, 2007)
  - Use complex, wordless picture books like *Tuesday*, *Flotsam*, *The Arrival*, *Mr. Wuffles*, *Rules of Summer*, *The Farmer and the Clown*, *Ballad*, *Zoom*, *ReZoom*, *Sector Seven*, *Tuesday*, and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.
12. To immerse students in various **cultures** and easily include diverse perspectives (Desai, 2011; Farris, 1995; Landt, 1996; [Mathis](#), 2002)
  - Help students experience the world with *If the World Were A Village*, *Tibet*, *Jamela's Dress*, *Going to School in India*, *Akkisi*, and *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit*.
13. To learn **poetic techniques** (Matthews et al., 1999)

- Pair picture books with poetry to introduce poetic terminology with *Fredrick* (Bennet, 2013), *One Leaf Rides the Wind: a Japanese Counting Book*, *Forgive Me, I Meant to Do it*, *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*, or *The Death of the Hat*
14. To analyze **characterization**
    - Analyze author's use of indirect and direct characterization with memorable characters in *My Name is Yoon*, *Chester*, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*, or *El Deafo*.
  15. As a **scaffold** to further understand longer stories
    - Begin with a picture book version of a complex story, such as *Sundiata* or *Beowulf*
  16. To learn about **oral tradition**, such as folk tales and fables
    - Teach students about oral tradition around the world with *Swamp Angels*, *The Lion and the Mouse*, *Stories from the Billabong*, *The Great Snake: Stories from the Amazon*, or *Fables*.
  17. Teach students to determine **tone** by analyzing the relationship between words and pictures
    - Give students a variety of picture books featuring symmetry, complementary, enhancement, counterpoint, or contradiction to analyze tone (Martinez, Roser, & Harmon, 2009).
  18. To discuss how authors make choices that affect **mood**
    - Choose books with distinct and varied moods, like *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, *My Father's Arms are a Boat*, and *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, in order to teach students about authorial intent.
  19. To learn **literary elements**, like simile, metaphor, allusion, or personification
    - Choose books with rich language, such as *The Promise*. Also see Susan Hall's *Using Picture Storybooks to Teach Literary Devices, Vol. 1-3* for a more detailed list of literary elements in picture books.
  20. **Comparing** different works that tell the same story (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014)
    - Choose books that students can compare and contrast, such as a variety of Cinderella stories from around the world.
  21. To **analyze quality** in written works (Galda et al., 2010; Bond, 2006)
    - Improve students' critical evaluation skills with any complex picture book
  22. To **evaluate the cultural authenticity** of international or multicultural picture books
    - Use international or multicultural books such as *Arrow to the Sun* and *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* and a checklist for cultural authenticity and/or racism ([NCCLR; Short, 2015](#)) to discuss this important topic.
  23. To **evaluate books for sexism** and discuss gender issues in literature ([Narahara, 1998](#))
    - Choose books that examine gender stereotypes, like *Princess Smartypants* or *The Dangerous Book for Boys*; and pair them with nonfiction articles on the Let Books Be Books movement and checklists evaluating sexism in children's literature ([Flood, 2014](#))
  24. To analyze **artistic techniques** and styles (Neal & Moore, 1991)
    - Teach students about various art styles with *The Little House* ([Clever, 2015](#)), *Seen Art?*, or *Willy's Pictures* (Serafini, 2015).
  25. To interpret **multiple meanings**
    - Pick books that are open to multiple interpretations, like *My Father's Arms are a Boat*, *Rules of Summer*, *Slog's Dad*, or *Black and White* ([Henry](#)).
  26. As an entire unit of study
    - Use a longer graphic novel, such as *The Arrival*, *Maus*, or *Persepolis*, to teach as an extended unit.
  27. To highlight **universal themes** (Neal and Moore 1991; Matthews et al., 1999; Mathis, 2002)
    - Picture books with a distinctive theme can help students learn to complete a thematic analysis: *The Heart and the Bottle*, *The Scar*, *The Sweetest Fig*, *My Name is Yoon*, *Home*, *Gaston*, *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*, *Hug Me*.
  28. As a **read-aloud** to practice listening skills (Albright, 2002; Giorgis 1999)
    - Choose an engaging text, such as *We Are the Ship*, to improve students' listening comprehension.
  29. To teach the **writing and publishing process** with student-created picture books (Conrad, 2005; Matthews et al., 1999; [Wright, 2015](#))
    - Have students create ABC books on a complex topic you've recently covered (Schoch, 2011)

- Pair with an elementary class to give students an authentic audience
- To teach **visual literacy** and **multimodal literacy** (Read and Smith 1982; Serafini, 2014)
    - Pantaleo (2015) recommends teaching students about color, point of view, framing, line, perspective, typography, and conventions with books such as *The Red Tree*, *Sidekicks*, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, or *Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word, and Music* ([Cairney, 2014](#)).
  - As a way to teach targeted **writing skills** (Beckman & Diamond, 1984; McElveen, 2001; Spandel & Culham, 1994)
    - See Dawn Little’s website or Ruth Culham’s book, *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits* for further ideas.
  - As a **model** or inspiration for their own writing (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Eti, [2013](#), Koutras & Kurstedt, 2000; [Bennett, 2013](#))
    - Choose a book like *House Held Up By Trees*, *The Memory String*, or *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* to jumpstart students’ writing process
  - To teach three types of **irony** (Matthews et al., 1999)
    - Teach students about verbal, situational, and dramatic irony with *Princess Smartypants*, *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *The Sweetest Fig*, or *Pink and Say*
  - To help students understand **point of view** (Neal & Moore, 1991; Matthews et al., 1999)
    - Try using a text set from multiple angles, like multiple versions of the *Three Little Pigs*, or a book from different perspectives, like *Voices in the Park*
  - As a topic for **argumentative writing**
    - Read *The Conquerors* and have students debate if books for children should be political ([NYT, 2014](#))
    - Read *In Our Mothers’ House* or *And Tango Makes Three*, as well as some nonfiction articles on censorship in Utah ([Rogers, 2012](#); [Newlin, 2013](#)) before writing an argumentative essay on censorship.
    - Read *The Wolves in the Walls* or *Woolvs in the Sitee* and have students debate if books for children and teens should be dark ([Li, 2014](#); [Gurdon, 2011](#))
  - For **author studies** (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1997; [Schoch, 2011](#))
    - Have students choose a picture book author to learn about and analyze, such as Emily Gravett, Lane Smith, John Scieszka, Jorg Muller, Eve Bunting, Sean Tan, Neal Gaiman, or Anthony Browne
  - To **motivate** reluctant readers and build classroom community ([Anderson, 2013](#); [Ripp, 2015](#))
    - Read an inspirational story like *Thank You, Mr. Faulkner* to motivate students’ reading
    - Build students’ self-efficacy and enthusiasm for literacy with short, fun, easy-to-read works such as *It’s a Book*, *Chester, I Want My Hat Back*, or *Unicorn Thinks He’s Pretty Great*
  - Paired with a challenging **critical essay** or author interview on the book
    - Try pairing an author’s book with an interview with them in *Show Me a Story: Why Picture Books Matter*
    - Give students a challenging critical essay on the book from *The Lion and the Unicorn* or *The Horn Book* ([DeSena, 2015](#))
  - As a pair with **nonfiction** articles
    - Try pairing *What There Is Before There Is Anything There: A Scary Story* or *The Dark* with nonfiction on childhood fears/ nightmares ([Popova, 2014](#))
    - Try pairing *My Teacher is a Monster* with Tolstoy’s letters to Gandhi on why we hurt or an author interview on accepting the “other” ([Popova, 2014](#))
    - Pair *What Pet Should I Get* with articles on the paradox of choice or FOMO ([Konnikova, 2014](#))
  - As a way **introduce reading comprehension strategies** for STRUGGLING readers (Zimny, 2008; Cassady, 1998)
    - Use any picture book to teach struggling readers how to use strategies like visualizing, summarizing, clarifying, or questioning
  - To help students understand complex or **abstract concepts** (Bloem & Padak, 1996)
    - Teach Maslow’s hierarchy of needs with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Meyerson, 2006)
    - Teach Id, Ego, and Superego with *Cat in the Hat* ([Wright, 2015](#))
    - Introduce postcolonialism with *Curious George* (Cummins, 1997)

42. To **spark dialogue** about issues like racism, stereotypes, and democracy (Wolk, 2004)
  - Inspire discussion about important issues with *Terrible Things*, *Smoky Night*, *The Other Side*, *The Long March*, *Stone Soup*, *Peaceful Protest: The Life of Nelson Mandela*, or *Migrant*
43. To **humanize historical figures** and events (Connor, 2003)
  - Help students connect emotionally with the past with books like *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*, *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor*, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*, *Mama Miti*
44. As a **jump-start to debate** or research (Matthews et al., 1999)
  - Discuss citizenship with *The Honest-to-Goodness Truth*, *Emily's Art*, & *The Giving Tree* (Sebek, 2015)
  - Debate controversial issues with *In Our Mother's House*, *And Tango Makes Three*, *The Conquerors*, or *Grandfather's Journey*
45. To begin a discussion on **what "counts" as literacy** and get students to recognize their own out-of-school literacies
  - Read books with unusual formats, such as *It's a Book*, *The Black Book of Colors*, *The Book with No Pictures*, or *Migrant*, to get students thinking about literacy in a new way.
46. To support **English Language Learners** (O'Loughlin, 2014)
  - Scaffold ELL learning with *Dave, the Potter* (Breiseth, 2015) or wordless picture books ([Cassady, 1998](#))
47. To inspire **vocabulary** development (Neal & Moore, 1991)
  - Use fun, vocabulary-filled books like *13 Words*, *Animalia*, *Baloney*, or *Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters*, as models for vocabulary notebooks or for word-learning opportunities
48. For learning **grammar and mechanics** in a fun way ([Schoch, 2011](#); [Patrick, 2007](#))
  - Use the *Language Adventures* series by Rick Walton, the *World of Language* series by Ruth Heller, or Brian Cleary's grammar picture book series, or *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really DO Make a Difference!*
49. To teach students how write **academic summaries**
  - Use this amazing, two-part lesson using biographical picture books to teach students to write academic summaries using textual evidence ([Schoch, 2014](#))
50. To encourage a growth mindset and metacognition
  - Get rid of a fixed mindset with *The Dot*, *The Most Magnificent Thing*, *Papa's Mechanical Fish*, or *Oh the Things You Can Think*.

#### General Reference Materials:

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## **Booklist**

- 13 Words* by Lemony Snicket  
*A is for Africa* by Ifeoma Onyefulu  
*A Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat* by Emily Jenkins  
*A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* by Paul Janeczko  
*Akissi: Cat Invasion* by Marguerite Aboutet  
*Anno's Math Games* by Anno  
*A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* by Jennifer Fisher Bryant  
*The Arrival* by Sean Tan  
*Arrow to the Sun* by Gerald McDermott  
*Abe Lincoln's Dream* by Lane Smith  
*And the Soldiers Sang* by Patrick J. Lewis  
*And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson  
*Animalia* by Graeme Base  
*A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip C. Stead  
*Bad Day at Riverbend* by Chris Van Allsburg  
*Ballad* by Blexbolex  
*Baloney* by Jon Scieszka  
*Battle Bunny* by Jon Scieszka  
*Black and White* by David Macaulay  
*Bluebird* by Bob Staake  
*Blueberry Girl* by Neil Gaiman  
*Big Wolf and Little Wolf* by Nadine Brun-Cosme  
*The Black Book of Colors* by Menena Cottin  
*The Big Box* by Toni Morrison  
*The Book-Eating Boy* by Oliver Jeffers  
*The Book with No Pictures* by B. J. Novak  
*The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos* by Deborah Heiligman  
*Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* by Susan Jeffers  
*The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco  
*The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss  
*The Cats in Krasinski Square* by Karen Hesse  
*Chester* by Melanie Watt  
*Come Away from the Water, Shirley* by John Burningham  
*Coming on Home Soon* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*The Composer is Dead* by Lemony Snicket  
*The Conquerors* by David McKee  
*Curious George* by H. A. Rey  
*The Dangerous Book for Boys* by Conn Iggulden  
*The Dark* by Lemony Snicket  
*The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* by Neal Gaiman  
*The Death of the Hat* by Paul B. Janeczko  
*The Distant Talking Drum* by Isaac Olaleye  
*Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference* by Lynne Truss  
*El Deafo* by Cece Bell  
*The Eleventh Hour* by Graeme Base  
*Elsa and the Night* by Jons Mellgren  
*Emily's Art* by Peter Catalanotto  
*Exclamation Mark* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal  
*Faithful Elephants* by Yukio Tsuchiya  
*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce  
*The Farmer and the Clown* by Marla Frazee  
*Frederick* by Leo Lionni  
*Forgive Me, I Meant to Do it* by Gail Carson Levine  
*Fox's Garden* by Princesse Camcam  
*Flotsam* by David Wiesner  
*Gaston* by Kelly DiPucchio  
*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein  
*Garibaldi's Biscuits* by Ralph Steadman  
*Going to School in India* by Lisa Heydlauf  
*The Great Snake: Stories from the Amazon* by Sean Taylor  
*Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say  
*The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers  
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*The Honest-to-Goodness Truth* by Patricia C. McKissack  
*Hug Me* by Simona Ciruolo  
*If the World Were A Village* by David J. Smith  
*In Our Mothers' House* by Patricia Polacco  
*It's A Book* by Lane Smith  
*I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen  
*Ish* by Peter H. Reynolds  
*The Insomniacs* by Karina Wolf  
*Jazz* by Walter Dean Myers  
*Jamela's Dress* by Niki Daly  
*Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker* by Patricia Hruby Powell  
*Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* by Russell Freedman  
*Leonardo the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems  
*The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney

*Little Bird* by Germano Zullo  
*The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton  
*Looking Down* by Steve Jenkins  
*The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan  
*Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka  
*The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* by Mordecai Gerstein  
*The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires  
*Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka  
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*Maus* by Art Spiegelman  
*The Memory String* by Eve Bunting  
*Migrant* by Maxine Trottier  
*Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker* by Jose Manuel Mateo  
*Mr. Tiger Goes Wild* by Peter Brown  
*Mr. Wuffles!* By David Wiesner  
*Mudkin* by Stephen Gammell  
*My Name is Yoon* by Helen Recorvits  
*My Father's Arms Are a Boat* by Stein Erik Lunde  
*The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg  
*My Teacher is a Monster! (No, I Am Not.)* by Peter Brown  
*The New Way Things Work* by David Macaulay  
*On a Beam of Light: A Story of Albert Einstein* by Jennifer Berne  
*Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters* by Oliver Jeffers  
*One Leaf Rides the Wind* by Celeste Davidson Mannis  
*Oye, Celia!* by Katie Scierba  
*Papa's Mechanical Fish* by Candise Fleming  
*Peaceful Protest: The Life of Nelson Mandela* by Yona Zeldis McDonough  
*Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi  
*The Promise* by Nicola Davies  
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*Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word, and Music* by Matt Ottley  
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*The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* by Jennifer Fisher Bryant  
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*Rules of Summer* by Sean Tan  
*The Scar* by Charlotte Moundlic  
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*Sector 7* by David Wiesner  
*Seen Art?* by Jon Scieszka  
*Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*Sir Cumference and the First Round Table* by Cindy Neuschwander  
*Slog's Dad* by David Almond  
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*Spoon* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal  
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*Tibet* by Peter Sis  
*The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner  
*Tuesday* by David Wiesner  
*Two Bad Ants* by Chris Allsburg  
*Unicorn Thinks He's Pretty Great* by Bob Shea  
*Varmints* by Helen Ward  
*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle  
*Virginia Wolf* by Kyo Maclear  
*Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne  
*Wabi Sabi* by Mark Reibstein  
*Willy's Pictures* by Anthony Browne  
*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak  
*What Pet Should I Get* by Dr. Seuss  
*What there is Before There is Anything There: A Scary Story* by Liniers  
*Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book* by Lauren Child  
*Willoughby & the Moon* by Greg E. Foley  
*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox  
*Woolvs in the Sitee* by Margaret Wild  
*Wolves* by Emily Gravett  
*Wolf Wanted* by Ana Maria Machado  
*The Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman  
*Zen Shorts* by Jon J. Muth  
*Zero* by Kathryn Otoshi  
*Zoom and ReZoom* by Istvan Banyai