

Using Wordless Picture Books

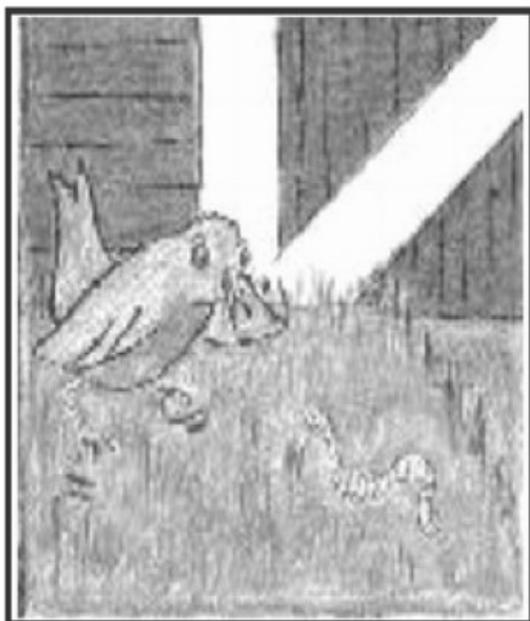
Pictures Can Give Me

1,000 Words

Using Wordless Picture Books

in Language Learning

by Greg Thomson

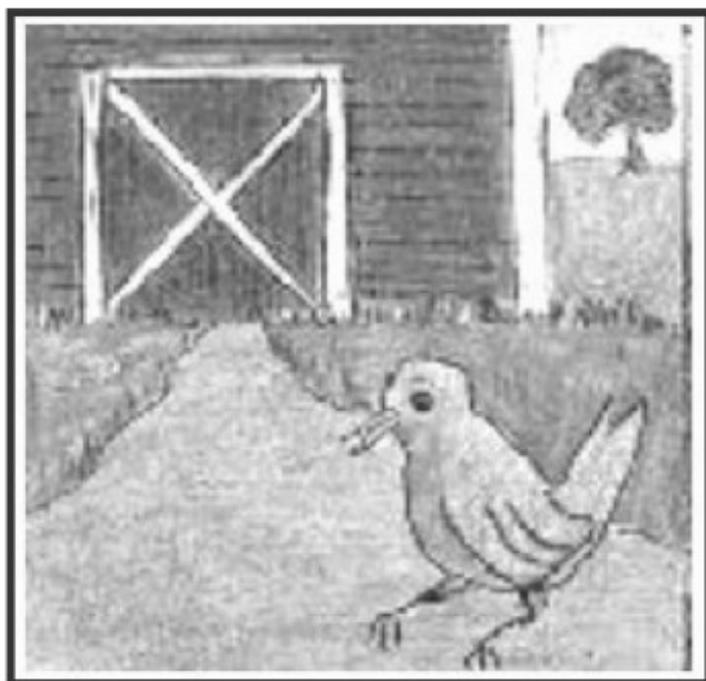


Children's picture story books can provide versatile and highly motivating tools for those learning any language. The picture story provides clues as to the meaning of the language the learner is hearing, helping the learner to have 'comprehensible input'. In addition, as the language helper describes the pictured scenes or tells the story in his/her own words, the description may differ quite a bit from a description the learner may have chosen to tell. This provides opportunity for the learner to gain new insights into the host culture.

Wordless picture books can provide wonderful opportunities for interaction, which allow you to develop more levels of language, and more themes with life-relevance.

With only 4-5 wordless picture books you will find opportunity for plenty of repetition of the most important vocabulary of everyday life experience, since these types of stories are usually set in everyday situations.

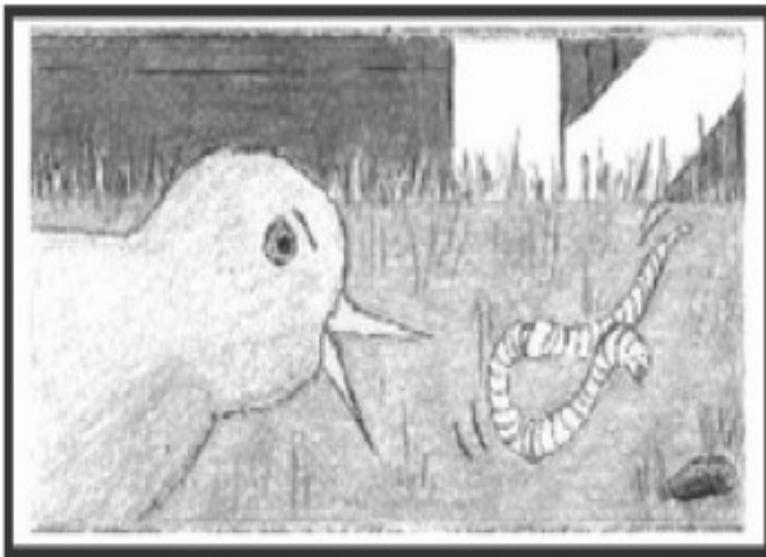
Even basic wordless picture stories reflect a range of difficulty levels. The Fly and the Bear (Winter, 1976, out of print—watch for it used) involves relatively simple objects, feelings and actions. One Frog Too Many, is a story dealing with friendship, jealousy, resentment, hurt feelings, grief, joy and reconciliation. Picture stories from the Bible are resources that bring up important moral and spiritual themes. In massaging such stories it is possible to begin discussing such matters beyond what is evident in the story's pictures. (The pictures here are from a picture story drawn by Angela Thomson, inspired by The Big Fat Worm, Van Laan, 1995. A



list of recommended wordless picture storybooks can be found in the Thomsons' Phase 2: Storybuilding handbook.)

How to Use Picture Books

The activities described below assume the use of picture story books in which the full plot of the story can be drawn from the pictures alone. If the book's pages are mainly filled with an illustration, and only one or two lines of text on each two-page spread, then a complete story will be clear from the pictures. Children's books that have more words than this often do not have this quality.



Comprehension Activities With Picture Stories—The Language Helper Does The Talking

Simplest activities: The language helper describes just what is clearly visible on each page. Harder: The language helper tells the story as a simple sequence of events, still sticking to the visible facts.

Still harder: The language helper tells the picture story fully, talking about unobservable motives, causes, reasons, etc., and perhaps drawing a moral (or morals)

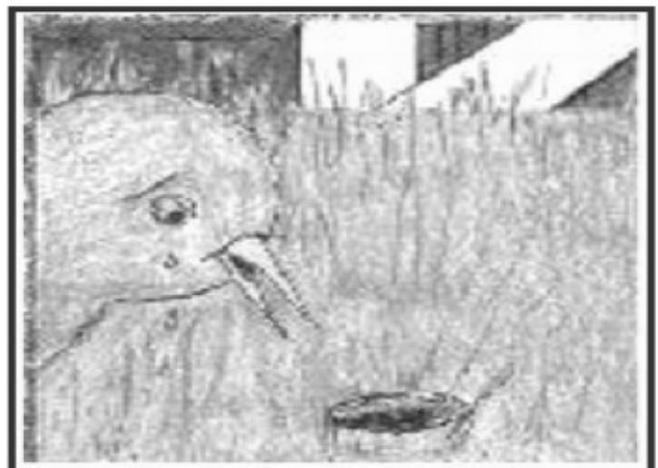
from the story.

This can be made more challenging if the learners familiarize themselves with the story beforehand by examining the pictures, but then do not watch the pictures as they are listening to the story.

Such stories can be tape recorded and 'massaged.' (for 'how to massage a text', see the Thomsons' Phase 2: Storybuilding handbook.)

Speaking Activities—The Learner Does The Talking

The learner attempts to tell the language helper the whole story with relatively little interaction. This is an excellent activity for learners who are at the phase of learning in which they need to talk a lot, expressing their own ideas with their own words, in order to increase their fluency.



Interactive Activities—The Learner And Language Helper Create A Story Together

Many scholars believe that interacting in the target language is more valuable than simply listening or simply talking. In addition, this may be the smoothest way to use picture stories. In comprehension activities where the language helper does all the talking s/he may often struggle attempting to figure out the pictures on his or her own. As the learner interacts with the helper, both can understand more what the pictures were meant to communicate and which parts of the new culture are being revealed by the helper's misinterpretations. (See detailed activities and tips in the Thomsons' Phase 2: Storybuilding handbook.)

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You can download the original document here — [Using Wordless Picture Books](#)