

2016 Kate Greenaway shortlist: Visual Literacy notes

Title: *Once Upon An Alphabet*
Illustrator/author: Oliver Jeffers
Publisher: HarperCollins

First look

What artistic qualities are we looking for in *Once upon an Alphabet*? Unlike the other books on the Greenaway shortlist this year, the combination of word and image in *Once upon an Alphabet* is so original that it is impossible to separate them when judging 'artistic quality'. The words are artistic and the pictures tell the stories.

In preparation for sharing the book, ensure that the shadowing group are aware of the how Oliver Jeffers has created a pattern of storytelling to achieve his purpose:

- Each letter has four pages [take the letter D for example]
- 1st page: The letter is hand written, as is the story title [D dDANGER Delilah]
- 2nd& 3rd pages: present a story or information in printed words and illustrations. There are extra comments in handwriting [for example no one likes being laughed at, you know! and *DON'T TRY this at HOME]
- 4th page: presents the punchy ending to the story [DELILAH! If you're not HOME in five MINutes there'll be NO DESSERT!]



Look again

When the group have discussed their first responses, return to the book; look, think and talk more about the design and artwork.

Let the members of the group discuss as many 'letter stories' as time allows. Chat in pairs or as a group about the first experience of the book. Did you like it? What did you like or dislike and why?

Choice of art materials

Jeffers uses a range of materials. As you turn through the pages at any point in the book see if you can identify where he uses any of the following:

pastels pens crayon paint chalk collage

All sorts of colours are used. The separate title pages for each letter's story has a different coloured background.



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D d DANGER Delilah, for example, has a dark purple background. Details in the illustrations are highlighted with pink, red, mauve and grey.

The next letter, **Ee** An ENIGMA about elephants, uses a lot of grey paint and collage. Jeffers designs the spaces on each page to accommodate the written text without detracting from the pictures. Carefully crafted line drawings could be mistaken for scribbles, blots and scratches but the overall effect is delightful. Jeffers deceptively simple illustrative style appeals to readers of all ages.

Look at everything

Talk about any visual aspect of the book that interests you, i.e. endpapers, font choices, title page and layout. Choose several pages to explore the choices made about colour, line, shape and space. Do you have a favourite?

Interpreting the texts

It is always beneficial, when studying a book, to find ways to get youngsters to fully engage with the whole text. This can be achieved through exploratory tasks and creative responses such as drama and art. The following suggestions may help young readers to become absorbed in the book.

Art

Try using some of the drawing and writing techniques used by Oliver Jeffers. You will need pencils, crayons, pastels, drawing inks, paints, pens and brushes. Be as creative as you wish as you develop your own 'deceptively simple' style.

Write a story for a letter of the alphabet

Make up a new story for the letter you have chosen. Write and illustrate it using the same four page pattern that is used in the book.

Storytelling

The 26 stories in *Once upon an Alphabet* are very short. They would be fun to tell or act out to an audience of younger children. Choose about three of your favourite letter stories to learn by heart and tell.

To see more about Oliver Jeffer's work visit
www.oliverjeffers.com/picture-books

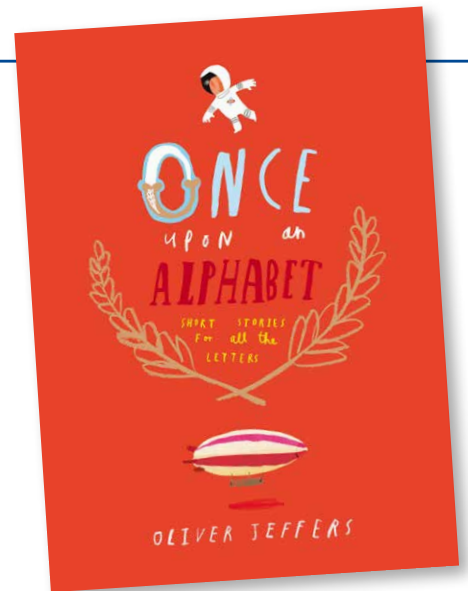


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ONCE UPON AN ALPHABET

by Oliver Jeffers

Published by HarperCollins



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 2: Human rights belong to everyone.

This inventive book explores the alphabet with a series of stories and is full of all kinds of characters – from an astronaut who is afraid of heights to Victor the vengeful violinist.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the rights of everybody; the only qualification for these rights is to be human. It does not matter who we are, where we come from, what we believe in or have experienced, or how we have behaved.

There are rights that can be limited for good reason such as the right to move freely if we have been convicted of a crime. However we are still entitled to fairness, justice and equality. Some rights are absolute and cannot be limited by a government. For example, everyone has the right not to be treated as a slave, not to be tortured or punished in cruel ways, and not to be treated in ways that are degrading.

THEMES

- Human rights defenders
- Resolving conflict

QUESTIONS

- What should Bob have done instead?
- How could the monkeys have included Nigel?
- Why is it important that everyone is an equal?

ACTIVITY

- Make an alphabet display. Assign an act of kindness, solidarity or support for each letter.

RESEARCH

- Which human rights heroes have inspired you or your family?

For more free teaching resources go to www.amnesty.org.uk/education



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