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Each of the following wordless or almost wordless books has one lesson created by a teacher for a teacher or parent. The books are grouped based first on the pictures and then on the English proficiency levels needed for the lesson. The following key will help you find a lesson that works to develop speaking, listening, reading, or writing. Most lessons focus on speaking, listening, and writing because the books are wordless.

- *SL = Speaking and listening objectives
- *R = Reading objectives
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INTRODUCTION

by **Gilda Martinez-Alba and Judith Cruzado-Guerrero**

The relatively recent appearance of wordless books is an antecedent of an ancient form of communication which our ancestors used to recount hunts, daily events, military incursions, and even Bible stories by using various media, including caves, tapestry, and stained-glass windows.
(Dowhower, 1997, p. 58)

In 1932 the first wordless book for children in the United States was published: *What Whiskers Did* (Caroll, 1932). Not many were published for several years after that. However, in the 1960s, 44 wordless books were published in the United States; in the 1970s, 317 were published; and in the 1980s, 408 were published. (Dowhower, 1997). Why did wordless books become so popular? Because they are very appealing, and teachers have found many benefits to using them with young children, adolescents, adults, and English learners.

Wordless books can be very engaging when used with English learners of all levels and ages to build English skills. Students can feel successful, regardless of their literacy level in any language. Wordless books can be used to develop oral language, vocabulary, listening, comprehension, writing skills, and much more. What makes them so beneficial is that they are full of visuals, which English learners need to help them with comprehension (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013). Moreover, there are no wrong answers when making up a story about a wordless book, which provides a nonthreatening environment for language learning.

With wordless books, K–12 and adult students can be authors and write the story that they interpret from the pictures. This can lead to a rich discussion about students' thoughts based on the illustrations. A study at the University of Utah showed that wordless picture books can lead to richer discussions than picture books with text (Lindauer, 1988). Since then, numerous studies have shown the benefits of using wordless picture books:

- Students learn how to make meaning from illustrations (Arizpe, 2013);
- Close reading of illustrations helps develop discussions (Ramos & Ramos, 2011);
- Students can work on comprehension, such as making inferences (Stahl, 2014);
- Students improve their writing (McAdam & Sinkie, 2013);
- Wordless books support biliteracy development (Jung & Commeyras, 2012);
- Students' motivation is improved (Arizpe, 2013); and
- Parents can use wordless books to interact with their children to develop reading motivation (Le Roux & Costandius, 2013).

Because one of the main goals of reading is comprehension, teachers want their students to understand stories covered in class. Thus, teachers can use wordless books to explain comprehension strategies. Then students can reread the stories to work on their speaking skills by talking through the stories and verbalizing their inferences. Students can even develop bilingual skills if their teachers provide them with time to work on using two languages.

Parents wanting to participate in their child's education can read the story to their child in any language, even if they cannot read or write in any language. This can potentially lead to students becoming interested in books, while showing parents how they can help with their child's academic progress. To make home connections, teachers can provide students with lessons from the book, and then have students go home and re-create or share the activities with their parents.

When reviewing wordless books, specific titles lend themselves to different types of instruction. For example, *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 1991) is a complicated story about a camera's travels in the ocean that has a wealth of vocabulary that can be discussed. In this book, *Flotsam* has a lesson for speaking and listening in which students are encouraged to talk about the illustrations and later about a mystery bag's contents related to the story.

On the other hand, *Chalk* (Thomson, 2010) is a simpler yet exciting book about drawings that come to life, which can be used to discuss story structure. The lesson in this book for *Chalk* emphasizes writing and speaking, and students write a script and make a movie based on the book.

This book will take readers on a journey through 23 wordless or almost wordless books. Teachers created engaging lesson ideas, each one connected to a highly rated wordless book, so you do not have to research which wordless books are worth your while. The lesson ideas are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; copyright © 2010 National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.), specifically in reading, writing, speaking and listening and include a range of grade levels on the rubrics to provide you with a quick overview of how the standards get more involved as grade level increases. You can look for the grade level you are interested in on the Common Core website and cut and paste the appropriate standards for your students into the editable rubrics provided on the

companion website for this book, www.tesol.org/wordless. You may find different Common Core State Standards work better for your students' needs than the examples provided, these are simply suggestions provided by the teachers that created the lessons. We have also included TESOL Standards (TESOL International Association, 2006) in the objectives section of the lessons. In addition, a list of vocabulary words is provided for each lesson. Last but not least, interesting related websites and apps are listed for each lesson. We hope you have the opportunity to use many if not all of the ideas in this book, using them as is or tweaking them to make them work for your students.

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