



Title: **The Paper Dolls**
Author: **Julia Donaldson**
Author/Artist: **Rebecca Cobb**
Publisher: **Macmillan**

First look

- * Share the book with the whole group by reading it aloud to them. Give an uninterrupted read, without making comments and holding it up so that everyone can see the pictures as they listen.
- * Go through the book again page by page concentrating on the visual text. Look closely at every picture and ask the group to point out to each other anything that strikes them as interesting.
- * 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? Have you ever made paper dolls?

Look again

When the group have discussed their first responses, return to the book, look, think and talk more about the artwork. Rebecca Cobb's (RC) illustrations have a freedom and simplicity about them that are reminiscent of childhood drawings. However, this effect is not as easy as you may think and is only achieved through skilful technique and careful thought. RC explains how she works in an interview on the Booktrust website:

I use a lightbox to trace my rough pencil sketches onto my best paper using a sharp stick dipped in ink. I tried drawing with different dip pens but I prefer using a stick, or the end of a paintbrush, because the line feels freer and much closer to drawing with a pencil. I then colour in the drawing using watercolours, inks and coloured pencils because these all make different types of marks and I can choose whether something needs to be coloured in a way that is soft or scratchy, neat or messy.

<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/children/illustrators/interviews/206>

Look at all the things the little girl plays with at the beginning of the story. The mother encourages her imaginative games, even at the meal table, and it is mum who introduces the toy crocodile. Everything she has contributes to the free-flowing fantasy world of play. Along with the dolls, can you see the island, the sea – and who is that in a boat on the honey jar?

Colour, Space, Line & Shape

On first glance, the pictures appear to be full of lots of colours but is there a dominant one? The primary colours are red, blue and yellow. Which of these is used the most? Are there colours that are seldom used or missing altogether?



Talk about any visual aspect of the book that interests you, i.e. end papers, font choices, title page and layout. Do these 'extras' to the story contribute to the overall impact of the book?

Interpreting the texts

It is always beneficial, when studying a book, to use tasks which require imaginative response to encourage students to engage fully with the text. The following suggestions may help the group of young readers to become engrossed in the book

Looking closely, thinking deeply

Remember there may be differences between what happens in a story and what a book is about. On one level this is a book about a little girl playing with paper dolls. On another, there are much more profound themes which relate to; the importance of imaginative play, the power of childhood memories and how both, imagination and memory, can be nurtured during childhood.

Look closely at the images to work out how RC has extended the meanings in the written text through her illustrations. Some pages depict reality but others slip easily into the fantasy world that that little girl creates in her head. For example, we are told at the beginning of the book that the little girl has a 'butterfly hairslide which she kept losing'.



The hairslide provides an important visual clue to help readers see more deeply into what is happening on each page. Look through the book again and note how and when the butterfly hairslide features on a page. What is happening on the pages where the butterfly is flying? Is it really occurring? Possibly the most evocative picture is the one after the dolls have been destroyed where we see the little girl's memory. RC has included all sorts of bits and pieces, some half hidden, all in the bright summer landscape that happy childhoods seemed to inhabit.

Art, craft & design

Make a set of paper dolls like the ones in the book. If you are not sure how to make them, look on the Internet; there are many websites offering advice.

Are your dolls the same as in the book? Do you have five dolls? What differences are there between your paper dolls and the illustrations in the book?

Discussion

What do you think about the end of the book? What happens and how does it relate to the rest of the story? First, talk about the scene which shows the boy with a pair of scissors, then the final four pages.