

The Gift
Written by Carol Ann Duffy and Illustrated by Rob Ryan
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Use the double page spread depicting the graveyard in snow.

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 Rob Ryan, 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...

How do your eyes travel across these pages?

What is the main focus of this illustration?

What other stories are being told here?

At the first glance, what time of year do you think it is?

Look carefully from the left to the right of the page, what do you notice about the ways in which the seasons are changing?

How has the illustrator done this?

What times of day can you find depicted here?

How has the illustrator depicted the passage of time in this picture?

How has the illustrator harmonised the different seasons and times of day to create one picture?

What do you think the main themes of this story might be?

What movement do you notice on this page, where is it?

Can you tell from this picture which character this story is about?

Look up at the sky over the graveyard. What sense do you have of the weather? How does it make you feel?

What do you notice about the birds in this illustration (Sometimes in superstitions birds are thought to depict the souls of the dead or to be the harbingers of death)?

Describe the atmosphere of the graveyard.

How does the scene in the graveyard make you feel?

What does it tell you about the woman and her family?

Look at the way the characters are placed around the grave, what do you notice about their posture and body language?

What are they doing?

What do you notice about the fencing around the graveyard, why do you think it has been fenced in? (How does this contrast with the clearing in the woods on other pages?)

Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to give minimal detail to the tombstones, what impact does this have on your emotional response to this scene?

Have you noticed the crosses? Where are they?

How has the illustrator created this picture?

Notice the use of shadow on these pages. What is their effect?

How do you think the illustrator has created these shadows? (Look at where the silhouettes have not been fully attached to the background).

What is the impact of using black on white?

What is the effect of silhouettes? Does it matter that you can't see the characters' faces?

How do you know what they are feeling?

Compare the different scenes on this page, what do you notice about the ways in which the family is depicted?

Why has the artist chosen to depict the woman alone on the path, walking towards the edge of the page?

What is she holding in her hands? What other clues are there in the picture to tell you about the things that she does?

What is the relationship between the written text and the illustrations on these pages – how do you read it (e.g. pictures first, text first, picture and text together)?

What do you notice about where the text is laid out on the page? Does it affect your engagement with the illustration?

In what ways do the pictures compliment or extend the detail of the written text?

This is a narrative picture: it tells stories and helps the observer to make up their own stories. Read the text on the page and consider how much more the picture suggests than merely illustrating the author's words. What further stories are you able to tell from this illustration?

What is the effect of the bold black border?

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

Freeze Frame

A 'freeze frame' is a snapshot of a scene where the children are asked to prepare a tableau to show the people involved and their behaviour.

- Ask the children to either recreate the scene in the graveyard, in the house or along the path.
- Explain that they do not necessarily have to be people; they could choose to be for example a tombstone, a window, a bird or a tree.
- Encourage them to behave and think as that character or object, considering what they have witnessed and experienced before and during the scene they have studied.
- Ask them to think carefully about:
 - who they think they are.
 - why they are there.
 - what their relationship is with the other characters or objects in the picture.
 - how they are feeling.
- Ask them to consider:
 - what their positioning in relation to other people or objects will imply about their feelings or relationships.
 - the ways in which their facial expression, body shape and body language will communicate their thoughts and feelings.

The rest of the class observe each other's freeze frame and give critical feedback. The use of 'thought tracking' is an ideal way to bring the freeze frames to life. They can be modelled by the adult and then continued by different children observing.

Thought Tracking

An observer gently taps the shoulder of various characters/objects in the freeze frame and asks them what they are thinking. This can often create an opportunity for spontaneous improvisation, where the children's responses to the thought tracking develop into dialogue and action between others in the freeze frame.

Revisiting and recording the children's work

- Take photos of the children's freeze frames.
- Ask the children to annotate these with thought and speech bubbles to record what was said during the session.
- Use the photos to stimulate further discussion/debate in groups about different interpretations of the picture and to expand children's appreciation of the different layers of meaning it portrays.
- Use improvisation to further develop children's ideas about the scene and use as an oral rehearsal for writing.