

There Are No Cats in this Book
Written and Illustrated by Viviane Schwarz
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Use the double page spread depicting all of the visiting cats looking at you.

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 Viviane Schwarz, 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...

What is your immediate response to this page?

How does it make you feel?

Where are you in this picture? Are you in the book with the cats or an outside observer?

Who do you think the cats are looking at?

Look carefully at the cats' faces. How would you describe their expressions?

How do you think the cats feel about seeing you looking at them?

How has the illustrator expressed their responses to being looked at by you, e.g. bewildered, surprised, pleased, thoughtful, embarrassed, shy, proud, perplexed?

There are 3 main 'cat' characters in this story. Can you tell which they are in this illustration? How has the illustrator helped you to identify them? Do you notice the shape they make from where they are placed on this double page spread?

How would you describe the atmosphere on this page?

If you were able to hear this page, what would it sound like?

In your mind's eye, can you imagine what is happening below, to the sides and above these pages? How has the illustrator helped you to do this?

How would you describe Viviane Schwarz's illustrative style: comic, humorous, realistic etc.?

What materials do you think have been used to draw these cats: e.g. pastels, ink, crayon, colour wash etc.?

What do you notice about the quality and thickness of the lines of these drawings? How are they used to accentuate the features of each cat? Do they outline the whole cat?

How has Viviane Schwarz created the impression of lots of cats?

There is a lot of movement on this page. Where is it coming from and how has the illustrator made your eyes dart from one cat to the next?

When animals take on human characteristics in stories such as this one, it is called anthropomorphism. What human characteristics do you notice about these cats?

Which features of the cats do you notice first: their eyes, noses ears, colour etc.?

What do these elements suggest about their characters?

How would you describe the colours of these cats: pastel, bright, muted, subtle, unusual? Are they realistic, cat-like colours?

How has Viviane Schwarz maintained the feline quality of her cats?

Is there anything that surprises you about these cats?

Why has the illustrator presented all the text on this page in speech bubbles? How does this affect the ways in which you engage with the story?

Can you imagine how each cat would be speaking? What clues has the illustrator given you? Consider the size, style and colour of the font and whether upper and lower case lettering has been chosen.

What do you notice about the layout of the speech bubbles? Are they randomly or strategically placed? How do they affect the ways which you might read this page?

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

Hot seating

Hot seating is a device for getting inside a character's head and encouraging children to consider how they would articulate/convey that character's thoughts, feelings and responses.

- Ask the class/group, why they think there are so many cats in this book and whom they could ask to find out more about why they are there.
- Ask children to select a cat who they think could explain why there are so many cats in the book.
- Use shared writing to compose a list of questions, which the children would like to ask the cats, such as; "Why are you here?"; "Who asked you to come?"; "Where did you come from?"
- Ask for a child to volunteer to take the role of a cat in the hot seat.
- Ask them to leave the room and quickly get into character, thinking about how the cat is feeling, whether s/he is young or old, how s/he might move and talk and to consider how s/he might enter the room.
- Ask the child to knock on the door when they are ready.
- The cat enters and sits on a chair in front of the class.
- The children take it in turns to ask the cat questions using the questions from the shared writing activity as a starting point.
- Encourage children to respond to the cat's replies in order to develop their spontaneous questioning skills.

Opportunities for development

Children work in pairs. One child chooses a cat from the illustration and the other interviews them, using the illustration to prompt their questions, such as; "Are you a thin, blue cat?"; "Are you a friend of the yellow cat?" etc. The other child must answer as fully as they can until the interviewer finds out which cat they are.