



Footpath flowers

English

Stage 3
Years 5–6



Sidewalk flowers trailer by House of Anansi

Using quality literature springboard

Review:

Footpath flowers

LAWSON, JonArno & SMITH, Sydney
Walker Books, UK, 2015
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USER LEVEL: Early Stage 1
Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

KLA: English

SYLLABUS: English K-10

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What is it about?

The picture book's title, *Footpath flowers*, refers to the flowers that a girl collects from cracks in the footpath and walls in the city streets. These are the symbols that link the events in the story. They are symbolic of her joy in discovering beauty in the everyday, moments of connection and colour, her way of communicating, and they represent the ways in which small gestures can have big impact. *Footpath flowers* is a visual representation of the importance of small things, small people, small gestures and the mutual value of giving. This book is ideal for a Stage 3 exploration of visual techniques, narrative structure, and symbolism.

Why is this important? Why does it matter?

Footpath flowers is a deceptively simple story of a young girl's trip home from the shops with her father. The story is represented in mainly black and white but the girl is depicted in colour to orient the reader to her as the focaliser of the action. Colour is used to emphasise what the girl is interested in and represents her world, focussing the reader on what she values. For instance, as she gets closer to home, the colour on the pages increases. The visual techniques are interesting and varied. Landscape views alternate with close ups from differing angles, focusing on the girl and what she sees, and exemplifying her curiosity.

We learn about the little girl's character through her actions. Instead of hoarding her collection of flowers, she gives them all away to animals (a small dead bird and a friendly dog) and people (a man sleeping on a park bench). Upon arriving home, she puts a few in mum's hair and has just enough left to give some to her siblings.

The author and illustrator construct a limited point of view so that the reader shares the child's perspective through colour and framing techniques. The 'adult' world that exists outside the limited point of view of the child is rendered in monotone to emphasise whose view of the world we have been invited to adopt. The story may be read once to enjoy this child's view of the world and again to experience what is happening around her during her father's trip home from the shop. Visual techniques enable the girl's perspective on the world to be realised through sequential framing, colour and symbols. These techniques borrow from comics, graphic novels and film, and may be a good introduction to these textual forms.

Related texts:

- *Luke's way of looking* by Nadia Wheatley & Matt Ottley
- *Mrs Millie's painting* by Matt Ottley
- *The red tree* by Shaun Tan
- *When Henry caught imaginitis* by Nick Bland

Resources:

- *The bottom of the box* (author's blog), JonArno Lawson
- *Sidewalk flowers trailer*, House of Anansi
- *Sidewalk flowers - writing a story without words*, House of Anansi Press and Groundwood Books
- *Visual rhetoric/visual literacy: writing about comics and graphic novels* (a guide to composing sequential art), Duke University

Learning and teaching activities in this springboard are centred on outcomes and content from the [NSW syllabus for the Australian curriculum English K-10 syllabus](#) and the [English textual concepts](#) [intranet] resource.

See next page for [teaching ideas](#).



Footpath flowers continued

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How do I use the text to teach the textual concepts of representation, point of view, perspective, character and narrative?

EN3-3A, EN3-5B, EN3-7C

	<p>Why is this establishing shot mainly black and white? Why has the illustrator used a wide long shot first? How do the images in multiple panels represent the quick passing of time? How do the camera angles used in multiple panels help to represent the little girl's mood? What is her mood? What is the little girl's perspective on this part of her world?</p>
<p>click to enlarge </p>	<p>Why has this establishing shot been coloured in? Why has the illustrator used a wide long shot in the first image? How do these multiple panels help to represent time? Which frame has the richest colours and why? Why has the illustrator used a close up shot in the multiple panels? Why is the inside of the house coloured in shades of grey? What is the little girl's perspective on this part of her world?</p>

In order for students to understand how the illustrator has used colour to represent the little girl's perspective of the world, students could compare two double page spreads from the text where colour is used quite obviously to represent this perspective. With a partner, students discuss their ideas and interpretation of the pages, and then share their ideas with the group. They will use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse the ideas represented in the text, comparing the content to understand how the illustrator has used colour to represent the girl's perspective of the world. Students will learn how to interpret events, situations and characters in texts.

EN3-7C, EN3-8D

click to enlarge

Students could then experiment with representing a part of the story through dad's eyes. What would they colour? How would they change the point of view? A close examination of camera shot distances (close, medium, long and birds-eye-view) and angles (low, high, eye level, frontal and oblique) and how they are used to position the reader would be the required scaffolding before students can fully engage with camera shots and angles to represent

point of view. Students could look at the double page of the event with the bird in the park and suggest dad's point of view of that event. Perhaps they could sketch a few frames of the event, suggesting different shot distances and angles and selecting what they would colour from dad's point of view.

EN3-7C

Footpath flowers provides a great opportunity for students to investigate colour symbolism. Once they have a sound understanding about how colours can impact a viewer or reader emotionally, students can then experiment with representing a different emotion through colour. They could use the same child or create a short story of their own. Provide students with photocopied pages from *Footpath flowers* in black and white and ask them to re-colour these to represent a new mood. As a group, students can then reflect on the effectiveness of their use of colour to symbolise a change in mood.

EN3-2A, EN3-7C, EN3-8D

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...			
ME		MUM OR DAD	
TEXT	IMAGE	TEXT	IMAGE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of panels • Camera angle • Colour 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of panels • Camera angle • Colour

Students can then develop a story of their day (from waking up to getting to school) through a limited point of view, emphasising only the things that interest them – this is their normal state! In another column they could write what their parents do at the same time... a dual narrative in a simple form. They could even try to tell both stories together as the third person omniscient narrator who knows the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.

Students could then use their design and layout knowledge of camera shots, angles and colour to visually represent their narrative. Some scaffolding may be required to help students understand the conventions of the narrative form and how they can engage readers through recognisable characters, events and places, plot development, mood, narrative voice and evocative images.

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EN3-1A, EN3-7C

Using the [Sidewalk flowers digital narration](#) video as a model, students could record a new digital narration or write the text for *Footpath flowers* in prose or short personal narrative. Students could incorporate spoken dialogue from the point of view of the child, even using childish language!