

Solomon Crocodile
Written and Illustrated by Catherine Rayner
ISBN 9780230529229

Use the double page spread depicting Solomon the crocodile being confronted by the hippo.

Working in pairs, encourage children to explore the picture, discussing their responses and working together to make meaning of what they see. Ask them to jot down words and phrases which reflect their responses to looking.

The aims of this activity are:

- to increase the interaction with and enjoyment of picture books for children of all ages
- to develop children's confidence and vocabulary to respond to what they see – to observe and describe
- to encourage them to build on their previous experience, imagination and understanding to make sense of visual information – to interpret
- to consider a variety of graphic forms and their interaction with a text in order to convey layers of meaning – to appreciate
- to recognise different styles and techniques used and developed by a variety of illustrators – to analyse
- to begin to recognise and appreciate visual metaphor, irony, puns and jokes etc. – to participate
- to use drama and role play techniques to engage more fully with the picture – to comprehend

The following questions have been designed to help children to look more closely at the illustrative work of Catherine Rayner, moving from the whole picture to the smallest part and to search for and use all available clues given by the artist to make meaning. Please select and adapt the questions to make them appropriate for your setting.

TELL ME ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATION...

This picture fills the double page spread and there is no border around the picture. How does this help you to imagine the creature's environment beyond the page?

Consider the layout of the page. Who is the most dominant character and where are they standing? It is as though the hippo has just made his entrance on to the scene.

Can you imagine the noise he is making?

What sort of mood is the hippo in?

Why do you think Catherine Rayner has chosen to only put part of the hippo on the page? How does this affect your perception of the hippo's bulk and size?

What impact does this have on Solomon the crocodile? How would you describe his posture and body language?

If you read the page from left to right where is Solomon going to end up?

How would you describe the hippo's mouth and jaws? What could they do to Solomon?

In contrast, observe Solomon's jaws. They are clamped tightly shut. What does this tell us about how he is feeling?

Through whose eyes are you observing the hippo?

Look at the ways in which the illustrator has applied colour to portray the thick leathery skin of the rhino. How does this contrast with the more lively splattery effect of the crocodile? How would you describe the texture of his skin?

What do you think is the setting for this picture? Consider:

- What you might hear.

- What you might smell.

- What you imagine to be beyond this page, in the rest of the river/swamp.

How has Catherine Rayner shown the stirring up of the water by the hippo?

How would you describe the look on Solomon's face as he is confronted by the hippo?

Which features most portray his shock and submission?

What do you think he is thinking?

What is the mood on this page?

How has the illustrator created this tension?

How does the colour on this page make you feel? How does it contrast with the colours used on the other pages of this story?

Are there any places in which the crocodile can hide or take cover?

What materials do you think the artist has used to achieve these visual effects?

What do you notice about the layout of the text, its size and prominence on the page?

How does it give you clues about how the words are intended to be read?

In what ways do the words and pictures work together? What do you think is the difference between a 'roar' and a shout? How has the illustrator given emphasis to the hippo's roar?

WRITE IT DOWN

Harvest children's responses and record their descriptions and comments on an IWB or flip chart. Are there any aspects of the picture that they find particularly interesting or puzzling? How do these pictures interact and work with the rest of the book?

PLAYING THE BOOK

Improvisation

Improvisation provides a quick opportunity to explore in more depth the confrontation between the hippo and Solomon and to discover what might have motivated the hippo's angry response. They are designed to be quick and not rehearsed or over-worked. They are not intended as a finished performance but as an opportunity to demonstrate and share children's understandings and interpretations with the rest of the groups.

Instant

- Group splits in half.
- One half goes about their daily life as all the creatures of the swamp/river for example, frogs, dragonflies, storks and hippo.
- The other half take the role of Solomon and imagine what sorts of mischief they can create that will annoy them.
- Gradually they begin to confront one another and the creatures respond to Solomon by escaping, challenging him, scolding him and so on.

Prepared

- Two or more people prepare an improvisation as Solomon and the hippo for performance.
- They decide on an aspect of their character they are curious about and work on character, motivation and outcomes etc.
- Using the text from the page shown to start their improvisation, they develop the dialogue supported by appropriate moves and actions.
- They might want to explore whether Solomon remains submissive or decides to snap back etc.
- The adult can work to support/extend the improvisation through e.g. goading one of the characters or supporting the hippo's verbal assault on Solomon.
- Children watch each other's performances and give critical feedback.

Forum Theatre

Improvisations performed by 2 members of the group working on instructions given by others, who can stop the action, alter and replay at will.

- Two children enter the forum and are assigned the roles of Solomon and the hippo.
- The hippo is given the words from the text to speak.
- Children from the forum tell him/her how to speak the words, how to move etc.
- Solomon responds and children tell him what to say and how to say it.
- They also focus on characters' positions in the space, their facial expressions, body language and actions.