

[Drawing Words](#) is an exhibition of children's picture books, curated by Lauren Child, the UK's Children's Laureate. The exhibition features ten illustrators from across the UK, whose work makes an important and original contribution to contemporary British picture book illustrations. Each illustrator uses different techniques to tell stories that show new perspectives on the world around us.

Drawing Words is inspired by [Magic Pencil](#), an exhibition of children's book illustrations selected by the first UK Children's Laureate, Quentin Blake, in 2002, which also included Lauren Child's work in her early career.

Using picture books offers an innovative, flexible and motivating approach to language development in a visual, literary and cultural context, as it allows you to bring multimodal representation into the classroom. While our main focus is on teaching language, the picture book generates many other educational gains as children develop multiliteracies. Multiliteracies extend the traditional view of literacy, which is the ability to read and write, to the decoding and interpretation of information conveyed through different modes. For example, information conveyed through visual images is an important means of communication, and challenging children to read images develops their visual literacy. Children can also be encouraged to read the emotional temperature of the illustrations to capture atmosphere, to feel empathy by reading facial expressions, gestures and body language and thus develop emotional literacy. Picture books are also full of cultural information and details of the natural world, so children can develop cultural and nature literacy.

Picture books provide a natural and meaningful context for language use and expose children to rich, authentic language. This gives them opportunities to infer, deduct, seek clues to meaning via the illustrations, predict what is going to happen next and thereby develop 'learning' literacy. Although children will be able to understand the general meaning of the story, they may respond in their own language or the shared classroom language if they are not yet able to express themselves in English. This shows they are drawing on their linguistic resources to construct meaning and show they understand. You can rephrase in English what they say, to mediate learning and build their confidence in using English. Most of all, listening to stories in class is a shared social experience which provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation and encourages social and emotional development.

The story notes for [A Dog Day](#) and [Wild](#) are aimed at children of primary school age<sup>1</sup>. However, picture books operate on many levels, satisfying children of different ages and with different language abilities, so it is difficult to be specific about age-level suitability. A picture book can be used as a springboard for a wide variety of related language and learning activities. You know your children best, so the suggestions in the story notes are for you to select from and to adapt accordingly.

You will need a copy of the picture book. Study the picture book and the story notes carefully and decide which key vocabulary you may need to pre-teach before you read the story aloud, but only pre-teach vocabulary that may be difficult for children to work out the meaning of themselves. The story notes are divided into three stages, before reading, reading the story,

---

<sup>1</sup> The primary age range varies from one education system to another, with some children beginning at age five in some countries and at age seven in others, and some children finishing at age 10/11 in some countries and at age 13/14 in others. The average age is 6–11 years.

and after reading. Decide how long you will spend on each stage, depending on your time available and your children's interests and language abilities. The main linguistic and learning aims are indicated in Table 1.

I have chosen *A Dog Day* and *Wild* for the reasons explained above and because they lend themselves, in particular, to developing visual and emotional literacy. Children are encouraged to empathise with the characters and to respond to the illustrations by observing detail and noticing how they create and enhance meaning.

In the words of Lauren Child:

*The more you look  
the more you see,  
the more you see  
the more you understand.*

I hope you enjoy using these picture books as much as I do and that the story notes provide you with plenty of suggestions and ideas that you can adapt to your own contexts as well as trigger ideas of your own. I would love to hear from you.

Gail Ellis, Advisor Young Learners and Quality, is based at the British Council in Paris. She has published widely in the field of young learners and is co-author of [Tell it Again!](#) She is an advocate for children's language learning rights, and her main interests include children's literature, ELT management and inclusive practices. She is a member of [Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching \(PEPELT\)](#)