

The Power of Children's Literature: Making Connections Between Books

Battle Bunny

Jon Scieszka and Mac Barnett

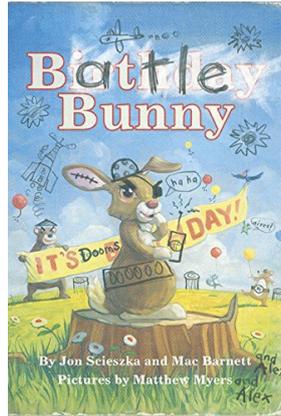
Illustrated by Matthew Myers

Walker Books

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£6.99.

8-10 Junior/Middle



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Themes

Authors who break and bend the rules of story writing.

Rewrites of well-known stories.

Authors who break and bend the rules of story writing

Come Away from the Water Shirley by John Burningham

This is a story of a family outing to the seaside, where Shirley's experience of the day is quite different to her parents. Here the author has two versions of the day out happening simultaneously, with the left hand page showing Shirley's mum and dad sitting on the beach and the right hand page showing Shirley rowing out to sea with her dog, to do battle with pirates and look for treasure. Coping with two plots requires good understanding of the story format and what the author is doing and why. The story lends itself to an interesting discussion about enjoying the seaside on a cold day. It might be possible to investigate the idea of Shirley quietly making sandcastles, while her parents have wild adventures.

Have you seen who's just moved in next door? by Colin McNaughton

Colin McNaughton describes himself as a writer of comics, which were the inspiration of his childhood and drew him into reading. In this book he manages two forms of narrative. One around the illustrations that looks like a comic strip but isn't, and the other are speech bubbles that refer to what is shown in the drawing. The jokes require the reader to absorb both parts.

Each page links to the next but doesn't really take the narrative forward and gives a vision of an upside down world. Graphic novels are very popular with this age group, and could maybe be compared with the more traditional comic, such as the Beano which is still produced in a very similar format to those of fifty years ago.

Rewrites of well-known stories

The Stinky Cheeseman and other Stupid Fairy Tales by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith

This crazy collection of fairy tales has endless variations of the traditional versions and is extremely funny. It is complex in its composition and requires readers to be able to relate to the traditional tale at the same time as taking in the chaotic version they are actually reading on the page. It is full of unexpected images, such as the contents page crashing down on Chicken Licken's head, but is still a great example of text and pictures working together to present the story. The humour in these alternative versions is a good way into discussing what the fairy tale genre consists of and what the enduring qualities are.

The Paper bag Princess, by Robert Munsch

This amusing and quirky story of role reversal between a prince and princess is funny and unexpected in the twists of the plot and the final outcome. The heroine is named after a young pupil Munsch taught at preschool, who on her first day dropped her coat and waited for him to pick it up. It is a good starting point for gender role discussion as well as fairy tale genre and as you might expect does not have a happy ever after ending.

Other Ideas

Using *Battle Bunny* as an example of a complete reversal of characters, take a simple story and substitute the character and setting with the opposite attributes. This would be a good way to emphasise the power of vocabulary choice.

Look at a selection of characters traditionally thought of as bad in traditional tales. Investigate descriptions and actions. Discuss how the story teller presents the good character in such a way that they gain the reader's support and sympathy, despite being challenged by such powerful enemies.

Look at a range of picture books for older children. Discuss features used in the pictures that impact on the story.

Where the Wild Things Are, by Maurice Sendak. The increasing size of the drawing on the page relates to Max, who tames the wild things when he puts on his wolf suit and sails off in his boat.

The Little Boat, by Kathy Henderson. This book has a huge landscape format and uses perspective very effectively.

Bear Hunt, by Anthony Brown. The bear in this story uses a pencil to draw himself out of difficult situations.

Liz Robertson