

Wordless Power

by | Lisa M. Shaia

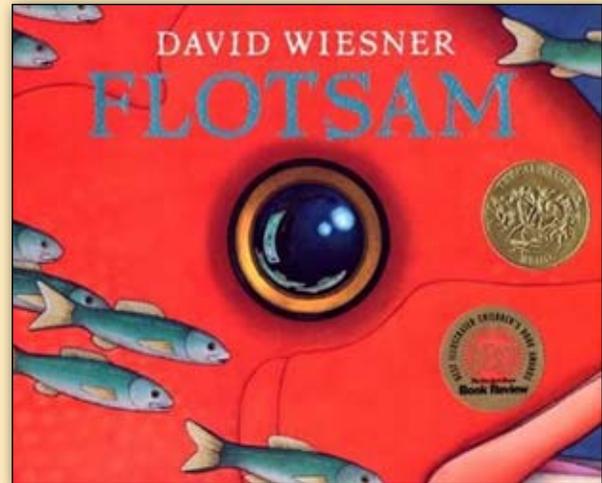
• Keep 'em Reading •

Grades
PK–2, 3–4

Wordless books provide so many learning opportunities for students of all abilities, especially with ESL learners. Wordless books give young readers the opportunity to be in charge—a space where they can control the characters, emotions, motives, and interactions. They can take on the role of narrator, or morph into different character roles. They can retell the story a different way each time. The possibilities are endless! Here are some ways you can incorporate them into your classroom.

Wordless Book Suggestions

- *Anno's Journey* by Mitsumasa Anno (Putnam, 1997) and his other wordless picture book classics are readily available and offer concepts such as counting and letter identification to use with the preschool and kindergarten ages.
- Chris Van Allsburg's complex illustrations in his wordless and nearly-wordless books will appeal to older students.
- David Wiesner has won Caldecott medals and honors for his wordless books, including *Flotsam* (Clarion, 2006) and *Sector 7* (Clarion, 1999).
- In Barbara Lehman's Caldecott honor-winning *The Red Book* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), follow the story of a reader who literally gets lost in a book. All ages will enjoy this one.
- In *Chalk* by Bill Thompson (Marshall Cavendish, 2010), three children use chalk to brighten a rainy day. Watch their creations come to life and nearly pop off the pages.
- In Elisha Cooper's *Beaver is Lost* (Schwartz & Wade, 2010), a beaver is accidentally transported out of the river and into the city.



- In *Wave* by Suzy Lee (Chronicle, 2008), a young girl plays on the beach. Is the ocean playing right back?
- The Caldecott-winning *The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney (Little, Brown, and Company, 2009) brings Aesop's fable to life in this story of friendship.
- The surprise ending in *The Chicken Thief* by Beatrice Rodriguez (Enchanted Lion, 2010) will delight students in all grades.

Reading Wordless Books

There are a variety of ways you can share wordless books. You might consider:

- Projecting the pages for the entire class to see at once using a projector or Smart Board.
- Writing a grant request or asking parents to donate multiple copies of your favorite wordless book.



- “Reading” the book to the class first, without saying any words. Get cozy in a reading corner and let the children absorb the story one page spread at a time. Then you can ask them to tell the story to you on a second reading. If you’d prefer, you can read the story cold. Have the children predict what will happen before each page turn. There is an added element of suspense reading it this way.
- Creating a Wordless Book Jar. Cut small strips of story-coded colored paper to hand out to your students. For instance, use blue for character names, pink for settings, green for types of relationships, and yellow for conflicts. Put the strips in a jar, and have each student choose one. As you read the story, call on various colors (students) to share the particular plot element that is going on in the story at that particular time. This “choose-your-own story” approach will be a hit because the children will be able to be part of telling the story. Reread the story several different times using this technique so every student has a chance to participate.

Word Bingo

Create bingo cards for the wordless book of your choice. For instance, a *Chalk* bingo card could include the words: playground, chalk, dinosaur, rain, raincoat, boy, girl, sun, red, yellow, blue, green. You can have a silent bingo session where you give students thirty seconds on each page

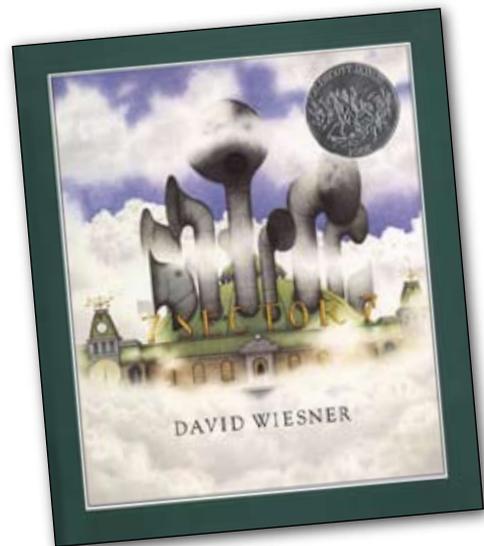
spread to find matching bingo squares. Visit <http://saksena.net/partygames/bingo/> or similar sites to generate free bingo cards using the terminology you choose.

“Where’s” Game

Create a “Where in the World Is . . .” game for the wordless books. Pass out different copies of books to each library table. See how observant each table can be. For instance,

Find the following in David Wiesner’s books:

- a propeller (*Flotsam*)
- a pier (*Flotsam*)
- a snow hat (*Flotsam*)
- a nametag with the name “Spot” (*Flotsam*)
- NORTH backward (*Sector 7*)
- Pencil (*Sector 7*)
- 29a (*Sector 7*)
- Bridgewater (*Sector 7*)
- Model #36582043 (*Sector 7*)
- Restroom sign (*Sector 7*)
- Stop Sign (*Sector 7*)
- How many frogs’ eyes can you find in *Tuesday*?



Find the following in Chris Van Allsburg’s *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*:

- yo-yo
- gondola
- radio
- How many windows are in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*?

A Story is Worth 1,000 Words

Have each student come up with a list of words that come to mind when they read a wordless story of your choosing. Use construction paper to create word blocks to decorate a bulletin board or hallway with their words. Have the students list the words aloud to you as you jot them down. Avoid word repetition. Can the class come up with 100 different words? How about 200? 500? 1,000?

Spelling

Incorporate students' spelling words into library time. Have a contest to see who can create a story to match a wordless picture book of your choosing using the most vocabulary words.

Musical Activities: Songs to Get Words Flowing

- “The Secret Word” by Hap Palmer from *One Little Sound*. This interactive song engages children to decode mysteries while getting a chance to jump, turn, hop, and clap.
 - “I’m Thinking of a Word That Starts with C” by Michael and Jill Gallina from *Alphabet in Action*. Children will be able to call out words such as “car,” “cow,” “candy,” and “cat” in this little ditty.
 - “N Words” by Michael and Jill Gallina from *Alphabet in Action*. Rhyming words try to steer away from the winning words like “nose” and “nail.”
 - “Word Families” by Dr. Jean from *Totally Reading*. Repeat word families such as -at, -un, -op, -it, -et in this tune.
 - “Rapping Words” by Dr. Jean from *Totally Reading*. Define the words “is,” “it,” “she,” “he,” “we,” and “me” in this hip-hop song.
 - “Compound Words” by Stephen Fite from *Cool To Be In School*. Learn compound words such as “air-plane,” “space-ship” and “play-ground” in this fast-paced tune.
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- “A Word for That” by Barenaked Ladies from *Snack Time*. Build the children’s vocabulary in this silly song. Learn the words “frenulum,” “uvula,” and “philtrum.”

Lisa M. Shaia is the children’s librarian at Oliver Wolcott Library in Litchfield, Connecticut. She has written articles for the American Library Association and the Collaborative Summer Library Program’s Children’s Manual.

