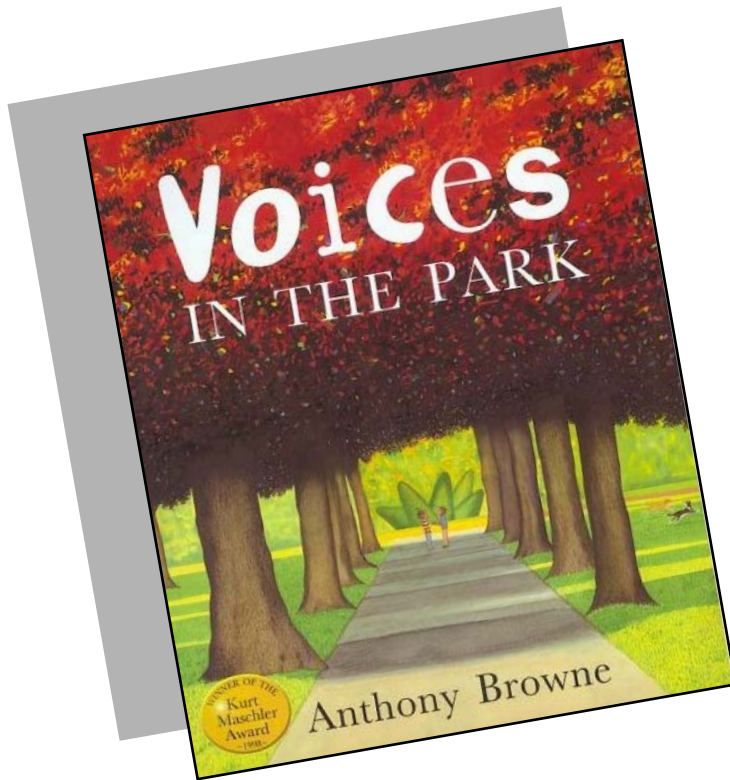


TEACHING GUIDE by NIKKI GAMBLE

Voices In The Park



ISBN: 978-0789481917



by Anthony Browne

CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Voices in the Park could be incorporated into an Anthony Browne author study and is well suited to work with pupils in upper Key Stage 2 (9 – 11 years). It might form part of a Narrative Unit on significant children's writers. It is also a good text for group and guided reading, providing opportunities for challenging and reflective reading, at the same time being accessible and appealing to readers who may not have developed the stamina for long novels.

The teaching sequence suggested below, explores voice in literature. The drama and role-play activities provide opportunities for considering the difference between words, thoughts and actions.

The plans should be adapted to suit the needs and interests of the children in your class and care should be taken not to move children towards a prescribed interpretation of the book.

ANTHONY BROWNE is the acclaimed author and illustrator of such prize-winning bestsellers as *Gorilla* (winner of the Kate Greenaway Medal and the Kurt Maschler Award), *Willy the Wimp* and *Zoo* (winner of the Kate Greenaway Medal). *Voices in the Park* won the 1998 Kurt Maschler Award and was shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal. Anthony was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for Illustration in 2000.



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THE BOOK

Synopsis:

In this reworking of the earlier *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne, the story of a visit to the park is told from the point of view of the four characters featured: a young boy, Charles; his mother; a young girl, Smudge and her father.

The four voices are represented by contrasting illustration style, font, layout and diction.

The characters are depicted as primates: the adults are gorillas and the children are chimpanzees, but the story is essentially a human one.

Characteristically, Anthony Browne's visual text is rich in cultural allusion, making this a book that works on many levels and open to interpretation.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Display

Set up a classroom display of books by Anthony Browne. Make them available for independent reading. Encourage children to post comments on a recommended reading noticeboard.

Preparation:

Have available four copies of *Voices in the Park*. Select four children who can read expressively and fluently. Discuss and

allocate parts and give them at least one day to prepare the reading.

Before reading

Talk about books that the children have read by Anthony Browne. Encourage them to talk about favourite and recommend them to other children.

First reading

Look at the front cover and read the title. Invite the children to share their thoughts about the title and suggest what they think the story will be about.

Look through the book and show the children that it is divided into 4 separate stories called; First Voice, Second Voice, Third Voice and Fourth Voice. Explain that this is a story told from 'point of view' of four different characters.

Ask the selected readers to read the story.

After reading, invite children to share their initial responses.

- How did the reading of the story affect their views of the characters?
- Were there specific words or phrases spoken by the characters that provoked a particular response or reaction?

What were the elements of the story that remained the same in each version? List these on the

white board:

- Four characters visit the park
- Two dogs, Victoria and Albert, play with each other
- Two children, Charles and Smudge, play together
- The characters leave the park and return home

These are the objective facts of the story but each character narrates the story from his/her own 'point of view'.

Responding to Character: first ideas

In pairs, ask the children to talk about their favourite characters and to give reasons for their choices.

Have four boxes or bags labelled with the names of the four characters: Charles' mother, Charles, Smudge, Smudge's father. Give each child a slip of paper and ask them to write their name on it. Then ask them to place their piece of paper in the box of the character they most liked.

Count the number of votes for each character in turn. With each character, pick some children to explain why they voted for that character. List some of the reasons on the whiteboard.

Taking it further: exploring the first voice

Use a visualiser or IWB so that

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the text can be clearly seen by the whole class. Reread the First voice pausing to look more closely at the way the pictures and words tell the story. Invite children to talk about the things they notice and find interesting and allow for full discussion before moving on.

Guide the discussion without leading the responses. Some points to consider:

- Who is telling this story? How do you know?
- What can we tell about the mother from:
 - The way she is dressed?
 - Her body language?
 - Her speech?
 - The way she speaks to Charles?
- Is there anything else in the pictures that gives information about the mother's character?

After re-reading First Voice, ask the children why the mother might be worried about Charles. Why does she think the park is full of 'frightful types'?

Take the hotseat: explain to the children that you are going to take on the role of the mother. The use of a visual prop such as a red hat or brightly coloured scarf can be used to signal when you are in and out of role.

Explain that when you are wearing the prop you are in the 'hot-seat'. This means the children can ask questions to find out more about you. Invite suggestions of one or two questions that might be asked to make sure the children understand the activity.

Note: by using teacher-in-role, you can encourage the children to think more deeply about the character. Subtleties of character might be picked up so that the children can come to some appreciation of her fears and worries as well as the more explicit prejudice and snobbery.

Make an enlarged picture of the mother shouting or scan the page and display on the IWB. Draw a speech bubble with the word CHARLES! Now draw some thought bubbles around the character. In pairs, ask the children to discuss words for the thought bubbles. Take suggestions and complete the thought bubbles.

Discuss with the children how spoken words and thoughts might tell a different story. Encourage them to relate this idea to their own experience: have they ever said one thing but have been thinking something entirely different. For example, they might have said thank you for a present that

they didn't really like, out of politeness or wanting to protect someone's feelings. They may have pretended to be brave about doing something daring when really they were feeling quite scared.

Analysing character: group work

Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a large sheet of paper with a picture of their assigned character in the centre of the page.

Ask each group to annotate the picture with information about the character gathered from the text and the illustrations. List some suggestions to help them:

- Factual information about the character, age, appearance,
- Speech
- Actions
- Opinions
- What opinions do the other characters have of them
- Clues from visual features such as colour, font etc

Justifying opinions

Gather the class together. Take each character in turn and ask groups to list their ideas about the character and then provide evidence to support their opinions. Write ideas in table form. For example:

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Smudge

Cheerful	The illustrations are brightly coloured Father says 'Smudge cheered me up. She chatted all the way home.'
Active	Picture of Smudge climbing tree She goes down the slide 'really fast' Does handstands

Writing in the First Person

Write the opening passage from *Voices in the Park* in the third person and display it next to the actual text.

'One day, Mrs Smyth decided to take her dog and her son for a walk. They went to the park and when they got there, Mrs Smythe let her dog, Victoria, off the lead. Another dog came up to Victoria and started to play. Mrs Smythe shoed it away but it didn't work. The dogs were happy playing with each other.'

(Note: although the mother is not given a name in this version of the story, in the earlier book *A Walk in the Park* she was called Mrs Smythe and the father was called Mr Smith. If you have a copy of *A Walk in the Park* you can use this text instead of writing your own version).

Read both passages aloud. What are the differences in the way these passages are written?

Guide the children towards identifying the difference between first and third person writing. Review the features of writing in the first person and consider why a writer might choose to write in the first person. You might want to offer writers' opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of writing in the first and third person. See for example, Nikki Gamble (2008) *Writers' Secrets* Hodder in which well known children's writers give their opinions.

Challenge the children to think more closely about the point of view shown in the pictures. For example, use two pictures of Charles' mother (one with her calling for Charles from 'First Voice' and one with her hat being blown off her head from 'Fourth Voice') From whose point of view are we seeing this character?

Children can also be guided towards recognising an unreliable viewpoint in the narration. Compare, for example, the narration and the accompanying picture of Charles and Smudge climbing trees in *Third Voice*.

Improvisation

Organise the children into

groups of three. Each group must have 1 mother, 1 Smudge and 1 Charles. They can either choose their own roles or these can be assigned.

Give each group 5 minutes to work out a short improvisation. Mother and Charles are in the park. Then along comes Smudge. How does this change what the characters are doing, saying, feeling?

Ask 1 group to show their improvisation and use a 'forum theatre' approach to develop and refine ideas about relationships and the dynamics between the characters. Extend the children's ideas by:

- Encouraging them to show clear body language
- Good use of eye contact or avoidance between different characters
- What would the characters really say in the situation – challenge the children to use authentic language
- Find and mark a moment showing dramatic tension – create a freeze frame of this moment

Ask each group to create their own freeze frame to show a moment of dramatic tension in the story. Possibilities:

- Charles playing with Smudge

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and preparing to go down the slide or climbing the tree

- Charles walking home from the park with his mother
- Smudge walking to the park with her father
- Charles' mother and Smudge's father sitting on a park bench

Ask half the class to show their freeze frames. Invite comments and evaluate according to the effective communication of tension between the characters.

Now ask the groups to bring their freeze frames to life.

Explain that they are going to show 30 seconds of action leading into the freeze frame. Allow groups 5 – 10 minutes to work on their short scenes.

View one or two examples and discuss.

Remind the children of the work done earlier on the differences between speech and thought. Introduce the term 'monologue' – when one person talks to an audience but the audience does not respond. Some popular children's television series employ this device i.e. where the character talks to the camera. Invite children to share their knowledge of these programmes.

Explain to the children that they are going to choose one character from their short scene to give

a short monologue to the audience. When the scene freezes, the character will come to life step forward and talk to the audience about all the things they are thinking. They will then step back into the frozen picture. You may need to demonstrate what is required.

Give the children a minute to decide which character will give the monologue. They do not need to rehearse this as the monologue can be spontaneous.

View some of the scenes. Invite comments.

Reflection: What has this group shown us about the characters in this story?

Final reflection:

What have we learnt about characters in *Voices in the Park* and the ways in which Anthony Browne has represented them?

Writing a Story from Different Points of View

Extend this work by asking children to write a well known story from a number of points of view. Small groups can work on one story, with each member of the group writing from a different point of view.

Stories with Alternative Viewpoints

Make a display of stories written from different viewpoints. You might include the following:

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*

Toby Forward and Izhar Cohen *The Wolf's Story*

Additional resources

DVD *The World of Anthony Browne: through a gorilla's eyes* information from

www.childrensauthors.tv

Nikki Gamble is lecturer, writer and education consultant specialising in children's literature, drama and arts education. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate students on primary teacher training programmes for eleven years.

Nikki is Director of Write Away, an organisation that seeks to promote literature and the arts in education. She is currently Associate Consultant at the University Of London, Institute Of Education. Nikki is Congress Director for the IBBY World Congress 2012 and recently elected member of the IBBY Executive Committee.

Recent Publications include *Family Fictions* (2001) (with Nick Tucker); *Exploring Children's Literature* (2008) (2nd edit) *Writers' Secrets* (2008).