



Thematic connections

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Friendships
- ❖ Saying Goodbye

Ages 4 – 8

Sometimes it takes a friend to help you find your way.

By Patrick McDonnell

A Word about Wordless Picture Books

Wordless picture books offer a unique way to build upon and assess comprehension. Learning to gain meaning from pictures is a foundational skill that may be applied toward more complex tasks such as answering Document Based Questions or interpreting data and graphs. The ability to gain meaning from a wordless picture book is also an indicator of a student’s sense of “story.” Students that have difficulty explaining the events sequentially or synthesizing the information may need additional, explicit instruction in comprehension.

Wordless picture books, such as *South*, are suitable for students of all ages and at all levels of language proficiency. The activities in this guide are designed to foster deeper comprehension and to extend learning across the curriculum. These ideas may be adapted for use with a variety of grade levels. Feel free to extend or alter these activities to meet your needs—or create your own lessons as you explore the idea of using wordless picture books with your students.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Building Background

Autumn Jackdaw

Activate schema (background knowledge) by filling a bag full of items that bring to mind the change of season from fall to winter. Some ideas include: apples, pumpkins, colorful leaves, squash, dried corn stalks, the colors red, orange, and yellow, a bare branch, and a picture of birds flying south. Tell students they are going to guess the setting for the book they will be reading. Remind them that setting means the time and place where a story takes place. Pull out each item and ask students to predict the setting based on that item. Record their ideas and encourage them to connect their thoughts as each “clue” gives them new information. How many items did it take before the class concluded the story would take place in the fall? Did they guess where it might take place? What information led them to that conclusion?

Comprehension Connection

On the back of the book, *South*, it says, “Sometimes it takes a friend to help you find your way.” Before reading the book, ask students to reflect in pairs and as a group about what this statement means to them. Do they agree with this

statement? What events in their own lives support their opinion? After reading the book, ask students to reflect on the statement once more. How do their own experiences help them understand how the little bird in the story might be feeling?

Summarizing

Using a Story Map

Sometimes students may question whether the book *South* is a “real” story because it doesn’t have any difficult words to read. To prove that *South* is definitely a story, and to reinforce the idea of story elements, ask students to create a story map. Story maps may take many forms, but simply creating a space to list characters, setting, problem, and solution is enough for a basic story map. Begin by reviewing story elements with students. After students read, have them fill in the map. After all students have completed the map, discuss how this story has all of the necessary parts of a story. To extend learning, complete story maps for other books and compare them with this one.

Vocabulary

Ask students to think about the author’s message, and brainstorm individual words that might be used to capture the meaning. Some suggestions include: compassion, kindness, or thoughtfulness. Ask students to think of as

many words as they can independently, then work with a partner or small group. A thesaurus may also be used for additional ideas. Compile a class list, and then ask students to choose several of the words to use in example sentences. Students can think of a situation in their own lives or in another book they have read to show what the word means. For example, a student might say, “I showed compassion to my friend when I shared my book because he left his on the bus.”

Writing

Creating Dialogue

Wordless picture books open the door for students to use their imagination. Have students work in pairs to create a dialogue between the two main characters in *South*. Begin with a short mini-lesson on the use of quotation marks, and then ask students to create the conversation they imagine the two characters might be having. Once the dialogue is written, students can take turns sharing their ideas with the class.

Narrative Writing

With no words, the meaning of the story must be “read” in the pictures. This is an excellent opportunity for students to practice narrative writing. Have them describe what is happening on each page, connecting the events to create the story.

Thank You Letter to Mooch

Begin with a discussion of point of view. Talk about how the little bird in the story might have felt after he was reunited with his family and finally reached his destination. Review the friendly letter format. Have students pretend they are the little bird and write a thank you letter from his perspective. As a variation, students could pretend they are Mooch and write a letter back.

SOCIAL STUDIES AND MATH

Migration Patterns

Birds travel many miles when they migrate and often follow a particular flight pattern. The Bar-tailed Godwit

migrates from Alaska to New Zealand, across the Pacific Ocean, without stopping! Challenge students to find Alaska and New Zealand on a map (or use a web-based mapping program such as Google Earth). Challenge students to determine approximately how many miles Bar-tailed Godwits travel. Were they surprised to discover they travel about 7,000 miles? Have students research other migrating birds and create a graph to compare distances. Which ones travel the farthest? Which ones travel the shortest distance? For an additional extension, have students fill in a map to show the migration routes of the birds they studied.

Understanding Cardinal Directions

In *South*, the little bird is hoping to travel south. Introduce or reinforce the concept of cardinal directions by using a compass rose on a map of the school or playground. Mark a starting point on the map and have students tell which direction they would need to travel to reach particular landmarks. Build on the lesson by teaching students how to use a compass. Create a simple treasure hunt using cardinal directions and have students work together to use their map and compass to find the “treasure.” Integrate technology and foster family participation by discussing the activity of geocaching. There are thousands of hidden geocaches around the world. Using a GPS (Global Positioning System) device, families can work together to discover the hidden caches. A good resource to help you get started is www.geocaching.com.

SCIENCE AND NATURE

Did You Know? Book

There are so many amazing facts about birds. Have students research interesting facts and create a class “Did You Know?” book or bulletin board display to share what they learned. They might include facts about longest migration route, shortest migration route, largest migrating bird, smallest migrating bird, or other fun facts they discover. Challenge them to use several different resources to verify their facts.

Shadow Play: Which Way is South?

Throughout the book *South*, the illustrator shows the shadows of Mooch and the little bird. Explore shadows with your students and discover how they may be used to determine directions.

Explain to students that although birds seem to know which way is south, sometimes people may not be sure. The easiest way to determine directions is with a compass. If someone does not have a compass, however, there is another way to determine which way is south. All you need is a tall stick, a pebble, and some sunshine. List the materials on the board and ask students to consult in small groups about how they might use the listed materials to find their way. After giving students several minutes to discuss their ideas, ask groups to share with the class. After groups have an opportunity to share, explain the following directions.

Begin by locating a level area and tap the stick into the ground. Locate its shadow and place a small pebble at the tip of the shadow. Wait approximately 15 minutes and place another stone at the tip of the shadow. (The shadow will have moved about 2 inches.) Draw a straight line between the location of the first pebble and the location of the second pebble. Extend the line about a foot past the second pebble (being as careful as possible to keep the line straight). Put your left foot on the first pebble and your right foot on the end of the extended line. If you are in the Northern Hemisphere you will be facing north, and south will be directly behind you. East will be to your right, and west will be to your left. If you are in the Southern Hemisphere you will be facing south, and north will be directly behind you. East will be to your left and west will be to your right.

Have the small groups work together to follow the directions and make a determination about which way is south. When all groups are finished, ask students to pretend they are going to help Mooch and the little bird figure out which way is south. Have them either create written directions or a diagram to help Mooch and his friend.

Brochure from the South

Show students examples of brochures used by travel agencies to convince people to visit certain places. Have students look at these examples of persuasive writing and understand how the writers use descriptions to convince their audience to come to that particular place. Have students research several bird migration “hot spots” such as Mexico, Florida, and South America. Have them choose one of the locations and write a brochure advertising the location to the appropriate “audience.” In this case, the audience would be the type of bird that normally migrates to that location. They should include food sources that might be appealing, descriptions of the local habitat, climate, and possible recreation activities. Photographs and colorful illustrations should be included to make the brochure especially appealing. Hosting a “travel fair” to display the brochures is a fun way for students to see each other’s creations and ask additional questions about the locations.

Bird Feeder Project

Migrating birds (and certainly the ones left behind) are always happy when their human friends provide a snack. Create a simple bird feeder by cutting an orange in half, hollowing it out, and punching two holes in it for a string. Fill the orange “cup” with bird seed and hang it on a tree branch. This environmentally-friendly feeder will be appreciated by feathered friends that may be stopping for a rest. Students may even want to keep track of the different types of birds that come to their feeder.

ART AND MUSIC

The Art of Cartooning

Explore the art of comic creation and cartooning with students. Provide many examples of newspaper comics and ask students to work in small groups to identify what the comics have in common. Then, have students choose one comic or the work of one cartoonist to critically analyze and discuss, focusing on the style of the cartoonist.

How do they use color or shading? Do they draw realistic looking characters? Do they draw a detailed setting or do they mainly focus on the characters? Do they rely mostly on the pictures to convey the story, or do they rely on words too? What makes this cartoonist unique? As a culminating activity, have students draw their own comics—either imitating the style used in the comic they analyzed or creating their own style.

Leaf Prints

To capture the beauty of autumn leaves, create a colorful leaf print. Take a fall walk and collect autumn leaves (or if it is not the right time of year or location for this activity, use artificial leaves available at craft stores). Paint the leaves with watercolor paints and then press the leaves onto white paper or unbleached muslin. The leaves will make a print on the paper. When the desired design is achieved, create a frame from card stock or heavy paper. For a literacy extension, ask students to write a reflection about what they enjoyed about the activity.

Communicating through Music

In the book, *South*, the little bird communicates with his friends and family by singing. Play many different types of music for students (lullabies, patriotic songs, love songs, etc.) and have them identify the “mood” of the music. They may even want to draw what they are visualizing as they listen to the music. Discuss how people, like the birds in the story, use music to communicate.

MOVEMENT AND GAMES

Birds Fly South Game

Divide students into two teams. Designate one team “Birds” and give each student a foam ball or balloon. Give the other students stickers or tags with the following words on them: loss of habitat, storms, predators, tall buildings, not enough food, fog, hunters, electrical towers, destroyed wetlands. Make one area the goal and label it “south.” While the Birds try to hit their balloons or throw their balls into the goal (reach south), the other

team tries to keep the balloons or balls out of the goal by throwing them back. After playing the game, discuss with students why it was so difficult for the Birds to reach south. What factors impact migration? Research ways to lessen the impact (such as planting new trees in deforested areas) and then play the game again. This time, replace some of the labels that limited migration with labels that show how people can help. Students with these labels should join the Birds’ team and help the balls or balloons reach south. How did this change make a difference in the game? How can these changes make a difference for migrating birds?

CHARACTER EDUCATION

Kindness Field Journal

Ornithologists study birds and sometimes use a field journal to record their observations. In this story, Mooch shows kindness to the little bird by helping to reunite him with his bird family. Ask students to look for examples of kindness all around them and record their “sightings” in a kindness field journal for one week. Have them record the type of action they considered to be kind, when it was observed, and the location where they observed it. At the end of the week compare “sightings.” Did all students see the same actions? Did they all happen in the same place? Did they notice any patterns in the data they collected?

Humane Society Project

The author/illustrator of *South*, Patrick McDonnell, is also the creator of the MUTTS comics. He is known for his work with the Humane Society. In celebration of the author’s work, suggest a service project to benefit a local animal shelter or Humane Society. Collecting towels or pet food to be donated is often appreciated. Check with your local animal shelter for a wish list of items.

about the book



When a little bird awakens to find that all of his friends and family have gone south for the winter, it takes a surprising friendship with Mooch the cat to help him find his way. This is a wordless and profoundly moving story—by the creator of the beloved comic strip *Mutts*—that explores being lost and found, crossing boundaries, saying goodbye, and broadening horizons.

South
By Patrick McDonnell
978-0-316-00509-8

praise for **South**:

★ “McDonnell continues a winning run of books about friendship.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “McDonnell has composed another quiet gem.”
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

also by Patrick McDonnell



Hug Time
978-0-316-11494-3



The Gift of Nothing
978-0-316-11488-2



Just Like Heaven
978-0-316-11493-6

about the author



Patrick McDonnell is the creator of the *Mutts* comic strip, which celebrates its 15th

anniversary this year. He has illustrated for the *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, *Parents*, and other journals, done CD covers for the Greatest Hits classical music series, and created a license plate for his home state of New Jersey. Hailed as “the next Charles Schulz,” Patrick sits on the board of directors of the Humane Society of the United States, and has won numerous awards for both *Mutts* and his animal welfare work. He is also the author of *The Gift of Nothing*, *Art*, *Just Like Heaven*, and *Hug Time*, and the co-author of *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman*.

