

Your Guide to Reading a Wordless Book

by Aaron Becker, author-illustrator of *Journey* and *Quest*

It's a question I've often heard from parents and teachers: how can they "read" a wordless book to a group of children? Fear not! It's actually more intuitive than you might think. Whether you're a parent reading to your child, a bookstore owner or librarian presenting at story time, or a teacher using a wordless book in the classroom, this guide should help you take the plunge.

1. Sit down with your audience at their eye level. The wordless book asks young readers to come *toward* the book rather than have the story come to them, so let them feel right away that they're going to be involved.
2. Before you begin, keep this one thing in mind: you're not about to tell your audience a story. You're about to discover one — *together*. And if all goes well, they'll be telling one to *you*!
3. Ask your audience about the title. What do they think it means? What do they think the story might be about based on the cover alone? Ask for evidence.
4. If, as in the case of *Journey* or *Quest*, there's something hidden under the jacket, ask if they think it may be a hint of what's yet to come. Then take a look at the endpapers and ask the same question. You haven't even started to read the book and already the children are starting to engage in the story. Treat this as a warm-up to get the kids actively seeking out ideas in what they're about to see.
5. As the story begins, you can start with this basic question: what do you see? Get the obvious out of the way. Then ask: what *else* do you see? Get these kids hunting for clues. At this point, I always ask the kids to just shout their ideas out instead of raising their hands. You're asking kids to step out of their roles as passive listeners and, instead, to become active participants, so they've got to feel like they really have permission to speak out.
6. As the story progresses, you can start asking other types of questions, such as:
 - "How do you think (a character) is feeling?"
 - "How do you know?"
 - "Do *you* ever feel this way?"
7. At moments of tension or conflict, I like to ask, "What would *you* do?" I think this helps children identify with the characters' challenges. And it raises the stakes for what might happen on the page turn. Act surprised even if you know what's coming.
8. Sometimes I take the reins for a while and just narrate the story, especially if the kids seem antsy or unfocused. It's a balancing act. Remember, not only are the children engaging with the story, but you are too! This is the challenge of a wordless book. But it's also why, when a child offers up something unexpected or revelatory, it can be such a powerful experience for both the adult and child.
9. Lastly, and this is something to keep in mind throughout the reading, remember to take your time. It's easy to rush through the pages without a script to follow, but don't! You'll miss out on the most rewarding part of sharing a wordless book: allowing the child to discover a story of his or her very own.

