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A Picture Book is Worth a Thousand Words:  
Oral Language Development

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research study investigated the observed and reported experiences of my kindergarten students when wordless picture books were used to facilitate oral language. Listening and speaking skills were observed and documented to measure vocabulary growth in greater detail. Fifteen kindergarteners participated in the study that involved creating their own wordless books, performances, group discussions, and retelling activities. The study focused on comprehension, literary elements, imagination, listening and speaking skills. Analysis of the data indicated that wordless picture books enhanced and developed student vocabulary and comprehension. The findings indicated using multiple readings, a variety of retelling and comprehension activities, performances, and vocabulary lists would help to increase oral language development, interest in reading, and comprehension levels. Results from the pre-surveys and post-surveys indicated that students felt confident using wordless picture books and showed an interest in using them in other areas.

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## **My Researcher Stance**

Growing up with seven people under one roof sounded like a farm or maybe even a zoo from time to time with all of the hustle and bustle. Similar to these places, our household was also full of singing, laughter, and a lot of chatter. Growing up in such a vocal family is likely what has shaped my love for language as both a child and an adult.

My father was an elementary school principal. His voice was loud and blustery, setting the foundation for order, rules, and logic throughout the home. My mother was a kindergarten teacher. Her voice was soft and compassionate, setting the tone for a caring and well oiled machine. My Nana also lived in our home. She could be both loud and soft all at one time. She was an animated storyteller and a whispering friend telling secrets in our ears. My brother, Greg was very musical. He could be both loud and soft as he played the piano, sang songs, or acted out a scene from a play. My sister, Jennifer explored other languages, making it difficult to understand, but leaving me feeling intrigued at the same time. She remains eclectic in her approach to life and has taught me to appreciate it. My little brother, Patrick was very logical and sequential. His voice was quiet and secretive as he mixed potions in the basement and quietly documented his new scientific creations. Today, he applies his love of creating new things particularly when it comes to cooking. Lastly, there was me, Abby. I was a mixture of all of the people in my house. I grew to be logical, compassionate, animated, musical, explorative, and quiet. I was an explorer of the language of all the people in my house and how they were using it.

As I grew, this curiosity of language followed me through my education and into my own teaching. I was excited when I was informed that I would be teaching Oral Language in my full-day Kindergarten classroom. However, after a year of using my district's program, I found that my students lacked motivation and creativity. My district's oral language program was meant for students to express thoughts and feelings, to describe what was happening in a picture and share thoughts, feeling, and previous experiences that may relate to the picture. Everything the children said had to be written on a sentence strip and later organized for sentence construction, grammar, and context. Many teachers have expressed how difficult and time consuming this program can be and we have spent hours determining what could be a better way to enhance its meaning. It should encourage students to engage in the text and each other in thoughtful discussion by creating a framework for students to explore texts and consider different sides of an issue before drawing conclusions. Opportunities for discussion allow for a more meaningful conclusion based on students own thoughts and purposeful discussion. It would be beneficial for a teacher to determine language growth and structure. It also should tell a teacher what areas need to be developed and what texts might be available to assist in this area.

A lot has changed since I began teaching in my district five years ago. My peers have also noted several changes in literacy and language programs over the decades in which they have taught; moving from initial teaching alphabet (ITA), to basal readers, whole language, phonics programs, and so on. However, it has been increasingly difficult in the area of language development no matter what

program has been used because students are missing out on the experiences that I was lucky enough to have as a child. While my childhood was spent playing outside with neighbors, building tree houses, and playing dress up in the basement, my students are instead spending countless hours watching television or playing videogames. My childhood also consisted of playing school on the back porch with the boys in my neighborhood, acting out stories with my siblings in the living room, or making up games and songs on family trips; my students are spending hours on the computer.

On the other hand, there have also been children in my classroom who have not spent hours watching television or on the computer because they do not have these luxuries. In fact, there are some who have spent hours alone or have been witness to things their eyes should never have seen. Their language is very different. Their words are hard even for me to describe. Some students either have very limited vocabulary or a vocabulary that is inappropriate for kindergarten. My study of language development was created for these children. It was written for the children who have yet to find their voices, those who have not had the opportunity to explore what is beyond the four walls of their home, and for those who have yet to experience books that can take them to a place in the world that does not exist for them. There are children in my class who have also been privileged and have had experiences in their lives that even I have yet to experience. But this study is for them as well. They are, after all, only five years old.

One day as I sat listening to a presentation in Camie Modjadidi's ESL

Learner, Family, and Community course, a student presented wordless picture books as an option for assisting her students with English language development. The light bulb instantly turned on. This was what my program needed. It provided a story and opportunity for the children to create something of their own. After years of feeling like my program was a disappointment, finally I was excited to teach oral language and revisit my roots of language development. Now was the opportunity to provide an environment conducive for using such language.

Wordless picture books greatly impact a student's ability to tell stories, use their imagination, and foster creativity. These books also allow for exploration with new vocabulary, word play, language development, listening, and speaking skills. Wordless picture books permit children to express themselves as both the author and illustrator as they create and recreate their own versions of the book. Children build off of their prior knowledge and extend learning experiences through text to text, text to self, and text to world. The creativity stimulated by wordless books has encouraged students to look more closely at story details, to examine story elements, and to understand how a story's text is organized. Wordless picture books introduced children to concepts they needed to apply when learning to read. Students built their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

Therefore, my research question was: What will be my observed and reported experiences when I integrate wordless picture books into my oral language program?

## Literature Review

### Introduction

Implementing wordless picture books into an oral language program allows children to build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for individuals. Using this type of visual literacy allows children to explore and expand their vocabulary through storytelling and imagination. The students' ability to create their own story eliminates the fear of being incorrect and allows the child to express and explain themselves as listening skills, speaking skills, and vocabulary are strengthened.

### Visual Literacy

**Benefits of implementing picture books.** Stewing (2001) found “that children who have not learned how to see will not be able to write, not because they cannot spell, but because they have nothing to say. These concerns have led educators to develop visual literacy programs” (as cited in Stewig, 2001). Curriculum in the classroom is vastly enhanced by supporting all subject areas with age appropriate literature. Some researchers agree that instruction integrating the visual literacy and the arts is often presented in isolation from language arts curriculum (Ramsey, 1993; Stewig, 2001). However, when combined, these areas can enhance what is being taught rather than hinder performance. “The task can be given in less than 15 minutes and provides children with authentic, enjoyable experiences” (Paris & Paris, 2001, p. 25). For example, good literature presents new concepts accurately, visually, and help students make connections. A picture book encourages wonder and excitement about the world, and reading becomes

more enjoyable for the students. When reading a wordless picture book, the children's knowledge is stirred to new heights with new ideas, and adds rich multi-layered connections to their understanding. "Picture books can open up a whole world of visual literacy for readers of all ages" (Storey, 1994, p. 5).

Readers both young and old view picture books as short, simple, and easy to read. The art itself tells the story, allowing for new interpretations by each of its readers. The responsibility of the artist rests in the work and its ability to convey truth, beauty, beliefs, and conflict.

"Bright colorful illustrations initially beckon people's attention in making a selection of a picture book" (Narahara, 1998, p. 4). As readers continue, they become interested in the imaginative play of drawings and paintings, telling stories of learning how to look at things in new ways. Tan (2001) explains that by encouraging visual reading, the meaning is left to the reader to find for themselves, rather than being overtly stated or implied in traditional literature. Further questioning allows the reading to find his own meaning and seek closure through his own experiences. The readers are able to make inferences and continue playful inquiry. "A successful picture book is one in which everything is presented to the reader as a speculative proposition, wrapped in invisible quotation marks, as if to say 'what do you make of this'" (Tan, 2001, p. 10). This engages the readers and allows for connections to existing knowledge or to previous texts. The remarkable element in this type of literature is that it allows the story to be told with endless possibilities and without fear of being incorrect. Several studies explain that numerous educators recommend using wordless

picture books with children to support emergent literacy. “Wordless picture books can be used to instruct children at different levels of their literacy development” (Hu & Commeyras, 2008, p. 5). With no written vocabulary to wrestle with, young children can enjoy wonderful moments telling the tales in their own words. Children can look through a wordless picture book, reveal their own versions and compare their classmates’ similarities and differences. Children can explore vocabulary by (a) naming or enumerating objects, (b) inventing dialogue, (c) making comparisons, (d) describing and interpreting action and events, and (e) predicting and evaluating outcomes.

**Combining literary elements.** “Wordless picture books could also be used in the classroom to further develop a child’s sensitivity to literary elements” (Jett-Simpson, 1976, p. 19). Wordless picture books elicit storytelling through pictures and inferencing. Children are challenged by using inferencing skills in oral language such as reading patterns, decoding, and syntax. “Many research studies have shown that children make significant gains in various areas of development through shared storybook experiences” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). The complexity of language increases, while students’ storytelling expression improves through using wordless picture books. Students become aware of the character’s emotions and include more literacy elements through picture book story telling. The readers’ close connection to the story allows the child to ... examine illustrations for what they have to add to characterization, action, setting, or mood” (Storey, 1994, p. 6).

Visual literacy is fostered by repetitive readings or showings, with time in

between, followed by discussion of understanding. This allows children the opportunity to process that every part of the story is connected to the following part of the story. Not all children walk away with the same understandings since they may have experienced the stories differently. Each artistic element has a vocabulary of its own. There are books written for the purpose of children to find hidden objects or clues that will help them find meaning in the pictures, similar to the children creating their own story from wordless picture books. Using the drawings of wordless picture books allows children to build focus on descriptive details within the stories. Having children tell a story orally can help students develop sequencing skills and identify fiction story elements. Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989).

**Incorporating storytelling and imagination.** “Telling stories in the classroom furthers oral and written language development, as well as furthering comprehension for reading and listening” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 159). It is important to expose children to a wide variety of literature styles in order to develop artistic taste. It is valuable when sharing the literature with children to compare and contrast all versions of the story. While hearing it told aloud, the children will take notice of the rhythm and sounds of the piece. “In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and

interaction” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158).

Using wordless picture books allows young readers to familiarize themselves with the story before retelling through recall and some prompts from the teacher. “They have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children demonstrate an ease with picture comments and understanding of the story. This provides a tool through which children’s understanding of narrative elements and relationships can be measured. The children are able to retract a statement, make changes, and make predictions about the story. According to Tan (2001), “it’s about showing and telling, a window for learning to ‘read’ in a broad sense, exploring relationships between words, pictures and the words we experience every day” (p. 4). This type of exploration with picture books can be acted out in role playing activities, creative drama, bookmaking, or puppetry. According to Hu and Commeyras (2008) “wordless picture books, the “pure” picture books or the “almost” wordless picture books, rely on illustrations to tell a story and offer a surprising variety of topics, themes, and levels of difficulty” (p. 4). Von Drasek (2006) agrees that a picture book should allow for an engaging storyline, striking language and a sense of wonder about the world. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless. Several studies show that children exhibit a broad range of responses when sharing stories in the classroom (Sipe and Mcguire, 2006; Gerecke, 1989; Goularte, 2002). The students relate the story to their own lives, other stories, themes, or characters. When children use these experiences in their writing it

helps them to establish meaningful and sequential stories.

The expectations the teacher may have for the text may in fact be totally different than what the children vocalize. The experiences of the students may be different than those of the teacher. “Picture books tend to represent that window of imagination: strange play, disruption and child-like wonderment that is always available, but only if you’re willing to look up and notice it” (Tan, 2001, p. 9). Providing children with imaginative experiences allows the children’s words to develop without prompting and is based on the child’s prior knowledge of both content and vocabulary.

### **Oral Language**

Picture book stories are for all ages. At approximately three to four years of age, children develop a scheme for conventional storytelling, and from the fourth year on they construct the story as a complex whole, with a purpose and a goal (Marjanovic-Umek, Kranjc, & Fekonja, 2002, p. 4). The development of oral language is one of children’s most impressive accomplishments that occur during the first five years of life” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 157). Children’s language development is often based on the experiences the children already had with language, whether it be hearing murmurs from inside the womb, responding to stimulus through coos and giggles, or experimenting with language structure in everyday occurrences. These language exchanges greatly impact the amount of words in children’s vocabulary and affect how the children use their vocabulary. Many studies show that young children’s mental functioning is related to visualization and direct experience (Isbell, Sobol,

Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004; Marjanovic-Umek, Kranjc, & Fekonja, 2002).

“Young children’s preschool experiences with stories and books have long been considered an important influence on language development, and relatedly, on their reading and writing performance in school” (Mistry & Herman, 1991, p. 4). Picture books serve as vehicles for a variety of communications activities, including choral reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

**Effective development of listening skills.** “Storytelling is the most effective way to develop listening skills. Storytelling also provides opportunity to experience the difference between listening quietly and listening actively, by participating in the process” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). When children are very young, their first form of communication is listening. As time goes by these listeners begin expressing their own messages through the verbal language of what they experienced as toddlers. Storytelling begins to construct as students enter pre-school and kindergarten. “For many children, hearing stories read aloud by their teachers is deeply pleasurable and emotionally satisfying” (Sipe & McGuire, 2006, p. 6). The stories are very simple and rely on prior experiences. The children are making coherent connections from their life to the text in order to connect events that seem reasonable.

According to Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lawrence (2004), the “early childhood teacher can provide opportunities for young children to play with language, while gaining an appreciation of the sounds and meaning in words” (p. 157). Knowing the importance of oral language in children’s early development, it becomes the responsibility of early childhood educators to offer opportunities

for word play while teaching letter sounds and word meaning. “Children can hear new words and quickly acquire partial meanings of the words based on the illustrations, the linguistic elements of the text, and the performance of the read-aloud. Repeated readings can lead incrementally to more complete knowledge of new words” (Leung, 2008, p. 166). Storytelling and story reading are two methods highly touted by educational researchers to achieve these goals. The primary differences between the two methods are that language growth is the focus for story reading, and storytelling is focused on listening skills. Storytelling seems to have further reaching effects orally, and language development fosters comprehension for reading and listening. Wang and Cameron (1996) explain, “from face to face communication to reading and writing, there lies a continuum from contextualization through decontextualization, to further recontextualization” (p. 4). Decontextualization is the type of language one uses in a book report, storytelling, or when taking a written or oral test. As language develops, the different context in which one speaks also strengthens. At this time, the listener is now becoming a mature speaker.

**Effective development of speaking skills.** According to Storey (1994) “not everyone takes the same information away from the book” (p. 8). Children’s narration of wordless picture books may change according to the type of interaction they have with their partner. “What matters are ideas, feelings and the pictures and words that build them” (Tan, 2001, p. 4). Decontextualization significantly impacts children’s narration as a partner in one context may speak differently in another. These interactions greatly impact one’s oral language as

vocabulary diminishes and the number of words decreases. This occurs regularly in the classroom. The type of language children use when speaking with their peers is often different from the language children use when addressing the entire class. “Exchanges between students lean toward a more well rounded understanding of what was seen” (Storey, 2004, p. 8). The presentation of picture books through several settings allows children the freedom to speak with one another in a variety of ways, therefore impacting their use of vocabulary. Implementing wordless picture books into an oral language program allows children to build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for each individual. “Challenging them to talk and write about what they see could help them to develop stronger speaking and writing skills” (Stewig, 2001, p. 309). Reading for meaning without having to deal with word identification is an obvious advantage of working with wordless picture books. “For the young child this type of early reading behavior is linkage to the continuation of learning to read and enjoy it. The value of the child’s verbal accomplishments are internalized: the child experiences good feelings about books and reading” (Gerecke, 1989, p. 11).

### **Summary**

Children’s listening, speaking, and oral language skills are greatly impacted through the implementation of wordless picture books into an oral language curriculum. Wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary. Their imagination and storytelling skills are pressed to new limits as these picture

books eliminate the fear of being incorrect and allow the children to express and explain their thoughts and emotions freely. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Wordless Picture Books provide emergent readers with the opportunity to use pictures to “tell” a story. Wordless books enhance vocabulary, language development, and creativity at all stages of cognitive development, and in content areas. The creativity stimulated by wordless books encourages students to look more closely at story details, to examine story elements, and to understand how a story’s text is organized. Wordless picture books introduce children to concepts they will need to apply when learning to read. Students build their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and eventually produce their own version of the wordless picture book.

### **Setting**

I am a full-day kindergarten teacher in northeastern Pennsylvania. My school is one of five elementary schools in the district. My school serves students in kindergarten through second grade. The geographical location of the school is unique in contrast to other schools in the district because Hamilton is located in a rural area ten miles from the city of Stroudsburg. Hamilton is an emerging suburban setting with many flourishing businesses, industrial parks, and housing developments. Stroudsburg and East Stroudsburg have recently seen a large influx of families from New York moving to the area with many parents maintaining jobs in New York and commuting to the city each day. Many students often miss a full day of school to return to the city for doctor and dentist appointments. Educators at Hamilton Elementary have started noting these instances and are feeling the effects that the urban elementary schools have been experiencing over

the past few years.

The socioeconomic status of my classroom is greatly divided as three children come from low income families, ten children come from lower-middle class families, and two come from upper-middle class families. There is one principal, two secretaries, and one guidance counselor in the building. We have 16 regular education teachers, one special education teacher with a paraprofessional support staff, and one emotional support teacher with a paraprofessional staff. We also have two part-time Instructional Support teachers, five reading specialists, and two math specialists. We have two art teachers, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, and one librarian with a paraprofessional.

The school building was renovated several years ago. A new wing and several new classrooms have been added onto the building. There are three computers and one wall-mounted television per classroom. The classrooms also have a mounted screen for use with an overhead or video projector. There is a wall mounted dry erase board across the front of the room and two bulletin boards along the back. There is a laptop cart available for use in the school and one projector to share among the classrooms. The school has one smart board per grade level, two digital cameras, and a digital video camera.

I utilize every inch of my classroom. My students sit at tables rather than desks and each table is labeled as a shape. The children work at these tables during group work, writing, and partner activities. I typically instruct my students in the back of the room rather than the front. We sit around our brightly colored

carpet where I have bulletin boards with calendar activities, a morning message, and my math word wall. Alongside the carpet are two easels; one holding a pocket chart and the other holding literacy charts. There is also a Venn diagram chart hanging on the back of the children's cubbies that line the carpet. In the corner of the carpet is my purple rocking chair and a small red chair for the child of the week. When I am not instructing from the carpet, I am either using the dry erase board located at the front of the room or working with reading or math groups at my kidney bean shaped table. I have seven center locations around the room including math, art, listening, poetry, reading, science, and writing. The centers are separated from one another to provide quiet areas for the students to work.

### **Participants**

I conducted my study with 15 students in my kindergarten classroom. My class consisted of nine boys and six girls. I had two African American students and 13 Caucasian students. I had one student who repeated kindergarten from a different classroom in the building. I did not have any students in Instructional Support, Emotional Support, Learning Support, Speech, or ESL. I did not have any students who received occupational or physical therapy.

### **Procedure**

I divided my unit into two aspects of oral literacy comprised of speaking and listening, and identifying story elements using wordless picture books. Students explored wordless picture books and discussed the specific elements of the illustration that "told" the story. They learned to "read" illustrations as they

looked at the ways in which pictures revealed information about the characters, setting, and plot of a story. Each lesson in the unit was taught for 20 minutes everyday for two weeks. The same wordless picture book was used during the two week period. Students closely examined the components of the book promoting oral language in a variety of classroom activities. Students worked individually, in pairs, small groups, and whole group instruction. Students created a presentation and literary magazine at the completion of each unit.

First, my study proposal was approved by The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) which ensured that my study was not placing students at risk (see Appendix A). The explicit procedures for each unit began as I explained my study to my students and distributed my parental consent forms to my class (see Appendix B). I showed the children my field journal and allowed them to ask questions. I showed my kindergarten students the books that we would use, the charts we would make, and the logs that I would be carrying around the room so that they were less likely to ask these questions while I was conducting observations. I also sought permission from my principal (see Appendix C) and took time to explain my study to her in great detail as I had done with my students. I received permission from 15 parents and my principal.

Once I had permission from the HSIRB, my principal, and the parents, I began my data collection. I interviewed (see Appendix D) my students to determine their prior reading experience. I then distributed surveys (Appendix E) to my students to determine the childrens' attitudes toward wordless picture books. I provided opportunities for my students to preview the wordless picture books

being used in my study as well as other picture books located in my classroom library (see Appendix K). This time allowed students the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings about using wordless pictures books and about being a student in my study. A mid-study survey (see Appendix E) and a mid-study interview (see Appendix D) were used after the third book in the study. A post-survey (see Appendix E) and post-interview (see Appendix D) were used when the study was completed to measure vocabulary growth and interest.

Each book was broken up into a unit that was divided into two sections. The sections corresponded to listening and speaking components of oral language as well as story elements and composition that correlated to oral literacy. The sections were taught for five days each. After completion of the unit, a new book was introduced following the same structured design of two sections taught over a two week time span. The same book was viewed every day throughout the unit. Daily viewing allowed for activities such as Think/Pair/Share activity and discussion questions. New vocabulary for each book was generated by the students and was recorded on chart paper. A new list for each story hung in the classroom throughout the study. The class monitored the list and acknowledged new, old, or similar vocabulary words throughout the study. A personal vocabulary sheet was added into a personal dictionary for the children to place into their own writing folders (see Appendix F). Students used the words that were formulated to write sentences and children created drawings based on a page from the story. The class examined the language that was used and compared it to

the language used on their vocabulary lists. The class highlighted these words on sentence strips so that children could continue to revisit the vocabulary words from each story. Critiques, biographies, awards, and videos about the author were shared so that students could gather information about the authors and illustrators. As a group, the class created a literary magazine that included information about the author and book. This was done for each picture book and author (see Appendix G).

The second week of each unit focused on story elements and composition through oral literacy. Students learned that pictures were an important element of storybooks. Pictures helped students understand the elements of each story, including the characters, setting, and plot. Illustrations also provided valuable clues when students had difficulty reading words. Students were asked to identify the meaning of the story elements. These words were again charted for students to reference. The meaning of these words were referenced to regularly as the study progressed. The group used a graphic organizer to make note of the story elements: characters, setting, and problem/solution (see Appendix H). Working in pairs, students used sticky notes to write stories to accompany the pictures. Sticky notes and a Four-Square graphic organizer (see Appendix I) emphasized the basic story elements of plot, setting, and characters as well. Students used this information to write their own story about the picture book. The vocabulary list that was created at the beginning of the unit was available in their writing folder as a reference. Students created their own artistic interpretation of the wordless picture book using a variety of mediums such as watercolors, puppetry, clay, etc. Presentations (see Appendix J) of the wordless picture books were created by the

students. In closure of each unit, students compared their own stories with other stories written by classmates, the group story that was created the week prior, and the original version of the story. Lastly, the class examined the language used in their own stories and added new words to the vocabulary lists (see Appendix F).

### **Data Sources**

I gathered multiple data sources at different points throughout my study: student surveys, student generated artifacts, student presentations, observational data, and field log entries. Observations and discussions included think/pair/share activities, vocabulary comparisons, sequencing, picture book discussions, and identifying story elements. Student work included vocabulary charts, sentence strips, drawings about the stories, sticky notes, and personal storybooks. Projects included a literary magazine about the author or illustrator and an artistic representation of the wordless picture book. There was one presentation at the end of each unit that students created on their own. Two graphic organizers were used throughout each unit including a four square writing grid and a Venn Diagram to compare stories. A vocabulary reference list was added to each child's writing portfolio for each unit.

I kept a field log of events in the classroom that contained students' actions, reactions, and comments during lessons. Observations were written as they occurred and reflections were noted following the lesson. Reflecting on my teaching assisted in refining and analyzing lesson plans and assessing the value of the activities. Throughout the study, reflection on my current lessons proved essential in planning lessons for future teaching practices.

The following are the different forms of data collection I used to complete my study.

**Field log.** I kept a record of conversations, interviews, and observations that occurred during my class in my field log. I carried a clipboard around with me to record all of my observations and quotes. I organized my field log by creating two columns. In the left column, I wrote my observations and student quotations. In the right column, I wrote my reflections about the events that occurred. Organizing my log into two columns separated the facts from the assumptions. Recording observations, behaviors, and statements that my students had made, allowed me to reflect upon my teaching and the events that occurred. These observations guided my instruction throughout my study. This was very helpful when analyzing my data and helped guide future lessons.

**Student interviews.** I conducted individual interviews with my students to learn more about them and their feelings about the new instructional techniques I was going to use in class. I used five questions to guide my interviews (see Appendix D). The questions focused on the students' experience with literature. This was meant to show me what types of books my students enjoyed reading and supported my ideas about what topics would be of interest to my students. Each child was interviewed once before, during, and after my study. The information gained from the interviews gave me valuable data to help guide the process of writing my theme statements.

**Student surveys.** I performed independent surveys with my students to learn more about their feelings toward wordless picture books. I asked five

questions in my survey (see Appendix E). The questions focused on the students' feelings about books with words as opposed to books without words. I also questioned their experience with both types of text. This was meant to examine each child's experience with wordless picture books and determine their attitudes toward the books prior to my study. Each child was interviewed once before, during, and after my study.

**Student work.** MacLean and Mohr (1999) state, "Student work may be the centerpiece of your data, helping you to understand and interpret all the rest" (p. 47). Throughout my study, students worked in large group, several small groups, and pairs to complete tasks. Multiple groupings gave students the opportunity to examine wordless pictures books with peers and to use and share vocabulary that was learned over the course of the study. Students created their own wordless picture books, developed vocabulary charts, critiqued literature, and held group discussions which supported instruction. I photocopied and kept samples of student work to exhibit the progress that had been made and used this information to modify my instruction as needed for future lessons.

Additional student work included vocabulary charts, sentence strips, drawings about the story, sticky notes, and personal storybooks. Projects included a literary magazine about the author or illustrator and an artistic representation of the wordless picture book.

**Student presentations.** I wanted to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned. At the end of each unit, students presented their own versions of the wordless picture book that we had been viewing.

Students presented using methods that they chose themselves and were assessed using a storybook rubric (see Appendix J). The presentations allowed students to use language that they had learned from the current wordless picture book along with previous books. This allowed students to present their interpretation of the book in a comfortable and engaging manner.

**Vocabulary lists.** I used vocabulary lists (see Appendix F) as soon as my study began. Students viewed wordless picture books and I charted their words as they described each page piece of literature. The vocabulary lists were used as a tool for students to reference as they explored other wordless picture books and to support their own stories. I used the lists to measure the growth of the group's vocabulary and shared the growth with the students as the study progressed.

**Venn diagrams.** A Venn Diagram (see Appendix H) was used to compare stories. The comparisons ranged from plot and setting to vocabulary and sentence structure. The Venn Diagrams exhibited which areas of oral language and literacy needed to be addressed and which areas had evolved. It created a visual for students as my study developed and allowed students to gauge their own progress.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was an essential element of my research study. In order to fully ensure trustworthiness within my study, I made certain to abide by ethical research practices, and presented the authenticity of the happenings within my classroom.

First, my study proposal was approved by The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board which ensured that my study was not placing students at risk (see Appendix A). Next, the principal of my elementary school received a consent form (see Appendix C). Hendricks (2006) described the essential components that comprise a consent form. The consent form explained the reason for the study, that participation in the study would occur during school hours, that confidentiality would be upheld, and that participation was wholly voluntary. Any student who wished to withdraw from the study could do so without penalty. I then described the study to my students and distributed participant consent forms (see Appendix B) to parents' of student participants, informing students and parents of the study in greater detail. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) recommend discussing the study with students before the study takes action in the classroom. The discussion with my students provided an essential opportunity for me to answer my students' questions regarding the study. I also showed my kindergarten students the books that we would use, the charts we would make, and the logs that I planned to carry around the room so that they were less likely to ask these questions while I conducted my observations.

The data that were recorded were kept and coded in a password protected computer and located in a locked filing cabinet. I was the only one who had

access to these materials. To protect my participants' identity, each student was given a pseudonym, as suggested by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005). I made certain that their names, our school name, and the names of staff members remained confidential. No names were kept on student work, but were immediately replaced with pseudonyms. The key for the pseudonyms was kept on a password protected computer. At the end of my research study, original work was returned to my students, and my field log was destroyed.

As suggested by Hendricks (2006), I collected several forms of data to assure the credibility of my study. This was known as triangulation of data. Hendricks defined triangulation as, "a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed" (pg. 72). I gathered multiple data sources at different points during the study: student surveys, student generated artifacts, student presentations, observational data, and field log entries. I kept a field log of events in the classroom that related to my study. The field log contained students' actions, reactions, and comments during lessons. Observations were written as they occurred and reflections were noted following the lesson. Reflecting on my teaching assisted in refining and analyzing lesson plans and assessing the value of the activities. Throughout the study, reflection on my current lessons proved essential in planning lessons for future teaching practices. Reflective memos assisted in understanding the view of my students and their learning. It also allowed me to make decisions and changes throughout my study. This helped me to understand any biases amidst my study.

Being self-reflective throughout the study helped me honestly analyze and

report data to my research study group members. They informed me when any bias interfered with my interpretation of data or study procedures. MacLean and Mohr (1999) established the importance of acknowledging biases while carrying out my study. Before conducting my study, it was important that I looked at the assumptions I was making about my students and their performance. This was my fifth year teaching kindergarten and I had witnessed a variety of student abilities. At times, it was possible to misjudge what my students were capable of achieving. The district's current language program did not have any criteria to measure growth or ability. In light of this, I had to be sure to include activities and assessments that would measure student progress in the area of language and early literacy skills. It was important that I began "gathering information from participants about their knowledge, values, beliefs, past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, or perceptions" (Hendricks, 2006, p. 89). I did this through a combination of interviews and survey questions. This type of data allowed me to determine the abilities' of my students before beginning the study and established what steps needed to be taken to address the needs' of my students.

Another existing bias was that I anticipated that my students would be excited to begin using wordless picture books because their reactions had been minimal with the current oral language program. However, many students were not familiar with wordless picture books and found it hard to understand that a book could be written without any words. I needed to remember that not all children had the same experiences with books and were not as quick to participate in such an unfamiliar learning experience.

MacLean and Mohr (1999) recommend meeting as a group to gain further insight and advice associated with our studies. A teacher research support group consisting of myself and three other degree candidates met once a week throughout the data collection process to discuss the progress of our individual studies and we offered each other ideas and encouragement. We also exchanged phone numbers, email addresses, and times to meet with one another outside of class in order to make ourselves available to any candidate that needed guidance. We were able to read each other's field logs, surveys, plans for future activities, and receive feedback in an encouraging atmosphere.

## My Story

### When I Grow Up

Kindergarten students always find it difficult to believe that teachers were once children too. The possibility of your first teacher being just like you seems like something out of a story book. In fact, many of my students have asked questions about where my bed was in the school, where I took a bath, and whether the cafeteria was open all night. You guessed it! Kindergarteners think their teachers live in the school. I could not possibly have a house or a car or even parents! Sharing these experiences with my students tended to alleviate any anxiety my students had prior to starting something new. When it came to sharing experiences with wordless picture books, I was left with only the literature that I had found for my literature review. I did not have any prior experiences with these books as a child. However, as an adult, I found myself drawn to something new. This time, instead of revealing a story of my past experience, I shared this experience with the students in my classroom, and they loved that we were teaching *each other* along the way.

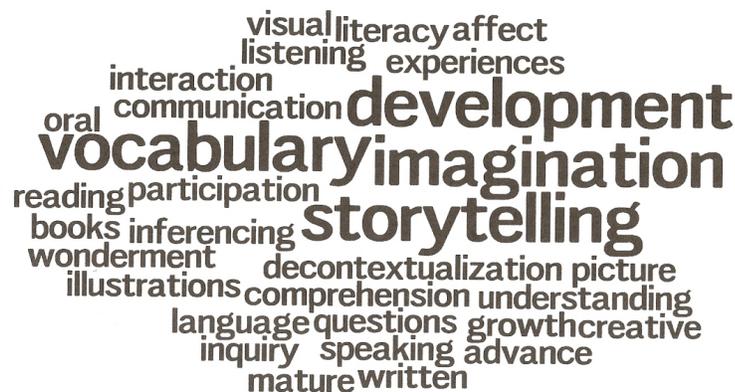


Figure 1. Vocabulary List: My Study In My Words

## More Than Yellow

**Ready, set, go.** I began my study feeling much like my students. I was nervous, full of anxiety, and questioning whether this was what I really wanted to do. I had already conducted my interviews and surveys and learned that my class this year was very different than classes I had in the past. This group of students knew of some authors and illustrators, as well as some titles and topics for books that they wanted to read in the future. They were well prepared and interested in reading. However, my surveys about implementing wordless picture books illustrated that my students were not interested in using books without words. I understood their fears because I was just as scared to implement my project. I gave my students the same advice that I was attempting to give myself. I asked them all to take a deep breath and enjoy the fact that there were not any words to read and that there would be no wrongs and no rights. And after a quick ready, set, go, we were off! Little did I know that this journey was going to entail some turbulence, a few wrong turns, and an end result that made us all excited to send postcards home about our exciting trip.

Interview Questions Pre-Study			
How would you feel if you read a story without words?	3	6	6
How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?	10	4	1
How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?	11	2	2
How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?	13	2	0
How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?	9	4	0

Table 1. Pre-Survey Results

Pre-Study Survey	Favorite Book Title	Book Information	Favorite Author or Illustrator
Madison	Disney	Princess Books	Walt Disney
Amber	Green Eggs and Ham	Princess Books	Dr. Seuss
Julie	Curious George	I like it	Margaret & H. A. Rey
Michael	Dinosaurs	Always dinosaurs	Eric Carle
Joshuah	Trucks	Chicka Chicka Boom Boom because it is about letters	Martin & Archambault
Rebecca	Cinderella	Alphabet books	Dr. Seuss
Joseph	Worms	Guided Reading books because I can read them	Dr. Seuss
Tyler	Clifford	Dr. Suess is funny	Dr. Seuss
Kailyn	Speed Racer	Dr. Suess is funny	Dr. Seuss
Jeremiah	Fishy Facts	Balloon books	Dr. Seuss
Dylan	Monster Trucks	Alphabet books	Eric Carle
Nathaniel	The Fly and The Frog	Dr. Suess is funny	Dr. Seuss
Emma	Trains	Real books	Marc Brown
Nathan	Spiderman	Spiderman	Dr. Seuss
Matthew	Spongebob	Reading books	I don't know

Table 2. Pre-Interview Results

**In my brain.** When I introduced my first wordless picture book, *The Yellow Umbrella*, students were puzzled by the fact that books existed without any words. When I showed the first picture, the children did not respond well because it was very simple. I was already getting concerned. However, as the book continued, the children began shouting out words. They were mostly labeling items or calling out adjectives. Andrew called out, “I am writing the story in my brain!” Others joined in stating that they had a story in their brain too. Donald said that he could not remember pages from the beginning so his story only had a middle and an end. Jacob said he did not have a story. Jacob had been very grumpy today. He was lying on the carpet and sticking his bottom up in the air for half of the story. When we reached the ending, he got mad because I stopped the book. I did not show them the ending. I thought that if my students already knew the ending it would be difficult to get them to tell their own stories. I felt that if I would reveal the author’s intention, the students would say the story

verbatim because they would think it would please me. I wanted this to be authentic and if they already knew the story, there would not be any reason for us to go any further.

**A sign of things to come.** Jack was retained from last year. His attitude had really been hindering his work. He thought he knew everything already but it appeared that he was just insecure. Yesterday he told me that he hated school because he just wanted to play all day and we never did that enough. When I started reading the book he fought with a boy over where to sit for the day. He wanted to be in the front row instead of the back. I think that he liked the idea of not having to read. He struggled in reading during his previous year in kindergarten. However, as I began showing students the book for the first time, his eyes were glued to the story the entire time. He was turning to friends and smiling. He repeatedly called out words and made it very difficult for me to document in my log because I could not keep up. I was so glad that he was finally showing an interest in school and that he was finally truly happy with something we were doing in the classroom. At that moment, I crossed my fingers that this would continue throughout the study. I hoped that this was a sign of things to come!

***First Person Narrative: Jack.*** This is going to be so dumb. I hate reading. I do not know why I am here anyway. I did all this stuff when I was in kindergarten last year. I flunked it because I could not read. I can read some stuff though. That sign over there says 'stop' and that book has the sight word 'like' in it. I can do it sometimes. I just can not do it all of the time. I do not want to do it

all of the time either. Why can't we just play and have fun? Books are so boring. I do not need to know this stuff. But sometimes I do not know what I am reading when I play my videogames and I hate when that happens. I love to play Wizard 101. It is my favorite game and sometimes I cannot read what the wizards want me to do. I guess if I try to learn to read I could get better at the game. I think I will give this a try.

Ok, I am just going to sit here and see what these wordless picture things are all about. I just do not get how a book could not have words but I am willing to give it a try. Here goes nothing.

Hmmm... this is not that bad at all. I think I actually am liking this. No reading. None at all! Well, I do not know how this is possibly going to help me learn how to read but I like it! I can read this whole book without even looking at a word. I could do this with my eyes closed! Are you kidding me? This is great! I will be reading in no time. I am going to love this. I think I might even help Mrs. Oertner out here. "Excuse me. I really want to know where they are going. Maybe they are going to my house!" Mrs. Oertner just smiled at me and even wrote down what I was saying. I think she liked this. I am going to try this out again. "No, they are at a playground. Don't you see the merry-go-round and the swings? I love to go on the seesaw. Whoa! They have one of those too! This book is great" Another smile from Mrs. Oertner. I think this is going to be fun. Every time I say something that I think the page should say, Mrs. Oertner acts like she thinks the page says the same thing! Am I reading? I think I am actually doing it! I am starting to love this stuff!

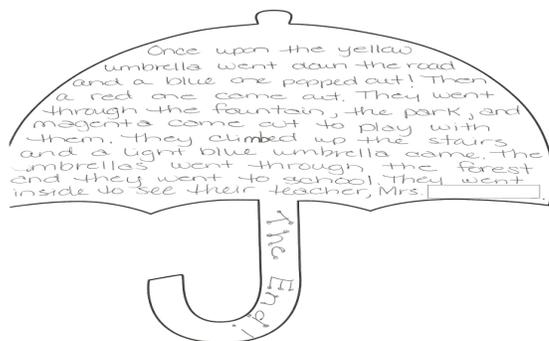


Figure 2. Jack's Retelling

***Finding meaning from nothing.*** When I first began my study, many of my students demonstrated that they had varying levels of maturity. As I began recording in my journal, I noticed that the language certain children used surprised me. Despite being higher level thinkers or readers, several students continued to use the language of some of the more immature students. However, as time went on, students began sharing strategies for finding meaning of unknown words and others corrected students based on tenses or making words plural. Many students began using the vocabulary word wall lists that we created as a class. Some students started correcting others to try to help them improve their language skills. My students started to combine lessons learned at home with new concepts taught at school. Students were helping each other by bringing their own experiences with language to the classroom and others were helping by sharing what they had learned in the classroom.

Erik recognized the word 'erupted' as being an important word because he heard Jordan and me talking about it during one of our readings. Jordan shared a strategy he used for looking up a word in a dictionary. Erik and Jordan were very similar in their need to be precise and look up answers. While I was happy that

they were sharing a strategy for solving problems with text, I hoped that these books would help them learn to take risks. They will not always have a dictionary or the internet around to help them. I wanted them to learn to trust their instinct. However, since these boys shared the same interests, they were often building from one another's skills and pushing each other based on their varying experiences.

“It is incorrect to conceive of play as an activity without purpose” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 103 ). My students were expressing themselves freely using play. The students were playing with the book and using their imagination to create their own stories. There were no limits or boundaries. Some students had unknowingly taken on roles of directors and producers of mini-plays in my classroom. These plays were based on *The Yellow Umbrella*. It was so interesting to hear the dialogue among the students as they played with a book that had no words. The students took what they knew from the pictures they viewed, to create a play with plot, setting, dialogue, and other story elements. Play established itself as an important component in my study at this point. Without it, some students may have continued to label pictures rather than retell the story.

Elizabeth used her own questioning as she looked through the book on her own. These were the types of questions that I had hoped my students would ask as they viewed wordless picture books. When I told her she could look at the book again tomorrow she said she was going to be a detective the next time she had the opportunity to read. The more the students played with the book, the more detailed and creative their stories became. I learned this was a strategy that I could

use with some of my students who were struggling to compile ideas about the story. The role of detective assisted them as they looked for picture clues and develop vocabulary. Many of the students felt more at ease when they sensed that they were playing.

***Wrapping it all up.*** My students began using a more mature vocabulary after only a few days of reading the book. The first two days of the story lent itself well to students labeling objects that they were viewing from page to page. However, students began developing their own stories and strategies within days. Andrew had trouble bottling up his need to tell his entire version of the story. He looked beyond the umbrellas in the story and took notice of the subtle objects on the first few pages. He was well on his way to uncovering the authors intention for placing these few objects on each page.

While Andrew was busy making meaning of the literature, Jack was beginning to participate without any reluctance. This was very unlike him. I had struggled everyday to get him to want to be apart of the group. His self esteem was so low since repeating kindergarten. He kept saying he “failed” or “flunked.” I do not know where he was hearing those words but I desperately wanted to build a more positive vocabulary with him. He stole *The Yellow Umbrella* book off of my desk while I was opening a snack for another student. I knew he was excited to learn what happened next in the story but he needed to realize that he needed to be fair to the rest of the children. When I spotted him he looked at me with so much guilt on his face. He tried to tell me that he did not see anything but then later told me that he saw some people on the last page. I was happy that he was

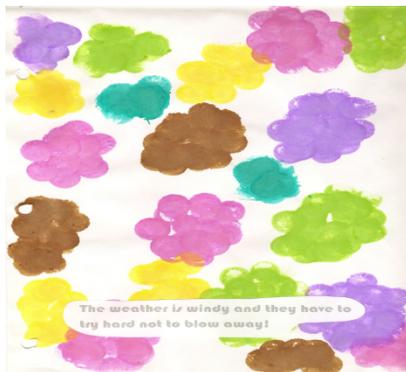
eager to participate and was feeling confident but I did not want this to fuel some of the behaviors he exhibited last year. At that moment I decided that his eagerness to participate needed to be put to use in another way. I determined that when we read our next book he would benefit from working with a peer who needed help. That way his new found love of learning could help inspire another student.



Ashley



Donald



Mackenzie



Andrew

*Figure 3. Student Work: The Yellow Umbrella*

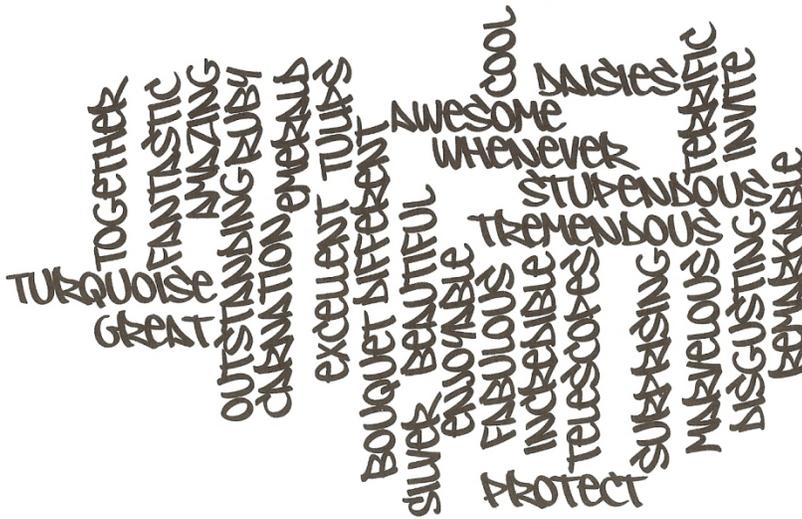


Figure 4. Vocabulary List: The Yellow Umbrella

### Why Not?

The book, *Why?* was not at all what I thought it would be. My students lacked motivation and some did not even look up at the book during the first day of the reading. I noticed several students playing with their hair, talking to each other, and even falling asleep on the carpet. I did not get the impression that Andrew liked this book very much. He was so excited about *The Yellow Umbrella* and now when we started reading our new book, he just sat there! He did not want to talk about the story when I asked him what he thought the book was about. So, instead, I asked him if he could tell me his favorite part. His answer was that he could not remember any details. I guessed this book was not of any interest to him. The colors were not as vibrant and it was much longer than the previous book. Jackson was not paying attention to this story at all. I was so frustrated. He just kept singing a song from my listening center. It was also strikingly noticeable

that he was not paying attention to the story because his retelling and vocabulary had nothing to do with the story, *Why?* Instead, he talked about going to see a train exhibit. I wondered if it was just that we had a busy day today and the students did not want to talk, or if it was the book that I had chosen.

There were only two students who were willing to share relevant facts about the story. Amanda recalled several examples of information after our reading. The events were out of sequence but they were the valid points. She was the first person to retell her version of the story so I was excited that she had noticed so much. However, as I met with more of my students I found out that they did not all take as much from the book as Amanda. Gregory's facial expressions demonstrated that he was enjoying the book. He was laughing and making gasps as we were viewing the pages. He was typically a quiet student and sometimes difficult made it to determine whether or not he was even paying attention to the task at hand. I was happy to see that he was enjoying himself. It did not appear that he liked *The Yellow Umbrella* book that we had read last week. However, in the book, *Why?* he picked out the details of the explosion and the boot that was made out of a bush. The other children had not noticed or failed to mention any of these details.

It was so frustrating that my study drastically changed from one week to the next. Throughout the reading I had thoughts of failure swirling through my brain. I must have questioned myself a dozen times as I turned the pages of the book. I was asking myself why this had happened, what made this book so different than the book prior, and where I went wrong? It was amazing how my

reflection-in-action had been such a whirlwind of thoughts. However, this thoughtful reflection would eventually lead me to make meaningful decisions in future lessons.

*Feeling Tense.* Despite a rocky start to my lessons during the first few attempts of viewing the book, *Why?* My students eventually began to show evidence that with the story being long and there being a hidden meaning within the pictures, that it just took a little longer for the students to change their tune in regards to the story. What had once felt like lack of interest and inattentiveness, had turned into a group of children who wanted to uncover *why* things were happening in the story. It was such a drastic transformation from only a few days earlier.

Donald noticed that something had been taken away from the frog character in the book and he questioned why the mice and frogs were fighting. This was refreshing to hear that someone noticed such an important topic of the story because these were the types of clues that I had been trying to get the children to look for as they viewed wordless picture books. Once Donald commented on the animals fighting, the students started conducting a group discussion over the topic of fighting. Ironically, the question of *why* continued to present itself as the students continued their discussion.

Why Not?

“I fight with my brother sometimes when he takes my toys.”

(Jack to Sydney)

**“My sister fights with me because she is little**

**and she doesn’t know that is bad.” (Mackenzie to Elizabeth)**

*“Mrs. Oertner, why do you fight? Do you even fight?”*

*(Donald to Mrs. Oertner)*

“Fighting isn’t the answer.

That is what my mom always says.” (Jacob to Andrew)

“When you fight with someone, you need to stop and think about what you are saying because it could hurt someone or their feelings.” (Amanda to Brianna)

**“You could walk away if it gets bad**

**and come back and talk it out later, right?”**

**(Andrew to Donald)**

“Why would you need to do that anyway?” (Jordan to Mrs. Oertner)

*“Well, why not? Sometimes you just have to fight for something if you know it is wrong.” (Erik to Jack)*

**“There are different kinds of fights, ya know?**

**(Elizabeth to Mackenzie)**

*“Why do you think that people fight?”*

*(Mrs. Oertner to the class)*

“Fighting doesn’t just mean punching.

Sometimes fighting can be with words.” (Andrew to Jacob)

“Why did you fight with Emma yesterday?” (Brianna to Amanda)

**“Why don’t you just  
talk it out next time? (Andrew to Donald)**

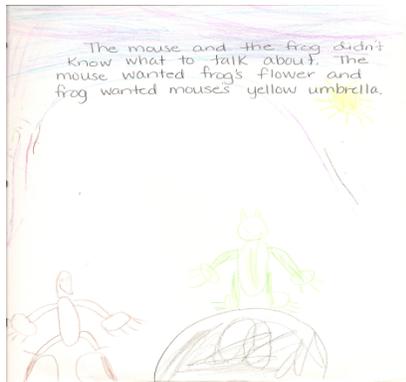
“Why do my parents fight?” (Sydney to Mrs. Oertner)

*Figure 5. Pastiche: Why not?*

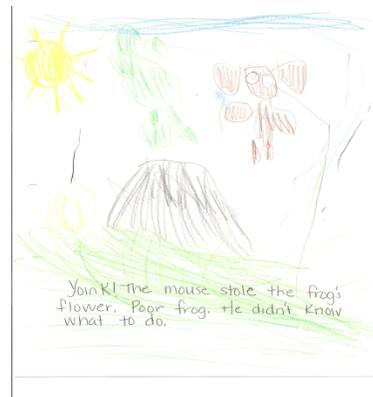
Everything started to make sense after providing time for an intense kindergarten discussion. My students were finally telling the story and it was not just naming the items on the page or telling a few random things that had happened in the story. They actually told the story *Why?* They were on topic and using picture clues to develop the story. While the vocabulary still remained somewhat simplified, the children were becoming more aware of the way they were speaking. When the word mouse became plural as new mice joined the army, the children replied using the word mice instead of ‘mouses’ as they had done in the previous week. This had been something I continued to notice and had wondered if the students would regularly acknowledge these differences when making words plural. As time passed, making words plural and recognizing the use of past tenses began to come more naturally. I was incredibly proud that in only our second wordless picture book, the students were listening to the way that they were speaking rather than simply just stating the facts.

The students excitedly drew the pictures corresponding to their own versions of the story. This was another surprise because the children showed very little interest last week when they were presented with this same task. Suddenly, Andrew finally announced that he knew the reason to why the book was called *Why?* He said, “Now I get it! The author is asking why they are fighting! But, I

am wondering, why would you fight over a flower? Why would you steal an umbrella? I guess I have some other questions about why.” This was the breakthrough that I had been waiting for and how appropriate that it came after the students started their own discussions about the topic. It was truly a child centered discussion with so many important revelations. This was something that students uncovered after relating their own lives to the text. I asked the children how this wordless picture book was relevant to our classroom discussions about sharing. Erik replied “It is because the book did not use words to ask to share and they started fighting. If the animals used words they could have talked it out like you say to do.” Finally, the students were not viewing wordless picture book as yet another book to read. They were connecting their own experiences in the classroom and making it relevant to the text.



Erik



Jack

*Figure 6. Student Work: Why?*



Figure 7. Vocabulary List: Why?

### **Dinos In The Tub**

After Andrew's struggle with the book *Why?* I was confident that Andrew's interest in wordless picture books had been fueled by his discovery of the meaning in *Why?* I was very concerned during the last book because he rarely participated. The next book in the cycle, *Dinosaur!* was more simplified in both text and meaning. However, it did allow for a wide range of interpretation. Andrew exclaimed, "there is a T-Rex. It is also pronounced Tyrannosaurus Rex but some say T-Rex as his nickname like my nickname is Andy. It's like we are twins!" Andrew noticed that the main dinosaur was a T-Rex. He then went on to explain that the real name is Tyrannosaurus. But he did not stop there! He explained to the students that it was a nickname and gave an example to help them understand the concept. Andrew demonstrating that he was advancing not only in his choice of vocabulary but in his ability to decontextualize, and make connections to the text. Some children questioned his choice of words like 'pronounced' and 'common.' We explained this together and then the children knew what he was talking about. We instantly added these new words to our Dinosaur word wall for students to reference as the unit progressed.

As soon as Andrew's words found a space on the word wall, Kennedy shouted out, "I know something too! I saw a raptor. Actually, I mean raptors because there was more than one." Two discoveries in a row! Kennedy noticed that when making the word plural he needed to add an /s/. It was also important to note that he was able to explain *why* he added an /s/ without any questioning. This was a big step for Kennedy. He typically has trouble with this in his usual speaking habits. He would often say things like "my heads hurts" or "I sees that" and I had spent time trying to explain to him that he did not need to use an /s/ if he was only talking about one thing. Instead, he used it correctly with raptors and was even able to explain his reasoning to the students. This was another word to add to the word wall and something for Kennedy to use to assist him in the future if he needs a reminder of his progress this year.

**Does anyone have any questions?**

"There was way too much water in the tub. Did he imagine that or was it real? I mean seriously, that couldn't happen in real life right? Mommy wouldn't let the water for all over the place like that! " (Elizabeth)

**"What if the dinosaur wasn't really live.**

**What if he just imagined it? (Erik to Jack)**

"Wouldn't it be cool if that happened in your tub?"  
(Sydney to Mrs. Oertner)

*"I wonder what my mommy would say if I made a mess like that. She would probably make me clean it up."* (Mackenzie to Amanda)

**"What would you do if that happened to you? (Elizabeth to class)**

*“Why do you think it happened to the little boy?” (Mrs. Oertner)*

“Where is the story really happening?”

I’m still wondering if this real. ” (Jacob to Jordan)

“Who ever did that before? I did it with my Barbies!” (Brianna to class)

*Figure 8. Pastiche: Does anyone have any questions?*

***Detectives on the loose.*** Many of the students were amazed that the little boy in the story could play in a tub filled with so much water. They were amazed that the boy’s parents were not knocking at the door or yelling at him to get out of the tub. However, one student took this opportunity to explain wordless picture books to the students so that they would understand the concept of the book a little better.

### **Elizabeth’s Story**

There was way too much water in the tub. Did he imagine that or was it real? Well, we don’t really know do we? But I think that everything about this story is in the boy’s imagination. Did you ever go into the tub and play Barbies, play in the bubbles, or have squirt fights with the bubbles? I do. And sometimes my mommy has to remind me that I am in the tub and not the ocean. My mommy is in the bathroom when I take a bath but I think this boy is older than us. That is probably why the mommy isn’t in the bathroom and doesn’t know the water has overflowed. The great thing about books without words is that you can make the story up yourself even if the author or illustrator didn’t tell it that way. In my imagination, the little boy just doesn’t hear his mommy knocking on the door and calling to him to get out of the tub. He is in his own world. He is using his

imagination and playing with his little dinosaur toys. He doesn't even realize that the world around him is not really the dino-land that we see. He thinks he is really in it! I wish that I could be there too. Maybe I will be when I take a bath tonight. I will get my own dinosaurs from the store and try to use my imagination to go to his world. I wonder if your imagination can be the same as someone else? I don't think it really works that way because it is just like the book. I think the boy just doesn't hear his mommy but other people think that his mommy just doesn't know that he made such a mess. Maybe she doesn't even know that he is in the tub!

Elizabeth used her own questioning as she looked through the book. These are the types of questions that I had hoped my students would ask as they read wordless picture books. When I told her she could look at the book again tomorrow she said she was "going to be a detective this time." She was looking to uncover new things that her peers had not discovered yet. At that moment, I decided that this was the same terminology I could use with some of my students who were struggling to compile ideas about the story. The role of detective could help them as they look for picture clues and develop vocabulary in what they may have perceived as being a monotonous task.

When I asked Jordan to try being the detective he looked at me in surprise. Suddenly, wordless picture books sounded intriguing! Jordan's eyes widened as he announced "the volcano exploded! Ya' know what? I know there is a different word for exploded but I can't think of it today. I will know tomorrow." Jordan recognized that there was a different word that he could have used for his word.

He was not satisfied with a word that he felt the other children already knew. I wondered if he was going to talk about it at home or ask his parents to help him. He was the type of child who loved to learn and he seemed to have taken this on as a new challenge for him. I decided that I was going to ask him tomorrow and find out how he came to his conclusion. This was the perfect beginning for our new vocabulary lists.

When Jordan returned to school the next day he announced that the word he wanted to use was called “erupted” and he also told us that we could use the word “eruption.” After asking him how he came to the decision to use the word, he announced that his mom helped him find the word he wanted in the dictionary. She had known what word he wanted so she showed him that erupted and other words like it could be found on that page. At that moment, Elizabeth announced, “you were like a detective! You had a problem and you solved it! You are good at this, Jordan. Maybe we can go into the detective business together.” After that announcement, we wrote a rule at the bottom of our new vocabulary list. It said, “Be a detective!”

### **Round Table Retelling**

In order to help students better understand the concept of retelling, we sat in a circle around the classroom. We pushed all of the tables to the center of the room and students sat in their chairs around the giant table that we created. The pictures that students created about the story were placed in order across the table. The first student to go was the student with the first event of the story. That student was asked to begin telling the story from that point. The person next to him then

spoke about the next event in the picture that was sitting in front of them. This continued around the table until the retelling was complete.

1. This book is about dinosaurs. They were all around. There was a boy in the bathtub. There was a dino in the tub and his head popped out. I like the word popped because it is easy spelled p-o-p-p-e-d.
2. The kid is naked. The boy put on his towel.
3. The boy was staring at the bath tub. His clothes were on the floor. A dinosaur was in the water.
4. The dinosaurs were not extinct in this story. They came alive again. In the old days, T-Rex was the last to become extinct.
5. The dinosaur splashed the bathtub.
6. The dinos were gone and then he got scared.
7. I like it when the dinosaur hits the other in the air.
8. The water overflowed. There was a triceratops. She has three horns because tri- means three. There was a long neck dinosaur and a T-Rex. T-Rex starts with the letter /t/ just like my name, Tyler.
9. There is a T-Rex. The boy played with his dinosaur in the tub. There were like a million dinosaurs. He was imagining things.
10. Another dino popped out. The coconut tree was dropping coconuts on the dino tail. When the tub overflowed the mom brought him a towel.
11. Then there was a volcano and liva was floating all the around. The dinosaurs were chasing each other to get out of the liva.
12. The volcano erupted. When the dinosaurs got out of the tub they were

fighting.

13. The tub overflowed. He was imagining everything.

14. His mom was rushing into the bathroom to stop the water. There was a dinosaur behind him and he freaked out. I don't really know what that word means. The dinosaurs were fading when they got out of the tub.

15. The tub exploded. He had his clothes. His mom brought his towel.

My students certainly were being detectives as Elizabeth taught them to do if they were stuck. Students sat in a circle in the middle of the room as I sat with the pages that they drew for the book. The children were given the opportunity to retell the story from beginning to end using the illustrations that they had made. However, the story was constructed from one student's comment from the beginning of the book and as we went around the circle each child took a turn adding one detail in the sequence of the story. Using this method allowed students to retell the story in proper sequence of what the illustrator and author had created on each page. While the interpretations may have varied from reader to reader, the document that was created flowed and was told in proper sequence.

### **Small group retellings**

#### **Group 1**

The boy is naked. He is staring at the bath tub and the faucet is running. The dinosaur is peeking out of the water while the boy holds his toy dinosaur. The faucet is now turned off. His mouth is open because he is really scared. They are chasing the polka dot dinosaur around the tub. The triceratops is chasing the raptor. The dinosaurs are fighting over who gets to play with the boy. The dinosaurs are getting bigger and bigger and the boy is stuck in the tub wondering what they are doing. The boy is looking around at the other dinosaurs. He is dreaming of a dinosaur world. The dinosaurs are acting like they would in the old

days. They are not acting like bath toys. The big dinosaur flicked the water with his tail and the water overflowed. The boy is back to playing with a simple toy dinosaur. No more imagination for him!

### **Group 2**

The boy took off his clothes and left them on the floor. He walked into the tub and turned on the water. The boy didn't know there was a dinosaur in the water. He was hiding under the tub forever. He peeked out of the water. The polka dot dinosaur popped out of the tub and the boy was so surprised. Another dinosaur appeared. The dinosaurs are coming alive but *not* his toy. More and more dinosaurs are popping into his imagination. There are two big dinosaurs fighting but the boy is just in the tub staring up in surprise. The dinosaurs were not along. There were in an imagination world full of dinosaurs but the boy is stuck there. The brontosaurus splashed the boy in the tub and made a big wave. The tub of flowed. Mom came running to the rescue with his towel but did not see the dinosaur. It was just the boy's imagination.

### **Group 3**

The boy took off his clothes. He turned on the water and got in to the tub. He was beginning to play with his toy dinosaur while the water was still running. He turned off the water and looked into the tub and saw a real dinosaur. They started to fight and yell at each other. The boy started to get scared. The dinosaurs chased each other around the bathroom. The boy looked up at the dinosaur and said, "uh-oh." The dinosaurs kept chasing and the boy was so surprised that he didn't know what to do. The boy was trapped in his imagination. His tub has turned into a pond while the dinosaurs roam. The long neck brought them back to real life! The brontosaurus splashed the boy in the tub. The water overflowed ("You mean overflowed," said Emma). The mother comes rushing in to the room to bring the boy his towel. He puts his towel on and his imagination time is over. Or is it?

*Figure 9. Group Retellings*

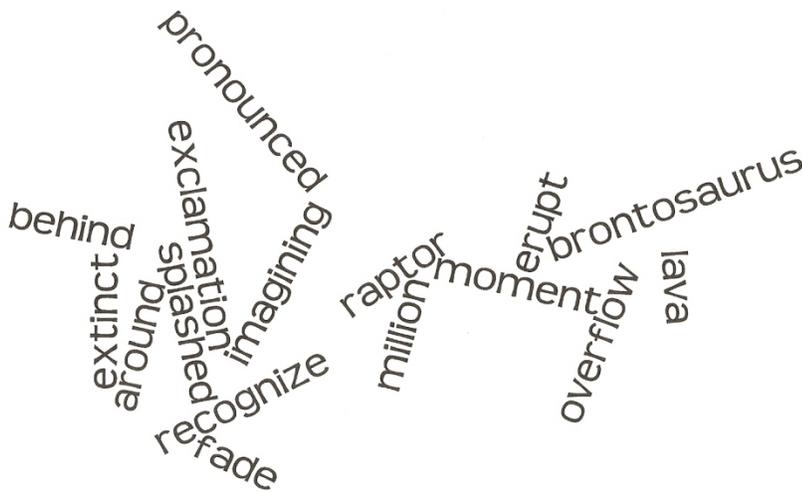


Figure 10. Vocabulary List: Dinosaur!

### Time Flies When You're Having Fun

*Wow, this book is so much different than the other dinosaur book. I think the other one was funnier. This one is serious. I like how it is like an adventure book. You think you are reading about going to a museum but you are really using your imagination in a dinosaur world. That is the part that reminds me of the other book. But this book is about prehistoric time. That's why they show fossils. The other book was just like a cartoon in the newspaper. - Amanda*

**I remember when I went to the museum. Didn't we just read another book about going to a museum? Oh my gosh! We read about Franklin's field trip to the dinosaur museum! Remember how he was scared? I would be scared too. This book is kind of scary. - Andrew**

The fossils are in the museum so that we can see what dinosaurs looked like a long time ago. But in this book the bird goes on an adventure. He gets to go back to when dinosaurs roamed the earth. It is a little scary when the bird is in the dinos belly.

- Jordan

This dinosaur book is not like the other one. This one is a lot *realer*. Do you know why? Because the pictures are real looking. The other ones were silly. I wonder if a bird would really fly around a museum. Do you think? No, that is just too funny. Plus, dinosaurs aren't real anyway. The bird was just using his imagination. - Donald

Figure 11. Pastiche: What is the difference between our two dinosaur books?

The students were beginning to notice that even though the theme of the book may be the same, the books do not necessarily have any other connection. Amber talked about this book being an adventure book and she was right. She also noted that much of the book takes place in the prehistoric era. Even though the other book about dinosaurs took us back to a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth, the pictures in the previous book were cartoons and did not impact the students on a heightened level. Instead, this book provided a sense of the reader being a part of the book. The illustrations look more like photographs than cartoon illustrations.

Andrew made the connection of this book being similar to one that we had read in the class earlier in the quarter. The book that Andrew was speaking of was not a wordless picture book. It was a Franklin book with words but had a similar story. However, the Franklin book had a different story line, more appropriate for kindergarten. This book was more advanced and had several possibilities for the plot. It really depended on how the reader interpreted some of the illustrations. Jordan interjected his feelings of being afraid and frightened. The book was a little scary for a kindergarten student. It depended on how students viewed the pictures. Donald explained that the pictures looked too real at times. However, he knew that that it did not mean the book was a non-fiction book. Donald had trouble deciphering between real and fantasy in the past. More experiences with this book helped Jordan, Donald, and the other students realize that the pictures were only scary if they chose to make the story sound scary.

**Be a detective!**

“Birds come from dinosaurs. Their skeletons are similar.” - Erik

*“The birds entered through the front window of the museum.” - Gregory*

“The veggie dinosaur saw everything that happened and did nothing to help the bird. What was that called again? Vegasuar?” - Jackson

**“You mean herbivore?”- Kennedy**

“Half of the dinosaur was just bones.” - Jordan

*“There was a part of the dinosaur that was real. He was really imaginary because they were in a museum and he wasn’t real real. The dinosaur ate a bird. But because he wasn’t real, he survived.” - Brianna*

“The bird landed on the dino’s teeth.

He swallowed the bird through his pretend belly.” - Ashley

**“His teeth were sharp. He was a statue.” - Donald**

*Figure 12. Pastiche: Tell me something you never noticed before. Be a detective!*

**Group retellings**

**Group 1**

There once was a little bird who did not want to fly around in the sky anymore so he decided to take a little trip to a museum. He went to a prehistoric museum so that he could learn about dinosaurs. He was always interested in dinosaurs so now it was his time to find out some more about something he always loved. When he got into the museum he discovered that the dinosaurs were half real and half fake. When the bird flew through the dinosaurs mouth he entered a land that was full of dinosaurs from that time. Birds come from dinosaurs called pterodactyls and he

got to see one when he traveled to a different land. But then he got hungry and flew out of the bones of the dinosaur. He went back to the land where he came from. It was a land where he was happier and he belonged.

### Group 2

One day a little birdie went on a trip to a museum. He loved to take trips to the museum once a week because he liked to visit his friends from the old days. Birds grew from dinosaurs during the prehistoric times. The little birdie liked to feel what it was like to go back to a time where he didn't have to worry about big buildings, cars, and people to take his home away. He flew through the dinosaurs' mouth and came to a land where he could be happy again. It was like a dream for a long time. But then he had to wake up and go back to his real life. He flew out of the dinosaurs' mouth, back into the museum, and out into the cloudy sky.

*Figure 13. Group Retelling*

flight herbivore  
 similar different intend  
 fossils pretend remind imagination  
 prehistoric belonged adventure half  
 fake pterodactyls discovered  
 survived amazed  
 roamed

*Figure 14. Vocabulary List: Time Flies*

## **Stop Calling Him Frosty**

The Snowman is an exciting tale about a young boy who builds a snowman that comes to life at night. The boy and the snowman become friends and share a variety of adventures together. The book is not designed the same way as the other picture books that we have read. Instead, this book has several smaller illustrations on the pages, much like a comic book. These small snapshots allow the reader to take each step of the journey with the boy and the snowman. The characters are very relatable and provide the reader with the opportunity to dream along with the boy. Sadly, like all good things, the story must come to an end. The boy is saddened by the fact that the snowman has melted. But just like the students in the class, the thought of another fresh snowfall fuels the excitement of a new day with the snowman.

### **The Snowman**

*“I made a snowman yesterday! It was so big that the head fell off when Daddy put it on top. We had to put snow around the neck to keep it on straight.” (Mackenzie to Brianna)*

“I only made a little snowman with my sister.

We did it together. I let her put the carrot on for his nose.

Then she even let me put on his magic hat!” (Sydney to Jack)

**“I made a snow family with my mom and dad last night. It was so funny. I am the little one because I am just a boy. Mom is the medium one and dad is the big one. Now people will know who everyone is when they look at it.” (Donald to Jacob)**

"I don't make snow people. My family doesn't do that stuff.  
 I just run outside and catch snowflakes on my tongue.  
 I want to try to make one with Joshua." (Kennedy to Jordan)

*"Sometimes I like to make snow cats and snow dogs.*

*I pretend that they are pets because my mom is allergic to pets.*

*I make them little bowls of food too!" (Jackson to class)*

"I never made a snowman. I don't have  
 snow pants so I can't go out in the snow.

But I want to." (Kennedy to Jacob)

*Figure 15. Pastiche: Did you ever build a snowman?*

### **Feelings When A Snowman Melts**

sad

**angry**

disappointed

*upset*

frustrated

grumpy

**surprised**

mad

*bumped*

hopeful

*16. Discussion: How do you feel when your snowman melts?*

***First person narrative: Kennedy.*** This book makes me want to build a snowman more than ever. I saw a movie about Frosty once. This book is a lot like Frosty. The boy builds a snowman and then the snowman comes to life at night. It is practically the same thing! Maybe it is the same thing. I guess this is just like the Frosty movie but they made it into a book for fun. This Frosty looks a little different. I do like him even though there isn't a magic rabbit anywhere. This Frosty is magical in a different way. He doesn't even talk. At least, I can't hear what he is saying. I bet if he could talk he would say, "Kennedy, come play with me." It is probably what he said to the little boy in the story. In the story the characters play in the house. The snowman plays dress up in the parents' clothes and they even go for a ride in the car. They fly to a different place that I think looks like it could be the North Pole or maybe a museum. I am not sure which one it is because I have never been to either of them. If I could fly somewhere with Frosty the Snowman, I would go to New York City. My dad works there and I don't get to see him all the time. Sometimes I wonder where he is because he isn't home when I eat my dinner. I went to the city before but I just went to dad's work. I want to go there and explore with Frosty. Then I could see my dad all the time and I wouldn't have to worry. Maybe I am not allowed to build snowmen because my mom thinks I will go fly with him at night to go see my dad. I wish I could do that but I wouldn't want my mom to worry.

### **Round Table Retelling**

1. Hurray! It's snowing! I better hurry outside before it stops.  
Mom, mom, mom. Is it a snow day? I want to go outside and play. Yay! I love snow days!
2. I can jump, I can skip, I can run, and I can even build a snowman.
3. First you make the bottom. Next, you make the middle. Then you make the head. When you are finished you need to get everything from mom to dress your snowman.
4. Then, ta-dah! You have a snowman. But you can't play anymore because you have been out in the cold all day. Say, "goodbye snowman!"
5. It's getting late. I better get ready for bed. Goodnight snowman!  
Goodnight, mom. Goodnight, dad.
6. I can't sleep. I can't wait to play with my snowman again!
7. "Nice to meet you snowman," says Jamie. What? He is alive! And uh-oh, he does not know his way around the house. But he sure likes the Christmas lights.
8. Oh no! The fire is burning him up. They need to find something else to do in the house because he will melt.
9. Let's have an adventure in the kitchen!
10. They play dress up with all the fruits and vegetables in the kitchen. The freezer sure feels comfy! It is just like being in his own home.
11. Jamie and the snowman get bored so they go upstairs and play dress up with the mommy and daddy clothes. The snowman is so silly and he almost

wakes up the parents. That would be trouble. I bet Jamie would get grounded.

12. Then they go to Jamie's playroom. He has tons of toys. They have lots of fun but it is getting late and there are lots of places to visit before the night is over.

13. They fly around the world together and visit places that they never went to before. There were pyramids, palaces, castles, and museums that little kids don't usually go to.

14. But it is so late. Jamie is getting tired and the snowman's magic is about to disappear. They travel home together. They are gliding through the air one last time.

15. Finally, Jamie wakes up and he wonders if it was a dream or if he really traveled around the world with a friend made out of snow. The end!



Figure 17. Student Work: The Snowman

### **What a wonderful world**

The book entitled, *What a Wonderful World* is based off of Louis Armstrong's famous song. In fact, many of my students were already familiar with the song. This book was not a wordless picture book. Although, there were very few words on the page and the words were simply the lyrics to the song. I picked the book knowing that there were words on the page because I was curious to what my students were taking from the visual cues in each book. I wondered if they were going to rely on the words or create their own. My students were able to generate their own words to the book despite the words that already existed. In fact, my students did not even realize the words on the page because they were written in cursive. To a kindergartener, these foreign letters fit right in with the vibrant pictures on the page. This was a book that I could not resist using for my study because of the beautiful pictures. The class was excited to view such a colorful book that seemed to tell a new story with every turn of the page. Some students hummed the song as they read while others did their best Louis Armstrong impression. However, when it was time to tell their stories; my students did their best to tell a story that fit into each student's own wonderful world.

**Jacob**

Ruby  
Daisies  
Us  
Great

**Jack**

**Silver**  
**Tulips**  
**Two of us**  
**Home**

**Mackenzie**

Turquoise  
Carnation  
Family  
Awesome

*Figure 18. Poem: Use four words to describe your wonderful world.*

**What would your wonderful world be like?**

Our world is special because each one of us is special and we are in it. We need to treat our world better because if we don't take care of it, we won't have a beautiful world anymore. I am going to take care of the world by picking up trash on the playground. Sometimes I get sad at recess because I see that there is trash around the swing set and if I am playing there I don't want disgusting trash on my hands. I could get germs and get sick. -Amanda

*When I think of a wonderful world I think of the flower and rainbows like in the book. But I also think about my mommy and daddy and my sissy. They make me happy to be in the world because they are in it. The world would not be as wonderful without them. I want to make the world a better place when I am a mommy too!-Mackenzie*

My wonderful world has lots of my friends in it. When I started school I didn't have a lot of friends. I just played with my sister and my neighbors. When I got to school I made so many friends and now everyone is going

to be invited to my birthday party. My wonderful world would be like having a birthday all the time!-Ashley

I would love to live in a world full of flowers and butterflies. I would want to see a rainbow every time I woke up in the morning and I would have ice cream for dinner! I would play all day with my friends and Mrs. Oertner would sing songs for me. It would snow whenever I wanted and turn to hot if I wanted to go swimming. My wonderful world would be full of laughs and be lots of fun. I wish it was like that for real. Sometimes this world is hard and I get sad. Sometimes I am afraid. But in this book I learned that there are lots of things around me to make me happy when I am sad.-Brianna

*Figure 19. Typed Version of Student Work: My Wonderful World*

**Synonyms for Wonderful**

**amazing**

*awesome*

**cool**

enjoyable

**excellent**

*fabulous*

fantastic

**incredible**

marvelous

outstanding

**remarkable**

*stupendous*

super

surprising

terrific

tremendous

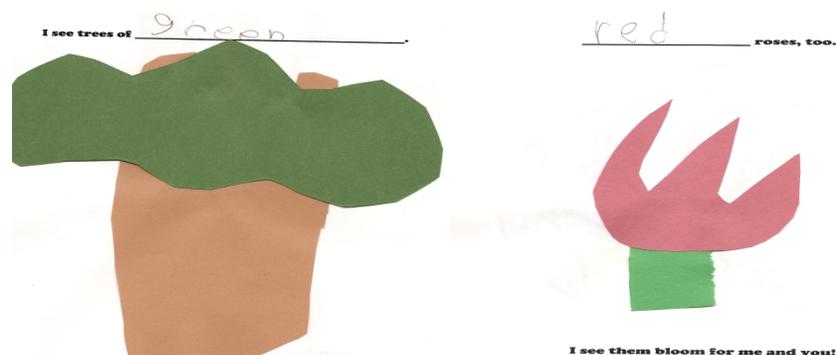
*Figure 20: List of Synonyms*

### **Round Table Retelling**

1. Our world is a beautiful place where everyone is your friends and it is ok to make mistakes. Everyone is there to help you and you help others too.
2. In our world you should take care of the trees and the flowers because they make the world beautiful. The trees give you clean air to breathe and homes to live in for people and animals. The flowers are food for animals and are beautiful to look at.
3. Flowers are like people. You need to take care of them. Even though they are different you shouldn't treat them different. They are there for everyone.
4. We are lucky to have so many pretty things in our world. We need to protect it. There are animals around us for people to use for food, for pets, and to help our world work. You shouldn't hurt an animal unless you need to. Killing animals is a bad choice.
5. The sky and the clouds are a part of our world even though you can't touch them. They give us our weather. We need the rain, the sun, and the snow to make our world work. We need them to help make our food and to keep things alive.
6. The sun and the moon tell us when to sleep and when to wake up. They make

things grow and some people like to look at them using telescopes.

7. I think our world can be better. Sometimes I see places that need extra care. We can take care of the world by planting trees, watering plants, picking up garbage, and recycling. We need to do this or our world won't be wonderful anymore.
8. But the world is wonderful when you look up at the pretty rainbows. Rainbows make me feel happy and they can make other people smile too. Rainbows cheer you up when you are sad. If you don't take care of the world there won't be rainbows anymore.
9. Your friends can cheer you up too. If you aren't good to your friends they won't be in your world either. They will be friends with other people instead. You need to be nice to the world and to your friends.
10. When I grow up I am going to make sure that I teach people to take care of the world so that it will be beautiful forever. My mommy tells me to take care of my things or I won't have them anymore. The earth is just like my toys. If I don't want it to break I need to be careful. And I promise I will be.



Gregory

Figure 21. Student Work: What A Wonderful World



Figure 22. Vocabulary List: What A Wonderful World

### Summary: The Journey

I started my study feeling like I was in kindergarten and going to my first day of school. I was nervous, full of anxiety, and questioning whether my students would take on the challenge that I was about to put before them. My surveys and interviews indicated that my students were reluctant to begin the wordless picture book adventure. They were well prepared and interested in reading but they wanted to read books with words like their big brothers and sisters. I understood their fears about wordless picture books because I was just as scared to implement my project. But as the study began and progressed daily, I learned that we were all helping each other through this topsy-turvy journey. Students surprisingly enjoyed the fact that there were not any words to read and that there could not be wrong answers. The freedom that they were given allowed students to become comfortable with their sense of voice, vocabulary, imagination, and storytelling. My students learned how to look deeply into the meaning of a text rather than just

skimming the surface. I think my students learned the same theory about themselves. There was more to this group of five and six year old than people would have ever known. They are now confident in speaking to the class, attentive listeners, and imaginative storytellers. Throughout this journey, students matured in their vocabulary and learned strategies for identifying words that they may not have known. They learned how to associate synonyms and look for words in an age appropriate dictionary. Lastly, my students gained an appreciation and love of literature. I would not be surprised if I one day open up a book written or illustrated by several members of my class. Our long journey may be over, but their lifetime of literature has just begun!

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed several forms of data throughout my study. My analysis of data occurred during and after my observations were categorized, tallied, and labeled (Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997). The majority of data collected were recorded in my field log. I documented events that occurred during my lessons. I read through my field log, and noted labels in the left hand column of my paper. I used the process of coding (1997) as I read and reread the data that had been recorded. Once all of the codes were completed for each lesson, I documented the amount of times each code was written on a spreadsheet. This was a continuous process and was repeated regularly throughout my entire study.

As I analyzed and coded my field log, I referenced student work to determine strengths and weaknesses in the current subject area. I examined daily work to determine the following day's lessons and book titles. I also compared answers from the pre-surveys and analyzed the results through tables and graphs. I distributed the same surveys during and after my study and recorded the results in a similar fashion. I reviewed the results based on vocabulary development, speaking and listening skills, and visual presentations. Student interviews were also coded and analyzed to determine student interest and student choice. I used a form of individual member-checks, which means checking my interpretations of the data with each participant (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Gardner, & Steinmetz, 1991). This provided confirmation or disproved the general themes I believed to be occurring throughout my data collection. The interviews provided individual perspectives from each child as well as their feelings and thoughts about using

wordless pictures books in the classroom.

In addition to the data collected during my study, I analyzed my data through reflective memos I wrote as I read the works of Dewey (1938/1997), Freire (2003), Delpit and Dowdy (2002), and Vygotsky (1978). Reading works from researchers and philosophers provided me with insightful quotes that applied to my study. I used this information to determine how they confirmed my findings and methodology. Reading the works of Dewey, Freire, Delpit and Dowdy, and Vygotsky, provided a variety of perspectives to use within my study and instructional practices.

After creating labels for my field log, examining student work, student interviews, and reflective memos, I looked at reoccurring themes and created bins to organize and classify my information (Figure 23). I arranged the codes from all forms of data collection into one visual. By linking the data collection and analyzing its contents, the results revealed possible outcomes (Ely, et al., 1997). After the bins were completed, theme statements were established to depict the intention of each bin. These theme statements supported the groundwork of my study.

## Bins



Figure 23. Bins.

### **Theme Statements**

**Literary Elements:** Literary elements are key concepts in wordless picture books.

**Language Development:** Wordless picture books provide an opportunity for students to develop language at an appropriate level for each individual.

**Affective Response:** Wordless picture books enhance positive and valuable responses without limiting their imagination.

**Performance:** Wordless picture books allow students to perform interpretations of books for every level of learners.

**Cognitive Response:** Wordless picture books elicit a meaningful connection to each text.

## Findings

My research study examined the observed and reported experiences of students when wordless picture books were integrated into my oral language program. I explored the development of vocabulary when using visuals and intended to find another successful method of instructing oral vocabulary. I had anticipated that in using observations and analyses of student work that I would be able to provide my students with a learning experience that both excited them and helped them develop a more mature vocabulary. I regularly reflected on my work and began to discover results as my bins were formulated. Figure 23 shows my bins and the categories within each bin that helped articulate my findings.

My study was designed to investigate the need for a more developed vocabulary in the kindergarten classroom. Throughout my teaching career, I have noticed that students entered kindergarten with varied levels of vocabulary due to different levels of experience with vocabulary. For this reason, I chose to focus on using wordless picture books to build vocabulary, since I believed there was a lack of instruction in oral vocabulary in a regular education classroom.

When I first began my study, I wanted to instruct students in developing a comfort with speaking in the classroom. I was able to do this, but on a limited basis. I realized that I was hindering my students' achievement by not providing enough opportunities for students to speak freely. I needed to allow students to speak as thoughts entered their brain rather than when they were called on to answer a question or to comment on a page of the book. I recognized that this greatly impacted my instruction when Dylan asked, "Why are you letting me talk

so much now? You didn't let me do it before!" This simple statement illustrated how important it was for me to allow my students to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and connections with the freedom to speak when the thought came to them.

When using wordless picture books as an oral language instructional tool, incorporating additional visual aids, vocabulary charts, and Venn diagrams provide students and teachers with a visual to illustrate the growth of the vocabulary. I wanted to explore whether using visual literacy, student interpretations, and presentations in a classroom were valuable ways to instruct students. I believe my study did suggest that these three modes of teaching are valuable. However, incorporating other means of literacy and varied presentations also proved to be helpful in obtaining success for my students.

### **Literary Elements**

Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Literary elements were key concepts when implementing wordless picture books because students were learning these concepts without viewing words or punctuation. "Wordless picture books could also be used in the classroom to further develop a child's sensitivity to literary elements" (Jett-Simpson, 1976, p. 19). This was also the first time that some students were learning about these concepts. Using the drawings of wordless picture books allowed children to focus on descriptive

details, developing sequencing skills and identifying story elements. Specific story elements that were presented in the kindergarten curriculum were comprehension, reflection, making connections, sequencing, symbolism, and themes. These concepts were explained on a level that was appropriate for kindergarteners. All of these elements were taught through modeling and student exploration prior to the implementation of formal observations and data collection. The topic of comprehension was explained to students so that they were aware that they needed to tell the story in a way that included details in order and made sense to others who were listening. Reflecting and making connections was taught so that students would see that books are not only fun to read, but are relevant to the lives of themselves and peers. Sequencing was explained using picture cards so that students were hearing and seeing what it meant to sequence a story. Symbolism and themes were explained using student work. Students showed pictures to the class and explained what they drew. We discussed telling the class the most important detail that picture represented with using only one sentence. Students were aware that the theme was the main idea of what was drawn. Some student work was then pulled out and used to explain symbolism. This was explained when students were telling the themes of their work without the picture showing a clear, implied theme within the picture. Amanda showed a picture of a little girl holding a flower. However, Amanda explained that the theme had nothing to do with the flower's color or type as some of the students had guessed. The flower made her feel better because it represented her grandmother.

While this may have been difficult for students to understand on a higher level or to create on their own, my students were able to recognize the symbolism in *The Yellow Umbrella* of the umbrellas representing friendship, as well as the symbolism of war in the story, *Why?*

### **Language Development**

When I utilized wordless picture books in my classroom, students were able to build their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. Stewing (2001) found that educators have developed visual literacy programs because there are individuals who are not as academically advanced as others. It is not always because they do not know how to perform the task at hand, it often because they have nothing to say. Wordless picture books build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for each individual because a visual is provided and students are given time to perform on their level. When the study began, Mackenzie always had a lot to say but her stories did not always connect to what was being discussed. The amount of words that she used did not reflect the intellect behind her stories. As time passed, Mackenzie's stories started to sound more mature. There were times when I felt that she was speaking like an adult. One day when we were reading about dinosaurs, Mackenzie announced, "Well, we all know that this story is about the prehistoric era. It can't possibly be from now. Do you see dinosaurs roaming the earth in the present?" The student's ability to create her own story eliminated the fear of being incorrect and allowed Mackenzie to express and explain herself as listening skills, speaking skills, and vocabulary were strengthened.

“A successful picture book is one in which everything is presented to the reader as a speculative proposition, wrapped in invisible quotation marks, as if to say ‘what do you make of this’” (Tan, 2001, p. 10). Elizabeth taught the class how to look for details in each story and to play the role of detective in order to find clues that were hidden in the story. These relationships allowed the students to make connections from using wordless picture books to using books with words. In addition, many students shared stories about strategies that they have developed to aide in storytelling. While Elizabeth explained that being a detective helped her add details to stories, Brianna told the class to “start at the beginning and go all the way to the end,” and Jackson explained that he likes to “look at the book lots of times. It helps to see things over and over again.” Visual literacy was fostered by repetitive readings or showings, with time in between, followed by discussion of understanding. This allowed children the opportunity to process that every part of the story was connected to the following part of the story. Not all children walk away with the same understandings since they may have experienced the stories differently. Many researchers believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Wordless picture books provided an opportunity for students to develop language at an appropriate level for each individual. The complexity of language increased, while students’ storytelling expression improved. “Many research studies have shown that children make significant

gains in various areas of development through shared storybook experiences” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). For instance, when I first implemented my study, Donald struggled with understanding what I was asking of him. He would consistently tell me about a part of the book that he enjoyed or did not like. When we completed our final book in the study, Donald was retelling stories and using complete sentences rather than labeling items on the pages of the books or telling me about his favorite part.

Mackenzie once told me that she “likeded that book cause’ it was tilly.” She meant to say that she liked the book because it was silly. When we began reading our third book she said, “I like this book better because it is hilarious!” “Wordless picture books can be used to instruct children at different levels of their literacy development” (Hu & Commeyras, 2008, p. 5). Like Mackenzie, Kennedy developed his vocabulary in his use of past tense. He regularly used a form of past tense by adding an extra -ed to the word that he intended to use in the past tense. For example, he once said the word “watched-ed” instead of watched. However, after viewing and listening to wordless picture books and retelling the stories in the past tense, Kennedy was able to recognize that he had been using the -ed improperly. One day he noted, “oh yeah, that isn’t right” and corrected himself. Since then, he has been correcting his speech when he realizes that he has used past tenses incorrectly.

### **Affective Response**

Wordless picture books enhance positive and valuable responses without limiting their imagination. Wordless picture books rely on illustrations to convey a story and offer a large assortment of topics, themes, and levels of complexity (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). Rather than simply stating the ending to *The Yellow Umbrella*, Andrew shouted out, “Surprise! The umbrellas are really kids!” He was excited to uncover the theme of the story when it had been more complex than some of the others had thought. His excitement for the last page of the story and throughout the duration of this study was enjoyable to watch. He often had to bite his tongue so that other students could have an opportunity to speak. His “surprise” really added to the book’s ending for those students who did not understand what they were reading at that point.

These books encouraged wonder and excitement about the world, and reading became more enjoyable for the students. “They have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children demonstrate an ease with picture comments and understanding of the story. I would regularly find my wordless picture books were missing from my shelves during free time and found Jack and Kennedy hiding books behind the shelves so that they would be the first students to get them when they were given free time again. Donald never grasped the concept of reading the book for two weeks at a time and soon began asking each day, “What is our next wordless book going to be? I can’t wait for the next one!” When I asked these three boys why they liked reading these books they each had

a different response. Kennedy said, “I like reading about things that I like. You got books that I like now.” Jacob told me, “I want to take art classes so I can make books like these when I grow up. I like telling stories too!” Lastly, Donald explained that “these books are fun cause’ you don’t really know what is happening. I like getting to be the author and the illustrator. No one can tell me I am wrong.” The three boys noted that wordless picture books were liked by all of them. Their reasoning was based on the connections that they were able to make with each book. All three of the boys related this type of literature to something in their lives. They also noted the sense of comfort that these books elicit. According to Tan (2001), “it’s about showing and telling, a window for learning to ‘read’ in a broad sense, exploring relationships between words, pictures and the words we experience every day” (p. 4).

<b>Interview Questions Post-Study</b>			
How would you feel if you read a story without words?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?	15	0	0
How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?	15	0	0

Table 3. Post Survey Results

## Performance

Wordless picture books allowed students to perform interpretations of books for every level of learners. Using this type of visual literacy allowed children to explore and expand their vocabulary through storytelling and imagination. With no written vocabulary to wrestle with, students were able to enjoy wonderful moments telling the tales in their own words. “Picture books tend to represent that window of imagination: strange play, disruption and child-like wonderment that is always available, but only if you’re willing to look up and notice it” (Tan, 2001, p. 9). Jackson never wanted to participate in activities in my classroom. He rarely spoke to students during classroom discussions about topics in math, social studies, or science. He preferred to talk to friends about things that were irrelevant to topics. He often interrupted conversations to tell stories about playing with his trains or cars rather than what his classmates were discussing. Wordless picture books allowed Jackson to transfer his love of playing and imagination to storytelling. The imaginative world that he escapes to when playing with trucks was just as evident in his storytelling abilities. When Jackson retold his version of *Dinosaur!* he added movement, dinosaur sounds, and dialogue into a story that had very simple illustrations. He was able to tell a story that starting at the beginning, had a detailed middle, and an ending that was relevant to the story’s illustrations. He even helped students who left out portions of the story that were important. Wordless picture books allowed Jackson and other students to develop and perform stories in a manner that made sense to them.

Wordless picture books also provided students with an opportunity to tell a story that was meaningful to them that had few limitations on what was right or wrong. “In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). Kennedy had difficulty staying on task when we were reading *The Yellow Umbrella* and I was constantly trying to figure out how to get Kennedy involved. Then one day during indoor recess, I noticed that Kennedy was making umbrellas out of the craft supplies in our art center. When I asked him what he was doing he replied, “I am making the story.” This instance demonstrated that Kennedy was looking at the pictures and listening to the stories that the students were making but his interpretation was different. Instead of telling his story through role playing and discussions, Kennedy preferred to make props. As the other stories were introduced, students would ask Kennedy for help when making props to perform their stories. Not only did this help him understand the story in greater detail, but it helped him build his confidence and make friends in the classroom.

### **Cognitive Response**

Wordless picture books elicit a meaningful connection to each text. “Early reading behavior is linkage to the continuation of learning to read and enjoy it. The value of the child’s verbal accomplishments are internalized: the child experiences good feelings about books and reading” (Gerecke, 1989, p. 11). In my study, students were able to develop a knowledge of literary elements and familiarize themselves with the story before retelling through multiple viewing

and a variety of representations of the text. The words could not be memorized, and were instead recreated through spontaneous storytelling and imagination (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004). Wordless picture books are said to “have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children were able to retract a statement, make changes, and make predictions about the story. When reading *The Yellow Umbrella*, Jack tried to determine where the umbrellas were going. He began by stating, “they are going to a hotel. Or is it a motel maybe? They are different. One is big and the other is little.” After a closer look at the book, Jack retracted his conclusion and said, “the red umbrella joined the yellow umbrella on the street because they were all going to school!” Jack’s attention to detail in the pictures allowed him to establish a conclusion that made sense and that related to his previous assumptions. He also added details to his story that were important in developing strong retelling skills.

Students examined illustrations and determined what they were able to add to characterization, action, setting, and mood. Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Children were challenged by using inferencing skills such as reading patterns, decoding, and syntax. Students became aware of the character’s emotions and included more literacy elements through story telling. Having children tell a story orally can help students develop sequencing

skills and identify fiction story elements. For instance, when we read *Time Flies*, Brianna noted that “even though the pictures look real, this book is still fiction like *Dinosaur!*” Brianna was not fooled by the imaginative pictures compared to the more realistic pictures of these books. She recognized even though the story was being told through pictures, the stories themselves were unlikely to have been non-fictional books. Tan (2001) explains that by encouraging visual reading, the meaning is left to the reader to find for themselves, rather than being overtly stated or implied in traditional literature. The books were short, simple, and easy to read. The art itself told the story, and allowed for a variety of interpretations. Readers became interested in the imaginative play of drawings and paintings, telling stories of learning how to look at things in new ways. Further questioning allowed the reader to find his own meaning and seek closure through his own experiences. For instance, when we read *The Snowman*, Kennedy could not find the relevance of the story to his own life because he had never built a snowman before. In order to make a more meaningful connection, Kennedy decided that the next time it snowed; he was going to make a snowman with his brother. *The Snowman* elicited questions, imagination, and an experience that Kennedy would encounter for the first time. Kennedy learned that books are not only enjoyable, but are also tools for teaching and learning about new things. When we completed *The Snowman* he asked, “are there picture books about zoos? I saw a zoo on TV but I never went to one. I want to look at books about zoos so I can see if it is something I will like.” I found books about zoos, animals, and other types of visual literacy for Kennedy to examine. He looked at these books during a recess

period and determined that going to the zoo was something that he wanted to do some day. He also told me, “these books taught me a lot this year. I think you should use them for the kids next year.”

### **Delimitations**

My study was not able to specify whether vocabulary growth occurred solely through the use of wordless picture books. Since kindergarten is the first experience with formal schooling, I was only able to observe and measure the growth that my students made in vocabulary within the contexts of using wordless picture books.

In addition, my study consisted of a variety of levels of students who were involved in other activities outside of school that may have promoted oral language. Students also lived in households with a varying number of family members that may reflect the amount of listening and speaking opportunities that are presented throughout the day. Due to this constraint, my study did not take into consideration the effect wordless picture books would have on vocabulary for students who have a wide range of vocabulary development opportunities. Students who already had such wide ranges in vocabulary may have had difficulty building and developing skills through interaction with each other.

My study consisted of an unusually small group of students. I only had fifteen students and none of the students had IEP's or restrictions. Also, all of the students expected that they would learn how to read in kindergarten. Therefore, students had been more inclined to want to try using wordless picture books because they believed that this type of instruction would help them learn to read.

## Conclusion

Students are presented with new expectations each day that appear unfair, unfamiliar, and unusual. There are times when these are obstacles that teachers face when they plan a lesson or unit. Wordless picture books were both unfamiliar and unusual to the students in my class and to me. I was worried about implementing something that was different than what students had been exposed to originally and was very different than the way I was teaching in other subject areas. Ladson-Billings said, “learning can be manifested in student competency in a variety of subject areas and skills” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.111). Ladson-Billings is acknowledging that there isn’t one specific way of teaching, but instead, an obligation to help students learn, believe, and succeed by all means possible. This includes using a variety of teaching methods to reach the needs of all students. This not only gave me the courage to implement my study but also reiterates that using wordless picture books within any area of the curriculum may help students develop and expand their knowledge of any topic. These books allow educators to explore a new way of teaching in a method that may profoundly impact a student’s learning. Although wordless picture books may not be the answer for every student in every subject, my study defended that wordless picture books are effective instruments to explore when teaching oral language.

Children’s listening, speaking, and oral language skills are greatly impacted through the implementation of wordless picture books into an oral language curriculum. These books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary. A child’s

imagination and storytelling skills are pressed to new limits as these picture books eliminate the fear of being incorrect and allow the children to express and explain their thoughts and emotions freely. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless.

### **Future Plans**

Completing this study has not only enhanced my teaching abilities, but also taught me to believe in myself. It has always been easy for me to believe that all of my students would be successful. However, when it comes to my own ability, I sometimes lack the same motivation that I uphold for my students. My study has taught me new things about myself as an educator. I have learned that it takes strength, patience, and perseverance to complete such an overwhelming task. I now have an appreciation for how my young students must feel when they come to school for the very first time. The ongoing obstacles and triumphs of my study provided that ‘first day of school’ feeling for me every time I discovered or uncovered something new.

“The peasant begins to get courage to overcome his dependence when he realizes that he is dependent. Until then, he goes along with the boss and says “What can’t I do? I’m only a peasant” (Freire, 2007/1970, p. 61). The notion of freedom in my study seemed as though it was not just an obstacle to overcome but an opportunity that seemed so overwhelming and farfetched that it could not possibly end well. Instead, it was the oppressed choice of what to do with the knowledge that was already within my students and me. My students also questioned their capabilities because they thought they could not do well because

they were only five or six years old. This was because they had been told that they could not do things since they were so young. However, my study gave my students the opportunity to work alongside me as I recorded my data. Rather than simply being my subjects, they were instead my co-researchers. Not only were my notes, student work, and surveys helpful as I conducted my research, but my students themselves were extremely helpful. When students noticed that someone said something of importance, they would tell me that I should write it down in my journal. At first, I thought that it was funny, but I learned to respect what they felt had value and it led to remarkable findings in my study.

In order to provide the best education for my students, I created additional questions that I plan to explore in the future. These questions were developed as my study progressed and gave me ideas for changes and new topics to examine. *What will be the observed and reported experiences when I use teacher prompting to facilitate oral language while using wordless picture books?* When collecting my data, I tried not to influence the data by interjecting my own thoughts about the books that we were reading. I also spoke very little when students were conducting discussions or telling their stories. At times, students did need prompting and spoke freely. Their discussions and vocabulary use greatly increased as the study evolved. Students were willing to speak more openly when I asked questions. While I tried to speak very little, it made me wonder what type of impact it would make if I were to consistently open our discussions with questions or prompts.

*What will be the observed and reported experiences when students compare books with pictures to books with words?* Several of my students were presented with new experiences using the wordless texts in my study. It was evident that questions were developing because the wordless texts had provided opportunities for students to explore topics that were unfamiliar to them. One way in which wordless picture books were limiting was the fact that the books only presented the students with ideas but did not allow for clarification of their ideas. Books that have similar storylines or non-fiction books that connect to topics in wordless text would allow students to further their lines of inquiry and find answers to the questions that were developed while reading wordless picture books. Not only would students continue to learn about the topics of interest, they would also be exposed to more vocabulary that may not have been evident when reading wordless picture books.

*What will be the observed and reported experiences when students choose the wordless picture books we examine?* There were moments in my study when I questioned the book titles that I chose for my study. Every group of students was different and they had different interests. Not only was the topic of wordless picture books unfamiliar to me, but so were the topics of the books that I chose for my class. At times, my students appeared as though they were not interested in certain books because the topics were irrelevant to their lives or were not of interest. Half way through my study I added a new question to my survey. I asked students how they would feel if they chose the books that we would read. Every student in my class agreed that student choice would impact how much they

spoke about the text. At that point, I provided students with a selection of books to choose from in order to promote a more comfortable learning environment. This greatly impacted the outcome of my study at that point. In the future, I plan to give students the chance to observe the books prior to implementing them into my unit. This will ensure that the books being used are of interest and will provide opportunities for students to establish relevant connections to the text.

I plan to continue playing the role of teacher-researcher in my classroom. I hope that sharing my findings and experiences with my co-workers will inspire them to explore this role in their own classrooms. I believe that my peers share the same drive to help their students achieve success and I hope that they will explore the impact that wordless picture books may have in their own classrooms.

I regularly referred to my study as a journey. I am saddened by the fact that my journey is over with this group of students. However, I do not feel that this is the actual end of my journey. There are sure to be more twists and turns in the road ahead of me. But with each stop I make along the way, I hope that I am inspiring my students and peers to strive for excellence.

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## APPENDIX A: HSIRB Form



September 16, 2009

Abigail Oertner  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Abigail Oertner:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone [REDACTED] or through e-mail [REDACTED] should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

George D. Brower  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
[REDACTED]

**APPENDIX B: Parental Consent Form**

April 29, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on oral language development. The title of my research is "Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books". My students will benefit from participating in this study because wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary.

As part of the study, all students will be asked to examine a variety of picture books, compare and contrast vocabulary, sequence events, and identify the meaning of story elements. Students will be asked to create vocabulary charts, drawings and other artistic representations of the story, write, and present their own version of the wordless picture book. They will also produce a literary magazine about the author or illustrator of each wordless picture book. We will use a simple survey involving pictures to determine the children's feelings toward wordless picture books. A rubric will be used to monitor vocabulary development through speaking and listening exercises as the school year progresses. A second rubric will be used to monitor the progression of visual literacy. The study will take place from September 8th through December 18th, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. Please note that this will be exclusion from the study only, not the classroom assignments. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on a student's grade, classroom placement, or exclusion from classroom activities. Should you be concerned about the perceived risks associated with this study please contact Mrs. Barbara Bradley, Principal. She has reviewed the study and is available through the school office at 570-992-4960 or your child's guidance counselor at 570-992-4960.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any question you have about the research can be directed to me by phone 570-992-4960, email [aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us](mailto:aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us) or my advisor is Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-7958.

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature Date

### APPENDIX C: Principal Consent Form

April 29, 2009

Dear Barbara Bradley,

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on oral language development. The title of my research is "Pictures to Words: Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books". My students will benefit from participating in this study because wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary.

As part of the study, all students will be asked to examine a variety of picture books, compare and contrast vocabulary, sequence events, and identify the meaning of story elements. Students will be asked to create vocabulary charts, drawings and other artistic representations of the story, write, and present their own version of the wordless picture book. They will also produce a literary magazine about the author or illustrator of each wordless picture book. We will use a simple survey involving pictures to determine the children's feelings toward wordless picture books. A rubric will be used to monitor vocabulary development through speaking and listening exercises as the school year progresses. A second rubric will be used to monitor the progression of visual literacy. The study will take place from September 8th through December 18th, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. Please note that this will be exclusion from the study only, not the classroom assignments. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on a student's grade, classroom placement, or exclusion from classroom activities.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any question you have about the research can be directed to me by phone [570-992-4966](tel:570-992-4966), email [aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us](mailto:aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us), or my advisor is Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, [610-625-7958](tel:610-625-7958).

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Abigail Oertner has my permission to conduct this study at Hamilton Elementary School.

Principal Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D: Interviews**

1. Tell me about your favorite book: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. Tell me about the types of books that you like to read: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. Tell me about your favorite authors or illustrators: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**APPENDIX E: Surveys**

1. How would you feel if you read a story without words?



2. How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?



3. How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?



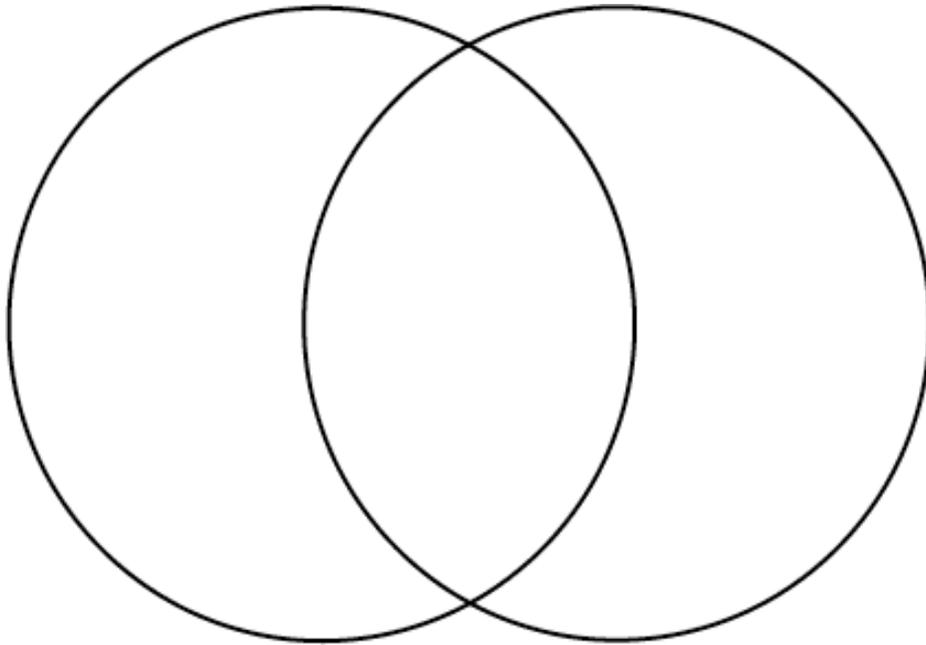
4. How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?



5. How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?





**APPENDIX H: Venn Diagram**

**APPENDIX I: Four Square Graphic Organizer**

<b>Comprehension</b>		<b>Setting</b>	
<b>Problem</b>		<b>Solution</b>	

**Details:**

### APPENDIX J: Wordless Picture Book Story Rubric

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Oral Language

<b><i>SPEAKING/LISTENING</i></b>	Y	N	M
Uses age appropriate vocabulary and language			
References familiar language used in the classroom			
References new language vocabulary established using picture books			
Attempts building onto prior vocabulary and language experience			
Other			

\*“Maturing” is based on students with speech, language or developmental delays that may impact achievement in these areas.

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Visual Literacy

<b><i>WRITING</i></b>	Y	N	M
Created story matches the illustrations			
Story is creative and imaginative			
Story elements are present (characters, setting, plot, problem/solution)			
Other			

\*“Maturing” is based on students with speech, language or developmental delays that may impact achievement in these areas.

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by

Abigail P. Oertner

2010

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research study investigated the observed and reported experiences of my kindergarten students when wordless picture books were used to facilitate oral language. Listening and speaking skills were observed and documented to measure vocabulary growth in greater detail. Fifteen kindergarteners participated in the study that involved creating their own wordless books, performances, group discussions, and retelling activities. The study focused on comprehension, literary elements, imagination, listening and speaking skills. Analysis of the data indicated that wordless picture books enhanced and developed student vocabulary and comprehension. The findings indicated using multiple readings, a variety of retelling and comprehension activities, performances, and vocabulary lists would help to increase oral language development, interest in reading, and comprehension levels. Results from the pre-surveys and post-surveys indicated that students felt confident using wordless picture books and showed an interest in using them in other areas.

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Thank you to Heather, Colleen, and Melissa for all of your support.

Thank you for your words of wisdom, your kind criticisms, your positive attitudes and believing in me. Your confidence in me was encouraging and made me believe in myself.

I would like to thank Dr. Dilendik for being such a patient, helpful and kind professor. You were always very willing to answer questions, accommodate schedules, and make yourself available to your students. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to help me construct my thesis.

Mrs. Camie Mojadidi also played an integral role in the creation of my research question. My mother was pregnant with me when she taught with you many years ago and ironically it took 25 years for our paths to cross again. I am grateful that you were able to take time away from your schedule to be a part of my thesis committee. I hope that I will make you proud!

Also, thank you to Dr. Zales for your patience, your encouragement, and your leadership. We had a bond that I will never be able to recreate with another professor. You believed in me and pushed me to strive for excellence. I always felt confident in my thesis because you spent countless hours reading and correcting my work so that it would be the best it could be. Thank you for all of your hard work and time that you put into the MEDU

program. We are all better educators because of you.

To my MEDU 702 girls, I loved hearing your stories, sharing laughter, tears, and great food! My research group deserves a big thank you for helping me through this study. You were always willing to help, made time to answer questions, and provided support.

To my best friends. Thank you for being so understanding when I could not attend girls nights, weekend getaways, movie nights, and so on. There were many weekends when I missed you. *I love hanging out with my best friends!*

Thank you to Jen, Patrick, Greg, Lisa, Brianna, Ryan and Evan for understanding and dealing with my stress and my inability to attend events while I was busy writing my thesis! I cannot wait to see you on a regular basis! I love you all.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my parents. Mom and Dad, thank you for proofreading my work every week. You constantly assured me that I was on the right track and encouraged me throughout this long process. I cannot believe that my thesis is complete! I knew that I could do this because you believed in me! Thank you and I love you!

To my loving husband, Mathew. You are the reason that I came to Moravian College. You knew this was a program that would help me become the teacher that I always wanted to become! I cannot thank you enough for helping me complete my thesis by taking on extra chores around the house, keeping the house quiet, and encouraging me to complete the program. You believed in me throughout the entire process, and made me laugh on very tiring and stressful days. Thank you and I love you!

## **My Researcher Stance**

Growing up with seven people under one roof sounded like a farm or maybe even a zoo from time to time with all of the hustle and bustle. Similar to these places, our household was also full of singing, laughter, and a lot of chatter. Growing up in such a vocal family is likely what has shaped my love for language as both a child and an adult.

My father was an elementary school principal. His voice was loud and blustery, setting the foundation for order, rules, and logic throughout the home. My mother was a kindergarten teacher. Her voice was soft and compassionate, setting the tone for a caring and well oiled machine. My Nana also lived in our home. She could be both loud and soft all at one time. She was an animated storyteller and a whispering friend telling secrets in our ears. My brother, Greg was very musical. He could be both loud and soft as he played the piano, sang songs, or acted out a scene from a play. My sister, Jennifer explored other languages, making it difficult to understand, but leaving me feeling intrigued at the same time. She remains eclectic in her approach to life and has taught me to appreciate it. My little brother, Patrick was very logical and sequential. His voice was quiet and secretive as he mixed potions in the basement and quietly documented his new scientific creations. Today, he applies his love of creating new things particularly when it comes to cooking. Lastly, there was me, Abby. I was a mixture of all of the people in my house. I grew to be logical, compassionate, animated, musical, explorative, and quiet. I was an explorer of the language of all the people in my house and how they were using it.

As I grew, this curiosity of language followed me through my education and into my own teaching. I was excited when I was informed that I would be teaching Oral Language in my full-day Kindergarten classroom. However, after a year of using my district's program, I found that my students lacked motivation and creativity. My district's oral language program was meant for students to express thoughts and feelings, to describe what was happening in a picture and share thoughts, feeling, and previous experiences that may relate to the picture. Everything the children said had to be written on a sentence strip and later organized for sentence construction, grammar, and context. Many teachers have expressed how difficult and time consuming this program can be and we have spent hours determining what could be a better way to enhance its meaning. It should encourage students to engage in the text and each other in thoughtful discussion by creating a framework for students to explore texts and consider different sides of an issue before drawing conclusions. Opportunities for discussion allow for a more meaningful conclusion based on students own thoughts and purposeful discussion. It would be beneficial for a teacher to determine language growth and structure. It also should tell a teacher what areas need to be developed and what texts might be available to assist in this area.

A lot has changed since I began teaching in my district five years ago. My peers have also noted several changes in literacy and language programs over the decades in which they have taught; moving from initial teaching alphabet (ITA), to basal readers, whole language, phonics programs, and so on. However, it has been increasingly difficult in the area of language development no matter what

program has been used because students are missing out on the experiences that I was lucky enough to have as a child. While my childhood was spent playing outside with neighbors, building tree houses, and playing dress up in the basement, my students are instead spending countless hours watching television or playing videogames. My childhood also consisted of playing school on the back porch with the boys in my neighborhood, acting out stories with my siblings in the living room, or making up games and songs on family trips; my students are spending hours on the computer.

On the other hand, there have also been children in my classroom who have not spent hours watching television or on the computer because they do not have these luxuries. In fact, there are some who have spent hours alone or have been witness to things their eyes should never have seen. Their language is very different. Their words are hard even for me to describe. Some students either have very limited vocabulary or a vocabulary that is inappropriate for kindergarten. My study of language development was created for these children. It was written for the children who have yet to find their voices, those who have not had the opportunity to explore what is beyond the four walls of their home, and for those who have yet to experience books that can take them to a place in the world that does not exist for them. There are children in my class who have also been privileged and have had experiences in their lives that even I have yet to experience. But this study is for them as well. They are, after all, only five years old.

One day as I sat listening to a presentation in Camie Modjadidi's ESL

Learner, Family, and Community course, a student presented wordless picture books as an option for assisting her students with English language development. The light bulb instantly turned on. This was what my program needed. It provided a story and opportunity for the children to create something of their own. After years of feeling like my program was a disappointment, finally I was excited to teach oral language and revisit my roots of language development. Now was the opportunity to provide an environment conducive for using such language.

Wordless picture books greatly impact a student's ability to tell stories, use their imagination, and foster creativity. These books also allow for exploration with new vocabulary, word play, language development, listening, and speaking skills. Wordless picture books permit children to express themselves as both the author and illustrator as they create and recreate their own versions of the book. Children build off of their prior knowledge and extend learning experiences through text to text, text to self, and text to world. The creativity stimulated by wordless books has encouraged students to look more closely at story details, to examine story elements, and to understand how a story's text is organized. Wordless picture books introduced children to concepts they needed to apply when learning to read. Students built their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

Therefore, my research question was: What will be my observed and reported experiences when I integrate wordless picture books into my oral language program?

## Literature Review

### Introduction

Implementing wordless picture books into an oral language program allows children to build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for individuals. Using this type of visual literacy allows children to explore and expand their vocabulary through storytelling and imagination. The students' ability to create their own story eliminates the fear of being incorrect and allows the child to express and explain themselves as listening skills, speaking skills, and vocabulary are strengthened.

### Visual Literacy

**Benefits of implementing picture books.** Stewing (2001) found “that children who have not learned how to see will not be able to write, not because they cannot spell, but because they have nothing to say. These concerns have led educators to develop visual literacy programs” (as cited in Stewig, 2001). Curriculum in the classroom is vastly enhanced by supporting all subject areas with age appropriate literature. Some researchers agree that instruction integrating the visual literacy and the arts is often presented in isolation from language arts curriculum (Ramsey, 1993; Stewig, 2001). However, when combined, these areas can enhance what is being taught rather than hinder performance. “The task can be given in less than 15 minutes and provides children with authentic, enjoyable experiences” (Paris & Paris, 2001, p. 25). For example, good literature presents new concepts accurately, visually, and help students make connections. A picture book encourages wonder and excitement about the world, and reading becomes

more enjoyable for the students. When reading a wordless picture book, the children's knowledge is stirred to new heights with new ideas, and adds rich multi-layered connections to their understanding. "Picture books can open up a whole world of visual literacy for readers of all ages" (Storey, 1994, p. 5).

Readers both young and old view picture books as short, simple, and easy to read. The art itself tells the story, allowing for new interpretations by each of its readers. The responsibility of the artist rests in the work and its ability to convey truth, beauty, beliefs, and conflict.

"Bright colorful illustrations initially beckon people's attention in making a selection of a picture book" (Narahara, 1998, p. 4). As readers continue, they become interested in the imaginative play of drawings and paintings, telling stories of learning how to look at things in new ways. Tan (2001) explains that by encouraging visual reading, the meaning is left to the reader to find for themselves, rather than being overtly stated or implied in traditional literature. Further questioning allows the reading to find his own meaning and seek closure through his own experiences. The readers are able to make inferences and continue playful inquiry. "A successful picture book is one in which everything is presented to the reader as a speculative proposition, wrapped in invisible quotation marks, as if to say 'what do you make of this'" (Tan, 2001, p. 10). This engages the readers and allows for connections to existing knowledge or to previous texts. The remarkable element in this type of literature is that it allows the story to be told with endless possibilities and without fear of being incorrect. Several studies explain that numerous educators recommend using wordless

picture books with children to support emergent literacy. “Wordless picture books can be used to instruct children at different levels of their literacy development” (Hu & Commeyras, 2008, p. 5). With no written vocabulary to wrestle with, young children can enjoy wonderful moments telling the tales in their own words. Children can look through a wordless picture book, reveal their own versions and compare their classmates’ similarities and differences. Children can explore vocabulary by (a) naming or enumerating objects, (b) inventing dialogue, (c) making comparisons, (d) describing and interpreting action and events, and (e) predicting and evaluating outcomes.

**Combining literary elements.** “Wordless picture books could also be used in the classroom to further develop a child’s sensitivity to literary elements” (Jett-Simpson, 1976, p. 19). Wordless picture books elicit storytelling through pictures and inferencing. Children are challenged by using inferencing skills in oral language such as reading patterns, decoding, and syntax. “Many research studies have shown that children make significant gains in various areas of development through shared storybook experiences” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). The complexity of language increases, while students’ storytelling expression improves through using wordless picture books. Students become aware of the character’s emotions and include more literacy elements through picture book story telling. The readers’ close connection to the story allows the child to ... examine illustrations for what they have to add to characterization, action, setting, or mood” (Storey, 1994, p. 6).

Visual literacy is fostered by repetitive readings or showings, with time in

between, followed by discussion of understanding. This allows children the opportunity to process that every part of the story is connected to the following part of the story. Not all children walk away with the same understandings since they may have experienced the stories differently. Each artistic element has a vocabulary of its own. There are books written for the purpose of children to find hidden objects or clues that will help them find meaning in the pictures, similar to the children creating their own story from wordless picture books. Using the drawings of wordless picture books allows children to build focus on descriptive details within the stories. Having children tell a story orally can help students develop sequencing skills and identify fiction story elements. Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989).

**Incorporating storytelling and imagination.** “Telling stories in the classroom furthers oral and written language development, as well as furthering comprehension for reading and listening” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 159). It is important to expose children to a wide variety of literature styles in order to develop artistic taste. It is valuable when sharing the literature with children to compare and contrast all versions of the story. While hearing it told aloud, the children will take notice of the rhythm and sounds of the piece. “In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and

interaction” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158).

Using wordless picture books allows young readers to familiarize themselves with the story before retelling through recall and some prompts from the teacher. “They have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children demonstrate an ease with picture comments and understanding of the story. This provides a tool through which children’s understanding of narrative elements and relationships can be measured. The children are able to retract a statement, make changes, and make predictions about the story. According to Tan (2001), “it’s about showing and telling, a window for learning to ‘read’ in a broad sense, exploring relationships between words, pictures and the words we experience every day” (p. 4). This type of exploration with picture books can be acted out in role playing activities, creative drama, bookmaking, or puppetry. According to Hu and Commeyras (2008) “wordless picture books, the “pure” picture books or the “almost” wordless picture books, rely on illustrations to tell a story and offer a surprising variety of topics, themes, and levels of difficulty” (p. 4). Von Drasek (2006) agrees that a picture book should allow for an engaging storyline, striking language and a sense of wonder about the world. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless. Several studies show that children exhibit a broad range of responses when sharing stories in the classroom (Sipe and Mcguire, 2006; Gerecke, 1989; Goularte, 2002). The students relate the story to their own lives, other stories, themes, or characters. When children use these experiences in their writing it

helps them to establish meaningful and sequential stories.

The expectations the teacher may have for the text may in fact be totally different than what the children vocalize. The experiences of the students may be different than those of the teacher. “Picture books tend to represent that window of imagination: strange play, disruption and child-like wonderment that is always available, but only if you’re willing to look up and notice it” (Tan, 2001, p. 9). Providing children with imaginative experiences allows the children’s words to develop without prompting and is based on the child’s prior knowledge of both content and vocabulary.

### **Oral Language**

Picture book stories are for all ages. At approximately three to four years of age, children develop a scheme for conventional storytelling, and from the fourth year on they construct the story as a complex whole, with a purpose and a goal (Marjanovic-Umek, Kranjc, & Fekonja, 2002, p. 4). The development of oral language is one of children’s most impressive accomplishments that occur during the first five years of life” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 157). Children’s language development is often based on the experiences the children already had with language, whether it be hearing murmurs from inside the womb, responding to stimulus through coos and giggles, or experimenting with language structure in everyday occurrences. These language exchanges greatly impact the amount of words in children’s vocabulary and affect how the children use their vocabulary. Many studies show that young children’s mental functioning is related to visualization and direct experience (Isbell, Sobol,

Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004; Marjanovic-Umek, Kranjc, & Fekonja, 2002).

“Young children’s preschool experiences with stories and books have long been considered an important influence on language development, and relatedly, on their reading and writing performance in school” (Mistry & Herman, 1991, p. 4). Picture books serve as vehicles for a variety of communications activities, including choral reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

**Effective development of listening skills.** “Storytelling is the most effective way to develop listening skills. Storytelling also provides opportunity to experience the difference between listening quietly and listening actively, by participating in the process” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). When children are very young, their first form of communication is listening. As time goes by these listeners begin expressing their own messages through the verbal language of what they experienced as toddlers. Storytelling begins to construct as students enter pre-school and kindergarten. “For many children, hearing stories read aloud by their teachers is deeply pleasurable and emotionally satisfying” (Sipe & McGuire, 2006, p. 6). The stories are very simple and rely on prior experiences. The children are making coherent connections from their life to the text in order to connect events that seem reasonable.

According to Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lawrence (2004), the “early childhood teacher can provide opportunities for young children to play with language, while gaining an appreciation of the sounds and meaning in words” (p. 157). Knowing the importance of oral language in children’s early development, it becomes the responsibility of early childhood educators to offer opportunities

for word play while teaching letter sounds and word meaning. “Children can hear new words and quickly acquire partial meanings of the words based on the illustrations, the linguistic elements of the text, and the performance of the read-aloud. Repeated readings can lead incrementally to more complete knowledge of new words” (Leung, 2008, p. 166). Storytelling and story reading are two methods highly touted by educational researchers to achieve these goals. The primary differences between the two methods are that language growth is the focus for story reading, and storytelling is focused on listening skills. Storytelling seems to have further reaching effects orally, and language development fosters comprehension for reading and listening. Wang and Cameron (1996) explain, “from face to face communication to reading and writing, there lies a continuum from contextualization through decontextualization, to further recontextualization” (p. 4). Decontextualization is the type of language one uses in a book report, storytelling, or when taking a written or oral test. As language develops, the different context in which one speaks also strengthens. At this time, the listener is now becoming a mature speaker.

**Effective development of speaking skills.** According to Storey (1994) “not everyone takes the same information away from the book” (p. 8). Children’s narration of wordless picture books may change according to the type of interaction they have with their partner. “What matters are ideas, feelings and the pictures and words that build them” (Tan, 2001, p. 4). Decontextualization significantly impacts children’s narration as a partner in one context may speak differently in another. These interactions greatly impact one’s oral language as

vocabulary diminishes and the number of words decreases. This occurs regularly in the classroom. The type of language children use when speaking with their peers is often different from the language children use when addressing the entire class. “Exchanges between students lean toward a more well rounded understanding of what was seen” (Storey, 2004, p. 8). The presentation of picture books through several settings allows children the freedom to speak with one another in a variety of ways, therefore impacting their use of vocabulary. Implementing wordless picture books into an oral language program allows children to build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for each individual. “Challenging them to talk and write about what they see could help them to develop stronger speaking and writing skills” (Stewig, 2001, p. 309). Reading for meaning without having to deal with word identification is an obvious advantage of working with wordless picture books. “For the young child this type of early reading behavior is linkage to the continuation of learning to read and enjoy it. The value of the child’s verbal accomplishments are internalized: the child experiences good feelings about books and reading” (Gerecke, 1989, p. 11).

### **Summary**

Children’s listening, speaking, and oral language skills are greatly impacted through the implementation of wordless picture books into an oral language curriculum. Wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary. Their imagination and storytelling skills are pressed to new limits as these picture

books eliminate the fear of being incorrect and allow the children to express and explain their thoughts and emotions freely. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Wordless Picture Books provide emergent readers with the opportunity to use pictures to “tell” a story. Wordless books enhance vocabulary, language development, and creativity at all stages of cognitive development, and in content areas. The creativity stimulated by wordless books encourages students to look more closely at story details, to examine story elements, and to understand how a story’s text is organized. Wordless picture books introduce children to concepts they will need to apply when learning to read. Students build their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and eventually produce their own version of the wordless picture book.

### **Setting**

I am a full-day kindergarten teacher in northeastern Pennsylvania. My school is one of five elementary schools in the district. My school serves students in kindergarten through second grade. The geographical location of the school is unique in contrast to other schools in the district because Hamilton is located in a rural area ten miles from the city of Stroudsburg. Hamilton is an emerging suburban setting with many flourishing businesses, industrial parks, and housing developments. Stroudsburg and East Stroudsburg have recently seen a large influx of families from New York moving to the area with many parents maintaining jobs in New York and commuting to the city each day. Many students often miss a full day of school to return to the city for doctor and dentist appointments. Educators at Hamilton Elementary have started noting these instances and are feeling the effects that the urban elementary schools have been experiencing over

the past few years.

The socioeconomic status of my classroom is greatly divided as three children come from low income families, ten children come from lower-middle class families, and two come from upper-middle class families. There is one principal, two secretaries, and one guidance counselor in the building. We have 16 regular education teachers, one special education teacher with a paraprofessional support staff, and one emotional support teacher with a paraprofessional staff. We also have two part-time Instructional Support teachers, five reading specialists, and two math specialists. We have two art teachers, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, and one librarian with a paraprofessional.

The school building was renovated several years ago. A new wing and several new classrooms have been added onto the building. There are three computers and one wall-mounted television per classroom. The classrooms also have a mounted screen for use with an overhead or video projector. There is a wall mounted dry erase board across the front of the room and two bulletin boards along the back. There is a laptop cart available for use in the school and one projector to share among the classrooms. The school has one smart board per grade level, two digital cameras, and a digital video camera.

I utilize every inch of my classroom. My students sit at tables rather than desks and each table is labeled as a shape. The children work at these tables during group work, writing, and partner activities. I typically instruct my students in the back of the room rather than the front. We sit around our brightly colored

carpet where I have bulletin boards with calendar activities, a morning message, and my math word wall. Alongside the carpet are two easels; one holding a pocket chart and the other holding literacy charts. There is also a Venn diagram chart hanging on the back of the children's cubbies that line the carpet. In the corner of the carpet is my purple rocking chair and a small red chair for the child of the week. When I am not instructing from the carpet, I am either using the dry erase board located at the front of the room or working with reading or math groups at my kidney bean shaped table. I have seven center locations around the room including math, art, listening, poetry, reading, science, and writing. The centers are separated from one another to provide quiet areas for the students to work.

### **Participants**

I conducted my study with 15 students in my kindergarten classroom. My class consisted of nine boys and six girls. I had two African American students and 13 Caucasian students. I had one student who repeated kindergarten from a different classroom in the building. I did not have any students in Instructional Support, Emotional Support, Learning Support, Speech, or ESL. I did not have any students who received occupational or physical therapy.

### **Procedure**

I divided my unit into two aspects of oral literacy comprised of speaking and listening, and identifying story elements using wordless picture books. Students explored wordless picture books and discussed the specific elements of the illustration that "told" the story. They learned to "read" illustrations as they

looked at the ways in which pictures revealed information about the characters, setting, and plot of a story. Each lesson in the unit was taught for 20 minutes everyday for two weeks. The same wordless picture book was used during the two week period. Students closely examined the components of the book promoting oral language in a variety of classroom activities. Students worked individually, in pairs, small groups, and whole group instruction. Students created a presentation and literary magazine at the completion of each unit.

First, my study proposal was approved by The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) which ensured that my study was not placing students at risk (see Appendix A). The explicit procedures for each unit began as I explained my study to my students and distributed my parental consent forms to my class (see Appendix B). I showed the children my field journal and allowed them to ask questions. I showed my kindergarten students the books that we would use, the charts we would make, and the logs that I would be carrying around the room so that they were less likely to ask these questions while I was conducting observations. I also sought permission from my principal (see Appendix C) and took time to explain my study to her in great detail as I had done with my students. I received permission from 15 parents and my principal.

Once I had permission from the HSIRB, my principal, and the parents, I began my data collection. I interviewed (see Appendix D) my students to determine their prior reading experience. I then distributed surveys (Appendix E) to my students to determine the childrens' attitudes toward wordless picture books. I provided opportunities for my students to preview the wordless picture books

being used in my study as well as other picture books located in my classroom library (see Appendix K). This time allowed students the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings about using wordless pictures books and about being a student in my study. A mid-study survey (see Appendix E) and a mid-study interview (see Appendix D) were used after the third book in the study. A post-survey (see Appendix E) and post-interview (see Appendix D) were used when the study was completed to measure vocabulary growth and interest.

Each book was broken up into a unit that was divided into two sections. The sections corresponded to listening and speaking components of oral language as well as story elements and composition that correlated to oral literacy. The sections were taught for five days each. After completion of the unit, a new book was introduced following the same structured design of two sections taught over a two week time span. The same book was viewed every day throughout the unit. Daily viewing allowed for activities such as Think/Pair/Share activity and discussion questions. New vocabulary for each book was generated by the students and was recorded on chart paper. A new list for each story hung in the classroom throughout the study. The class monitored the list and acknowledged new, old, or similar vocabulary words throughout the study. A personal vocabulary sheet was added into a personal dictionary for the children to place into their own writing folders (see Appendix F). Students used the words that were formulated to write sentences and children created drawings based on a page from the story. The class examined the language that was used and compared it to

the language used on their vocabulary lists. The class highlighted these words on sentence strips so that children could continue to revisit the vocabulary words from each story. Critiques, biographies, awards, and videos about the author were shared so that students could gather information about the authors and illustrators. As a group, the class created a literary magazine that included information about the author and book. This was done for each picture book and author (see Appendix G).

The second week of each unit focused on story elements and composition through oral literacy. Students learned that pictures were an important element of storybooks. Pictures helped students understand the elements of each story, including the characters, setting, and plot. Illustrations also provided valuable clues when students had difficulty reading words. Students were asked to identify the meaning of the story elements. These words were again charted for students to reference. The meaning of these words were referenced to regularly as the study progressed. The group used a graphic organizer to make note of the story elements: characters, setting, and problem/solution (see Appendix H). Working in pairs, students used sticky notes to write stories to accompany the pictures. Sticky notes and a Four-Square graphic organizer (see Appendix I) emphasized the basic story elements of plot, setting, and characters as well. Students used this information to write their own story about the picture book. The vocabulary list that was created at the beginning of the unit was available in their writing folder as a reference. Students created their own artistic interpretation of the wordless picture book using a variety of mediums such as watercolors, puppetry, clay, etc. Presentations (see Appendix J) of the wordless picture books were created by the

students. In closure of each unit, students compared their own stories with other stories written by classmates, the group story that was created the week prior, and the original version of the story. Lastly, the class examined the language used in their own stories and added new words to the vocabulary lists (see Appendix F).

### **Data Sources**

I gathered multiple data sources at different points throughout my study: student surveys, student generated artifacts, student presentations, observational data, and field log entries. Observations and discussions included think/pair/share activities, vocabulary comparisons, sequencing, picture book discussions, and identifying story elements. Student work included vocabulary charts, sentence strips, drawings about the stories, sticky notes, and personal storybooks. Projects included a literary magazine about the author or illustrator and an artistic representation of the wordless picture book. There was one presentation at the end of each unit that students created on their own. Two graphic organizers were used throughout each unit including a four square writing grid and a Venn Diagram to compare stories. A vocabulary reference list was added to each child's writing portfolio for each unit.

I kept a field log of events in the classroom that contained students' actions, reactions, and comments during lessons. Observations were written as they occurred and reflections were noted following the lesson. Reflecting on my teaching assisted in refining and analyzing lesson plans and assessing the value of the activities. Throughout the study, reflection on my current lessons proved essential in planning lessons for future teaching practices.

The following are the different forms of data collection I used to complete my study.

**Field log.** I kept a record of conversations, interviews, and observations that occurred during my class in my field log. I carried a clipboard around with me to record all of my observations and quotes. I organized my field log by creating two columns. In the left column, I wrote my observations and student quotations. In the right column, I wrote my reflections about the events that occurred. Organizing my log into two columns separated the facts from the assumptions. Recording observations, behaviors, and statements that my students had made, allowed me to reflect upon my teaching and the events that occurred. These observations guided my instruction throughout my study. This was very helpful when analyzing my data and helped guide future lessons.

**Student interviews.** I conducted individual interviews with my students to learn more about them and their feelings about the new instructional techniques I was going to use in class. I used five questions to guide my interviews (see Appendix D). The questions focused on the students' experience with literature. This was meant to show me what types of books my students enjoyed reading and supported my ideas about what topics would be of interest to my students. Each child was interviewed once before, during, and after my study. The information gained from the interviews gave me valuable data to help guide the process of writing my theme statements.

**Student surveys.** I performed independent surveys with my students to learn more about their feelings toward wordless picture books. I asked five

questions in my survey (see Appendix E). The questions focused on the students' feelings about books with words as opposed to books without words. I also questioned their experience with both types of text. This was meant to examine each child's experience with wordless picture books and determine their attitudes toward the books prior to my study. Each child was interviewed once before, during, and after my study.

**Student work.** MacLean and Mohr (1999) state, "Student work may be the centerpiece of your data, helping you to understand and interpret all the rest" (p. 47). Throughout my study, students worked in large group, several small groups, and pairs to complete tasks. Multiple groupings gave students the opportunity to examine wordless pictures books with peers and to use and share vocabulary that was learned over the course of the study. Students created their own wordless picture books, developed vocabulary charts, critiqued literature, and held group discussions which supported instruction. I photocopied and kept samples of student work to exhibit the progress that had been made and used this information to modify my instruction as needed for future lessons.

Additional student work included vocabulary charts, sentence strips, drawings about the story, sticky notes, and personal storybooks. Projects included a literary magazine about the author or illustrator and an artistic representation of the wordless picture book.

**Student presentations.** I wanted to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned. At the end of each unit, students presented their own versions of the wordless picture book that we had been viewing.

Students presented using methods that they chose themselves and were assessed using a storybook rubric (see Appendix J). The presentations allowed students to use language that they had learned from the current wordless picture book along with previous books. This allowed students to present their interpretation of the book in a comfortable and engaging manner.

**Vocabulary lists.** I used vocabulary lists (see Appendix F) as soon as my study began. Students viewed wordless picture books and I charted their words as they described each page piece of literature. The vocabulary lists were used as a tool for students to reference as they explored other wordless picture books and to support their own stories. I used the lists to measure the growth of the group's vocabulary and shared the growth with the students as the study progressed.

**Venn diagrams.** A Venn Diagram (see Appendix H) was used to compare stories. The comparisons ranged from plot and setting to vocabulary and sentence structure. The Venn Diagrams exhibited which areas of oral language and literacy needed to be addressed and which areas had evolved. It created a visual for students as my study developed and allowed students to gauge their own progress.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was an essential element of my research study. In order to fully ensure trustworthiness within my study, I made certain to abide by ethical research practices, and presented the authenticity of the happenings within my classroom.

First, my study proposal was approved by The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board which ensured that my study was not placing students at risk (see Appendix A). Next, the principal of my elementary school received a consent form (see Appendix C). Hendricks (2006) described the essential components that comprise a consent form. The consent form explained the reason for the study, that participation in the study would occur during school hours, that confidentiality would be upheld, and that participation was wholly voluntary. Any student who wished to withdraw from the study could do so without penalty. I then described the study to my students and distributed participant consent forms (see Appendix B) to parents' of student participants, informing students and parents of the study in greater detail. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) recommend discussing the study with students before the study takes action in the classroom. The discussion with my students provided an essential opportunity for me to answer my students' questions regarding the study. I also showed my kindergarten students the books that we would use, the charts we would make, and the logs that I planned to carry around the room so that they were less likely to ask these questions while I conducted my observations.

The data that were recorded were kept and coded in a password protected computer and located in a locked filing cabinet. I was the only one who had

access to these materials. To protect my participants' identity, each student was given a pseudonym, as suggested by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005). I made certain that their names, our school name, and the names of staff members remained confidential. No names were kept on student work, but were immediately replaced with pseudonyms. The key for the pseudonyms was kept on a password protected computer. At the end of my research study, original work was returned to my students, and my field log was destroyed.

As suggested by Hendricks (2006), I collected several forms of data to assure the credibility of my study. This was known as triangulation of data. Hendricks defined triangulation as, "a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed" (pg. 72). I gathered multiple data sources at different points during the study: student surveys, student generated artifacts, student presentations, observational data, and field log entries. I kept a field log of events in the classroom that related to my study. The field log contained students' actions, reactions, and comments during lessons. Observations were written as they occurred and reflections were noted following the lesson. Reflecting on my teaching assisted in refining and analyzing lesson plans and assessing the value of the activities. Throughout the study, reflection on my current lessons proved essential in planning lessons for future teaching practices. Reflective memos assisted in understanding the view of my students and their learning. It also allowed me to make decisions and changes throughout my study. This helped me to understand any biases amidst my study.

Being self-reflective throughout the study helped me honestly analyze and

report data to my research study group members. They informed me when any bias interfered with my interpretation of data or study procedures. MacLean and Mohr (1999) established the importance of acknowledging biases while carrying out my study. Before conducting my study, it was important that I looked at the assumptions I was making about my students and their performance. This was my fifth year teaching kindergarten and I had witnessed a variety of student abilities. At times, it was possible to misjudge what my students were capable of achieving. The district's current language program did not have any criteria to measure growth or ability. In light of this, I had to be sure to include activities and assessments that would measure student progress in the area of language and early literacy skills. It was important that I began "gathering information from participants about their knowledge, values, beliefs, past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, or perceptions" (Hendricks, 2006, p. 89). I did this through a combination of interviews and survey questions. This type of data allowed me to determine the abilities' of my students before beginning the study and established what steps needed to be taken to address the needs' of my students.

Another existing bias was that I anticipated that my students would be excited to begin using wordless picture books because their reactions had been minimal with the current oral language program. However, many students were not familiar with wordless picture books and found it hard to understand that a book could be written without any words. I needed to remember that not all children had the same experiences with books and were not as quick to participate in such an unfamiliar learning experience.

MacLean and Mohr (1999) recommend meeting as a group to gain further insight and advice associated with our studies. A teacher research support group consisting of myself and three other degree candidates met once a week throughout the data collection process to discuss the progress of our individual studies and we offered each other ideas and encouragement. We also exchanged phone numbers, email addresses, and times to meet with one another outside of class in order to make ourselves available to any candidate that needed guidance. We were able to read each other's field logs, surveys, plans for future activities, and receive feedback in an encouraging atmosphere.

## My Story

### When I Grow Up

Kindergarten students always find it difficult to believe that teachers were once children too. The possibility of your first teacher being just like you seems like something out of a story book. In fact, many of my students have asked questions about where my bed was in the school, where I took a bath, and whether the cafeteria was open all night. You guessed it! Kindergarteners think their teachers live in the school. I could not possibly have a house or a car or even parents! Sharing these experiences with my students tended to alleviate any anxiety my students had prior to starting something new. When it came to sharing experiences with wordless picture books, I was left with only the literature that I had found for my literature review. I did not have any prior experiences with these books as a child. However, as an adult, I found myself drawn to something new. This time, instead of revealing a story of my past experience, I shared this experience with the students in my classroom, and they loved that we were teaching *each other* along the way.

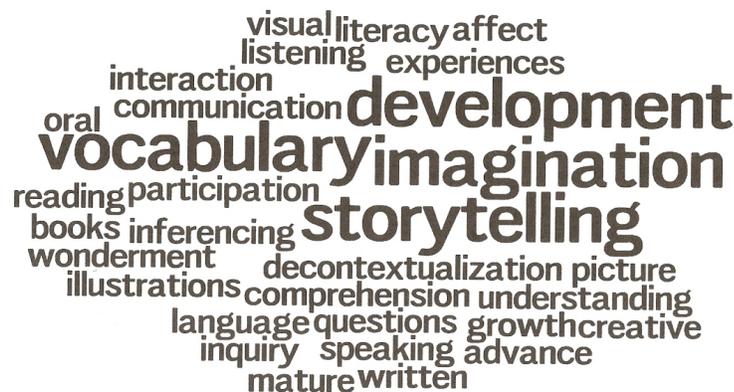


Figure 1. Vocabulary List: My Study In My Words

## More Than Yellow

**Ready, set, go.** I began my study feeling much like my students. I was nervous, full of anxiety, and questioning whether this was what I really wanted to do. I had already conducted my interviews and surveys and learned that my class this year was very different than classes I had in the past. This group of students knew of some authors and illustrators, as well as some titles and topics for books that they wanted to read in the future. They were well prepared and interested in reading. However, my surveys about implementing wordless picture books illustrated that my students were not interested in using books without words. I understood their fears because I was just as scared to implement my project. I gave my students the same advice that I was attempting to give myself. I asked them all to take a deep breath and enjoy the fact that there were not any words to read and that there would be no wrongs and no rights. And after a quick ready, set, go, we were off! Little did I know that this journey was going to entail some turbulence, a few wrong turns, and an end result that made us all excited to send postcards home about our exciting trip.

Interview Questions Pre-Study			
How would you feel if you read a story without words?	3	6	6
How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?	10	4	1
How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?	11	2	2
How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?	13	2	0
How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?	9	4	0

Table 1. Pre-Survey Results

Pre-Study Survey	Favorite Book Title	Book Information	Favorite Author or Illustrator
Madison	Disney	Princess Books	Walt Disney
Amber	Green Eggs and Ham	Princess Books	Dr. Seuss
Julie	Curious George	I like it	Margaret & H. A. Rey
Michael	Dinosaurs	Always dinosaurs	Eric Carle
Joshuah	Trucks	Chicka Chicka Boom Boom because it is about letters	Martin & Archambault
Rebecca	Cinderella	Alphabet books	Dr. Seuss
Joseph	Worms	Guided Reading books because I can read them	Dr. Seuss
Tyler	Clifford	Dr. Seuss is funny	Dr. Seuss
Kailyn	Speed Racer	Dr. Seuss is funny	Dr. Seuss
Jeremiah	Fishy Facts	Balloon books	Dr. Seuss
Dylan	Monster Trucks	Alphabet books	Eric Carle
Nathaniel	The Fly and The Frog	Dr. Seuss is funny	Dr. Seuss
Emma	Trains	Real books	Marc Brown
Nathan	Spiderman	Spiderman	Dr. Seuss
Matthew	Spongebob	Reading books	I don't know

Table 2. Pre-Interview Results

**In my brain.** When I introduced my first wordless picture book, *The Yellow Umbrella*, students were puzzled by the fact that books existed without any words. When I showed the first picture, the children did not respond well because it was very simple. I was already getting concerned. However, as the book continued, the children began shouting out words. They were mostly labeling items or calling out adjectives. Andrew called out, “I am writing the story in my brain!” Others joined in stating that they had a story in their brain too. Donald said that he could not remember pages from the beginning so his story only had a middle and an end. Jacob said he did not have a story. Jacob had been very grumpy today. He was lying on the carpet and sticking his bottom up in the air for half of the story. When we reached the ending, he got mad because I stopped the book. I did not show them the ending. I thought that if my students already knew the ending it would be difficult to get them to tell their own stories. I felt that if I would reveal the author’s intention, the students would say the story

verbatim because they would think it would please me. I wanted this to be authentic and if they already knew the story, there would not be any reason for us to go any further.

**A sign of things to come.** Jack was retained from last year. His attitude had really been hindering his work. He thought he knew everything already but it appeared that he was just insecure. Yesterday he told me that he hated school because he just wanted to play all day and we never did that enough. When I started reading the book he fought with a boy over where to sit for the day. He wanted to be in the front row instead of the back. I think that he liked the idea of not having to read. He struggled in reading during his previous year in kindergarten. However, as I began showing students the book for the first time, his eyes were glued to the story the entire time. He was turning to friends and smiling. He repeatedly called out words and made it very difficult for me to document in my log because I could not keep up. I was so glad that he was finally showing an interest in school and that he was finally truly happy with something we were doing in the classroom. At that moment, I crossed my fingers that this would continue throughout the study. I hoped that this was a sign of things to come!

***First Person Narrative: Jack.*** This is going to be so dumb. I hate reading. I do not know why I am here anyway. I did all this stuff when I was in kindergarten last year. I flunked it because I could not read. I can read some stuff though. That sign over there says 'stop' and that book has the sight word 'like' in it. I can do it sometimes. I just can not do it all of the time. I do not want to do it

all of the time either. Why can't we just play and have fun? Books are so boring. I do not need to know this stuff. But sometimes I do not know what I am reading when I play my videogames and I hate when that happens. I love to play Wizard 101. It is my favorite game and sometimes I cannot read what the wizards want me to do. I guess if I try to learn to read I could get better at the game. I think I will give this a try.

Ok, I am just going to sit here and see what these wordless picture things are all about. I just do not get how a book could not have words but I am willing to give it a try. Here goes nothing.

Hmmm... this is not that bad at all. I think I actually am liking this. No reading. None at all! Well, I do not know how this is possibly going to help me learn how to read but I like it! I can read this whole book without even looking at a word. I could do this with my eyes closed! Are you kidding me? This is great! I will be reading in no time. I am going to love this. I think I might even help Mrs. Oertner out here. "Excuse me. I really want to know where they are going. Maybe they are going to my house!" Mrs. Oertner just smiled at me and even wrote down what I was saying. I think she liked this. I am going to try this out again. "No, they are at a playground. Don't you see the merry-go-round and the swings? I love to go on the seesaw. Whoa! They have one of those too! This book is great" Another smile from Mrs. Oertner. I think this is going to be fun. Every time I say something that I think the page should say, Mrs. Oertner acts like she thinks the page says the same thing! Am I reading? I think I am actually doing it! I am starting to love this stuff!

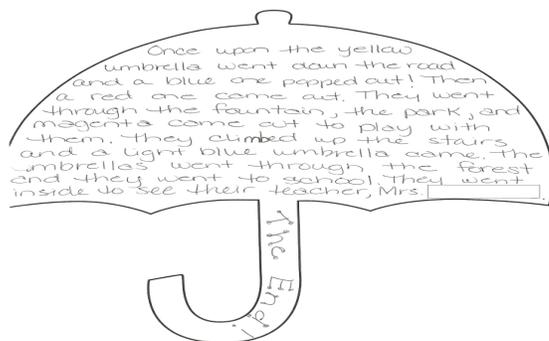


Figure 2. Jack's Retelling

***Finding meaning from nothing.*** When I first began my study, many of my students demonstrated that they had varying levels of maturity. As I began recording in my journal, I noticed that the language certain children used surprised me. Despite being higher level thinkers or readers, several students continued to use the language of some of the more immature students. However, as time went on, students began sharing strategies for finding meaning of unknown words and others corrected students based on tenses or making words plural. Many students began using the vocabulary word wall lists that we created as a class. Some students started correcting others to try to help them improve their language skills. My students started to combine lessons learned at home with new concepts taught at school. Students were helping each other by bringing their own experiences with language to the classroom and others were helping by sharing what they had learned in the classroom.

Erik recognized the word 'erupted' as being an important word because he heard Jordan and me talking about it during one of our readings. Jordan shared a strategy he used for looking up a word in a dictionary. Erik and Jordan were very similar in their need to be precise and look up answers. While I was happy that

they were sharing a strategy for solving problems with text, I hoped that these books would help them learn to take risks. They will not always have a dictionary or the internet around to help them. I wanted them to learn to trust their instinct. However, since these boys shared the same interests, they were often building from one another's skills and pushing each other based on their varying experiences.

“It is incorrect to conceive of play as an activity without purpose” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 103 ). My students were expressing themselves freely using play. The students were playing with the book and using their imagination to create their own stories. There were no limits or boundaries. Some students had unknowingly taken on roles of directors and producers of mini-plays in my classroom. These plays were based on *The Yellow Umbrella*. It was so interesting to hear the dialogue among the students as they played with a book that had no words. The students took what they knew from the pictures they viewed, to create a play with plot, setting, dialogue, and other story elements. Play established itself as an important component in my study at this point. Without it, some students may have continued to label pictures rather than retell the story.

Elizabeth used her own questioning as she looked through the book on her own. These were the types of questions that I had hoped my students would ask as they viewed wordless picture books. When I told her she could look at the book again tomorrow she said she was going to be a detective the next time she had the opportunity to read. The more the students played with the book, the more detailed and creative their stories became. I learned this was a strategy that I could

use with some of my students who were struggling to compile ideas about the story. The role of detective assisted them as they looked for picture clues and develop vocabulary. Many of the students felt more at ease when they sensed that they were playing.

***Wrapping it all up.*** My students began using a more mature vocabulary after only a few days of reading the book. The first two days of the story lent itself well to students labeling objects that they were viewing from page to page. However, students began developing their own stories and strategies within days. Andrew had trouble bottling up his need to tell his entire version of the story. He looked beyond the umbrellas in the story and took notice of the subtle objects on the first few pages. He was well on his way to uncovering the authors intention for placing these few objects on each page.

While Andrew was busy making meaning of the literature, Jack was beginning to participate without any reluctance. This was very unlike him. I had struggled everyday to get him to want to be apart of the group. His self esteem was so low since repeating kindergarten. He kept saying he “failed” or “flunked.” I do not know where he was hearing those words but I desperately wanted to build a more positive vocabulary with him. He stole *The Yellow Umbrella* book off of my desk while I was opening a snack for another student. I knew he was excited to learn what happened next in the story but he needed to realize that he needed to be fair to the rest of the children. When I spotted him he looked at me with so much guilt on his face. He tried to tell me that he did not see anything but then later told me that he saw some people on the last page. I was happy that he was

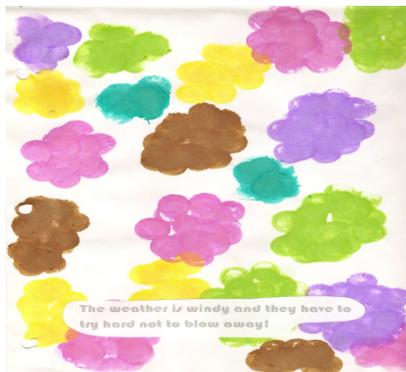
eager to participate and was feeling confident but I did not want this to fuel some of the behaviors he exhibited last year. At that moment I decided that his eagerness to participate needed to be put to use in another way. I determined that when we read our next book he would benefit from working with a peer who needed help. That way his new found love of learning could help inspire another student.



Ashley



Donald



Mackenzie



Andrew

*Figure 3. Student Work: The Yellow Umbrella*

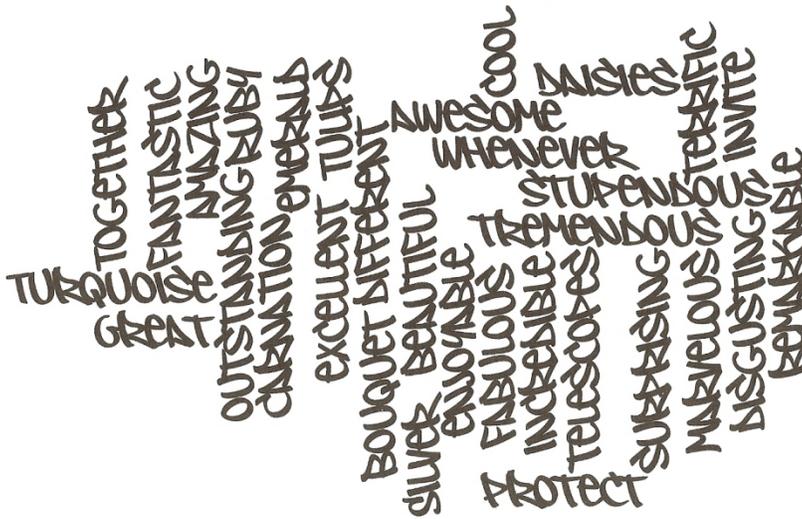


Figure 4. Vocabulary List: The Yellow Umbrella

### Why Not?

The book, *Why?* was not at all what I thought it would be. My students lacked motivation and some did not even look up at the book during the first day of the reading. I noticed several students playing with their hair, talking to each other, and even falling asleep on the carpet. I did not get the impression that Andrew liked this book very much. He was so excited about *The Yellow Umbrella* and now when we started reading our new book, he just sat there! He did not want to talk about the story when I asked him what he thought the book was about. So, instead, I asked him if he could tell me his favorite part. His answer was that he could not remember any details. I guessed this book was not of any interest to him. The colors were not as vibrant and it was much longer than the previous book. Jackson was not paying attention to this story at all. I was so frustrated. He just kept singing a song from my listening center. It was also strikingly noticeable

that he was not paying attention to the story because his retelling and vocabulary had nothing to do with the story, *Why?* Instead, he talked about going to see a train exhibit. I wondered if it was just that we had a busy day today and the students did not want to talk, or if it was the book that I had chosen.

There were only two students who were willing to share relevant facts about the story. Amanda recalled several examples of information after our reading. The events were out of sequence but they were the valid points. She was the first person to retell her version of the story so I was excited that she had noticed so much. However, as I met with more of my students I found out that they did not all take as much from the book as Amanda. Gregory's facial expressions demonstrated that he was enjoying the book. He was laughing and making gasps as we were viewing the pages. He was typically a quiet student and sometimes difficult made it to determine whether or not he was even paying attention to the task at hand. I was happy to see that he was enjoying himself. It did not appear that he liked *The Yellow Umbrella* book that we had read last week. However, in the book, *Why?* he picked out the details of the explosion and the boot that was made out of a bush. The other children had not noticed or failed to mention any of these details.

It was so frustrating that my study drastically changed from one week to the next. Throughout the reading I had thoughts of failure swirling through my brain. I must have questioned myself a dozen times as I turned the pages of the book. I was asking myself why this had happened, what made this book so different than the book prior, and where I went wrong? It was amazing how my

reflection-in-action had been such a whirlwind of thoughts. However, this thoughtful reflection would eventually lead me to make meaningful decisions in future lessons.

*Feeling Tense.* Despite a rocky start to my lessons during the first few attempts of viewing the book, *Why?* My students eventually began to show evidence that with the story being long and there being a hidden meaning within the pictures, that it just took a little longer for the students to change their tune in regards to the story. What had once felt like lack of interest and inattentiveness, had turned into a group of children who wanted to uncover *why* things were happening in the story. It was such a drastic transformation from only a few days earlier.

Donald noticed that something had been taken away from the frog character in the book and he questioned why the mice and frogs were fighting. This was refreshing to hear that someone noticed such an important topic of the story because these were the types of clues that I had been trying to get the children to look for as they viewed wordless picture books. Once Donald commented on the animals fighting, the students started conducting a group discussion over the topic of fighting. Ironically, the question of *why* continued to present itself as the students continued their discussion.

Why Not?

“I fight with my brother sometimes when he takes my toys.”

(Jack to Sydney)

**“My sister fights with me because she is little**

**and she doesn’t know that is bad.” (Mackenzie to Elizabeth)**

*“Mrs. Oertner, why do you fight? Do you even fight?”*

*(Donald to Mrs. Oertner)*

“Fighting isn’t the answer.

That is what my mom always says.” (Jacob to Andrew)

“When you fight with someone, you need to stop and think about what you are saying because it could hurt someone or their feelings.” (Amanda to Brianna)

**“You could walk away if it gets bad**

**and come back and talk it out later, right?”**

**(Andrew to Donald)**

“Why would you need to do that anyway?” (Jordan to Mrs. Oertner)

*“Well, why not? Sometimes you just have to fight for something if you know it is wrong.” (Erik to Jack)*

**“There are different kinds of fights, ya know?**

**(Elizabeth to Mackenzie)**

*“Why do you think that people fight?”*

*(Mrs. Oertner to the class)*

“Fighting doesn’t just mean punching.

Sometimes fighting can be with words.” (Andrew to Jacob)

“Why did you fight with Emma yesterday?” (Brianna to Amanda)

**“Why don’t you just  
talk it out next time? (Andrew to Donald)**

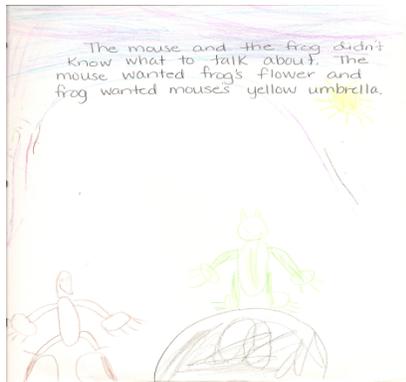
“Why do my parents fight?” (Sydney to Mrs. Oertner)

*Figure 5. Pastiche: Why not?*

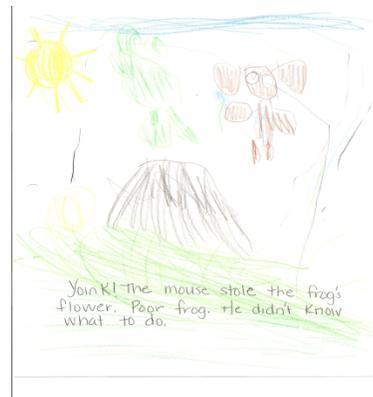
Everything started to make sense after providing time for an intense kindergarten discussion. My students were finally telling the story and it was not just naming the items on the page or telling a few random things that had happened in the story. They actually told the story *Why?* They were on topic and using picture clues to develop the story. While the vocabulary still remained somewhat simplified, the children were becoming more aware of the way they were speaking. When the word mouse became plural as new mice joined the army, the children replied using the word mice instead of ‘mouses’ as they had done in the previous week. This had been something I continued to notice and had wondered if the students would regularly acknowledge these differences when making words plural. As time passed, making words plural and recognizing the use of past tenses began to come more naturally. I was incredibly proud that in only our second wordless picture book, the students were listening to the way that they were speaking rather than simply just stating the facts.

The students excitedly drew the pictures corresponding to their own versions of the story. This was another surprise because the children showed very little interest last week when they were presented with this same task. Suddenly, Andrew finally announced that he knew the reason to why the book was called *Why?* He said, “Now I get it! The author is asking why they are fighting! But, I

am wondering, why would you fight over a flower? Why would you steal an umbrella? I guess I have some other questions about why.” This was the breakthrough that I had been waiting for and how appropriate that it came after the students started their own discussions about the topic. It was truly a child centered discussion with so many important revelations. This was something that students uncovered after relating their own lives to the text. I asked the children how this wordless picture book was relevant to our classroom discussions about sharing. Erik replied “It is because the book did not use words to ask to share and they started fighting. If the animals used words they could have talked it out like you say to do.” Finally, the students were not viewing wordless picture book as yet another book to read. They were connecting their own experiences in the classroom and making it relevant to the text.



Erik



Jack

**Figure 6. Student Work: Why?**



Figure 7. Vocabulary List: Why?

### **Dinos In The Tub**

After Andrew's struggle with the book *Why?* I was confident that Andrew's interest in wordless picture books had been fueled by his discovery of the meaning in *Why?* I was very concerned during the last book because he rarely participated. The next book in the cycle, *Dinosaur!* was more simplified in both text and meaning. However, it did allow for a wide range of interpretation. Andrew exclaimed, "there is a T-Rex. It is also pronounced Tyrannosaurus Rex but some say T-Rex as his nickname like my nickname is Andy. It's like we are twins!" Andrew noticed that the main dinosaur was a T-Rex. He then went on to explain that the real name is Tyrannosaurus. But he did not stop there! He explained to the students that it was a nickname and gave an example to help them understand the concept. Andrew demonstrating that he was advancing not only in his choice of vocabulary but in his ability to decontextualize, and make connections to the text. Some children questioned his choice of words like 'pronounced' and 'common.' We explained this together and then the children knew what he was talking about. We instantly added these new words to our Dinosaur word wall for students to reference as the unit progressed.

As soon as Andrew's words found a space on the word wall, Kennedy shouted out, "I know something too! I saw a raptor. Actually, I mean raptors because there was more than one." Two discoveries in a row! Kennedy noticed that when making the word plural he needed to add an /s/. It was also important to note that he was able to explain *why* he added an /s/ without any questioning. This was a big step for Kennedy. He typically has trouble with this in his usual speaking habits. He would often say things like "my heads hurts" or "I sees that" and I had spent time trying to explain to him that he did not need to use an /s/ if he was only talking about one thing. Instead, he used it correctly with raptors and was even able to explain his reasoning to the students. This was another word to add to the word wall and something for Kennedy to use to assist him in the future if he needs a reminder of his progress this year.

**Does anyone have any questions?**

"There was way too much water in the tub. Did he imagine that or was it real? I mean seriously, that couldn't happen in real life right? Mommy wouldn't let the water for all over the place like that! " (Elizabeth)

**"What if the dinosaur wasn't really live.**

**What if he just imagined it? (Erik to Jack)**

"Wouldn't it be cool if that happened in your tub?"  
(Sydney to Mrs. Oertner)

*"I wonder what my mommy would say if I made a mess like that. She would probably make me clean it up."* (Mackenzie to Amanda)

**"What would you do if that happened to you? (Elizabeth to class)**

*“Why do you think it happened to the little boy?” (Mrs. Oertner)*

“Where is the story really happening?”

I’m still wondering if this real. ” (Jacob to Jordan)

“Who ever did that before? I did it with my Barbies!” (Brianna to class)

*Figure 8. Pastiche: Does anyone have any questions?*

***Detectives on the loose.*** Many of the students were amazed that the little boy in the story could play in a tub filled with so much water. They were amazed that the boy’s parents were not knocking at the door or yelling at him to get out of the tub. However, one student took this opportunity to explain wordless picture books to the students so that they would understand the concept of the book a little better.

### **Elizabeth’s Story**

There was way too much water in the tub. Did he imagine that or was it real? Well, we don’t really know do we? But I think that everything about this story is in the boy’s imagination. Did you ever go into the tub and play Barbies, play in the bubbles, or have squirt fights with the bubbles? I do. And sometimes my mommy has to remind me that I am in the tub and not the ocean. My mommy is in the bathroom when I take a bath but I think this boy is older than us. That is probably why the mommy isn’t in the bathroom and doesn’t know the water has overflowed. The great thing about books without words is that you can make the story up yourself even if the author or illustrator didn’t tell it that way. In my imagination, the little boy just doesn’t hear his mommy knocking on the door and calling to him to get out of the tub. He is in his own world. He is using his

imagination and playing with his little dinosaur toys. He doesn't even realize that the world around him is not really the dino-land that we see. He thinks he is really in it! I wish that I could be there too. Maybe I will be when I take a bath tonight. I will get my own dinosaurs from the store and try to use my imagination to go to his world. I wonder if your imagination can be the same as someone else? I don't think it really works that way because it is just like the book. I think the boy just doesn't hear his mommy but other people think that his mommy just doesn't know that he made such a mess. Maybe she doesn't even know that he is in the tub!

Elizabeth used her own questioning as she looked through the book. These are the types of questions that I had hoped my students would ask as they read wordless picture books. When I told her she could look at the book again tomorrow she said she was "going to be a detective this time." She was looking to uncover new things that her peers had not discovered yet. At that moment, I decided that this was the same terminology I could use with some of my students who were struggling to compile ideas about the story. The role of detective could help them as they look for picture clues and develop vocabulary in what they may have perceived as being a monotonous task.

When I asked Jordan to try being the detective he looked at me in surprise. Suddenly, wordless picture books sounded intriguing! Jordan's eyes widened as he announced "the volcano exploded! Ya' know what? I know there is a different word for exploded but I can't think of it today. I will know tomorrow." Jordan recognized that there was a different word that he could have used for his word.

He was not satisfied with a word that he felt the other children already knew. I wondered if he was going to talk about it at home or ask his parents to help him. He was the type of child who loved to learn and he seemed to have taken this on as a new challenge for him. I decided that I was going to ask him tomorrow and find out how he came to his conclusion. This was the perfect beginning for our new vocabulary lists.

When Jordan returned to school the next day he announced that the word he wanted to use was called “erupted” and he also told us that we could use the word “eruption.” After asking him how he came to the decision to use the word, he announced that his mom helped him find the word he wanted in the dictionary. She had known what word he wanted so she showed him that erupted and other words like it could be found on that page. At that moment, Elizabeth announced, “you were like a detective! You had a problem and you solved it! You are good at this, Jordan. Maybe we can go into the detective business together.” After that announcement, we wrote a rule at the bottom of our new vocabulary list. It said, “Be a detective!”

### **Round Table Retelling**

In order to help students better understand the concept of retelling, we sat in a circle around the classroom. We pushed all of the tables to the center of the room and students sat in their chairs around the giant table that we created. The pictures that students created about the story were placed in order across the table. The first student to go was the student with the first event of the story. That student was asked to begin telling the story from that point. The person next to him then

spoke about the next event in the picture that was sitting in front of them. This continued around the table until the retelling was complete.

1. This book is about dinosaurs. They were all around. There was a boy in the bathtub. There was a dino in the tub and his head popped out. I like the word popped because it is easy spelled p-o-p-p-e-d.
2. The kid is naked. The boy put on his towel.
3. The boy was staring at the bath tub. His clothes were on the floor. A dinosaur was in the water.
4. The dinosaurs were not extinct in this story. They came alive again. In the old days, T-Rex was the last to become extinct.
5. The dinosaur splashed the bathtub.
6. The dinos were gone and then he got scared.
7. I like it when the dinosaur hits the other in the air.
8. The water overflowed. There was a triceratops. She has three horns because tri- means three. There was a long neck dinosaur and a T-Rex. T-Rex starts with the letter /t/ just like my name, Tyler.
9. There is a T-Rex. The boy played with his dinosaur in the tub. There were like a million dinosaurs. He was imagining things.
10. Another dino popped out. The coconut tree was dropping coconuts on the dino tail. When the tub overflowed the mom brought him a towel.
11. Then there was a volcano and liva was floating all the around. The dinosaurs were chasing each other to get out of the liva.
12. The volcano erupted. When the dinosaurs got out of the tub they were

fighting.

13. The tub overflowed. He was imagining everything.

14. His mom was rushing into the bathroom to stop the water. There was a dinosaur behind him and he freaked out. I don't really know what that word means. The dinosaurs were fading when they got out of the tub.

15. The tub exploded. He had his clothes. His mom brought his towel.

My students certainly were being detectives as Elizabeth taught them to do if they were stuck. Students sat in a circle in the middle of the room as I sat with the pages that they drew for the book. The children were given the opportunity to retell the story from beginning to end using the illustrations that they had made. However, the story was constructed from one student's comment from the beginning of the book and as we went around the circle each child took a turn adding one detail in the sequence of the story. Using this method allowed students to retell the story in proper sequence of what the illustrator and author had created on each page. While the interpretations may have varied from reader to reader, the document that was created flowed and was told in proper sequence.

### **Small group retellings**

#### **Group 1**

The boy is naked. He is staring at the bath tub and the faucet is running. The dinosaur is peeking out of the water while the boy holds his toy dinosaur. The faucet is now turned off. His mouth is open because he is really scared. They are chasing the polka dot dinosaur around the tub. The triceratops is chasing the raptor. The dinosaurs are fighting over who gets to play with the boy. The dinosaurs are getting bigger and bigger and the boy is stuck in the tub wondering what they are doing. The boy is looking around at the other dinosaurs. He is dreaming of a dinosaur world. The dinosaurs are acting like they would in the old

days. They are not acting like bath toys. The big dinosaur flicked the water with his tail and the water overflowed. The boy is back to playing with a simple toy dinosaur. No more imagination for him!

### **Group 2**

The boy took off his clothes and left them on the floor. He walked into the tub and turned on the water. The boy didn't know there was a dinosaur in the water. He was hiding under the tub forever. He peeked out of the water. The polka dot dinosaur popped out of the tub and the boy was so surprised. Another dinosaur appeared. The dinosaurs are coming alive but *not* his toy. More and more dinosaurs are popping into his imagination. There are two big dinosaurs fighting but the boy is just in the tub staring up in surprise. The dinosaurs were not along. There were in an imagination world full of dinosaurs but the boy is stuck there. The brontosaurus splashed the boy in the tub and made a big wave. The tub of flowed. Mom came running to the rescue with his towel but did not see the dinosaur. It was just the boy's imagination.

### **Group 3**

The boy took off his clothes. He turned on the water and got in to the tub. He was beginning to play with his toy dinosaur while the water was still running. He turned off the water and looked into the tub and saw a real dinosaur. They started to fight and yell at each other. The boy started to get scared. The dinosaurs chased each other around the bathroom. The boy looked up at the dinosaur and said, "uh-oh." The dinosaurs kept chasing and the boy was so surprised that he didn't know what to do. The boy was trapped in his imagination. His tub has turned into a pond while the dinosaurs roam. The long neck brought them back to real life! The brontosaurus splashed the boy in the tub. The water overflowed ("You mean overflowed," said Emma). The mother comes rushing in to the room to bring the boy his towel. He puts his towel on and his imagination time is over. Or is it?

*Figure 9. Group Retellings*

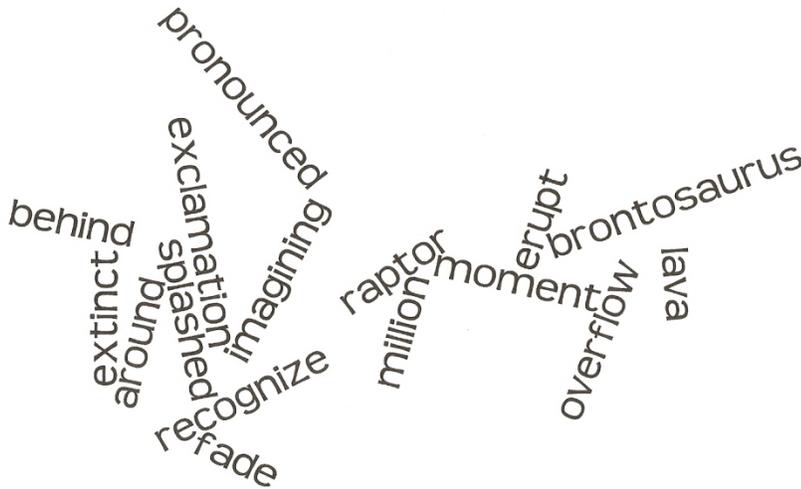


Figure 10. Vocabulary List: Dinosaur!

### Time Flies When You're Having Fun

*Wow, this book is so much different than the other dinosaur book. I think the other one was funnier. This one is serious. I like how it is like an adventure book. You think you are reading about going to a museum but you are really using your imagination in a dinosaur world. That is the part that reminds me of the other book. But this book is about prehistoric time. That's why they show fossils. The other book was just like a cartoon in the newspaper. - Amanda*

**I remember when I went to the museum. Didn't we just read another book about going to a museum? Oh my gosh! We read about Franklin's field trip to the dinosaur museum! Remember how he was scared? I would be scared too. This book is kind of scary. - Andrew**

The fossils are in the museum so that we can see what dinosaurs looked like a long time ago. But in this book the bird goes on an adventure. He gets to go back to when dinosaurs roamed the earth. It is a little scary when the bird is in the dinos belly.  
- Jordan

This dinosaur book is not like the other one. This one is a lot *realer*. Do you know why? Because the pictures are real looking. The other ones were silly. I wonder if a bird would really fly around a museum. Do you think? No, that is just too funny. Plus, dinosaurs aren't real anyway. The bird was just using his imagination. - Donald

Figure 11. Pastiche: What is the difference between our two dinosaur books?

The students were beginning to notice that even though the theme of the book may be the same, the books do not necessarily have any other connection. Amber talked about this book being an adventure book and she was right. She also noted that much of the book takes place in the prehistoric era. Even though the other book about dinosaurs took us back to a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth, the pictures in the previous book were cartoons and did not impact the students on a heightened level. Instead, this book provided a sense of the reader being a part of the book. The illustrations look more like photographs than cartoon illustrations.

Andrew made the connection of this book being similar to one that we had read in the class earlier in the quarter. The book that Andrew was speaking of was not a wordless picture book. It was a Franklin book with words but had a similar story. However, the Franklin book had a different story line, more appropriate for kindergarten. This book was more advanced and had several possibilities for the plot. It really depended on how the reader interpreted some of the illustrations. Jordan interjected his feelings of being afraid and frightened. The book was a little scary for a kindergarten student. It depended on how students viewed the pictures. Donald explained that the pictures looked too real at times. However, he knew that that it did not mean the book was a non-fiction book. Donald had trouble deciphering between real and fantasy in the past. More experiences with this book helped Jordan, Donald, and the other students realize that the pictures were only scary if they chose to make the story sound scary.

**Be a detective!**

“Birds come from dinosaurs. Their skeletons are similar.” - Erik

*“The birds entered through the front window of the museum.” - Gregory*

“The veggie dinosaur saw everything that happened and did nothing to help the bird. What was that called again? Vegasuar?” - Jackson

**“You mean herbivore?”- Kennedy**

“Half of the dinosaur was just bones.” - Jordan

*“There was a part of the dinosaur that was real. He was really imaginary because they were in a museum and he wasn’t real real. The dinosaur ate a bird. But because he wasn’t real, he survived.” - Brianna*

“The bird landed on the dino’s teeth.

He swallowed the bird through his pretend belly.” - Ashley

**“His teeth were sharp. He was a statue.” - Donald**

*Figure 12. Pastiche: Tell me something you never noticed before. Be a detective!*

**Group retellings**

**Group 1**

There once was a little bird who did not want to fly around in the sky anymore so he decided to take a little trip to a museum. He went to a prehistoric museum so that he could learn about dinosaurs. He was always interested in dinosaurs so now it was his time to find out some more about something he always loved. When he got into the museum he discovered that the dinosaurs were half real and half fake. When the bird flew through the dinosaurs mouth he entered a land that was full of dinosaurs from that time. Birds come from dinosaurs called pterodactyls and he

got to see one when he traveled to a different land. But then he got hungry and flew out of the bones of the dinosaur. He went back to the land where he came from. It was a land where he was happier and he belonged.

## Group 2

One day a little birdie went on a trip to a museum. He loved to take trips to the museum once a week because he liked to visit his friends from the old days. Birds grew from dinosaurs during the prehistoric times. The little birdie liked to feel what it was like to go back to a time where he didn't have to worry about big buildings, cars, and people to take his home away. He flew through the dinosaurs' mouth and came to a land where he could be happy again. It was like a dream for a long time. But then he had to wake up and go back to his real life. He flew out of the dinosaurs' mouth, back into the museum, and out into the cloudy sky.

*Figure 13. Group Retelling*

A word cloud containing the following words: flight, herbivore, similar, pretend, different, intend, fossils, remind, imagination, prehistoric, belonged, adventure, fake, pterodactyls, half, survived, amazed, roamed, discovered.

*Figure 14. Vocabulary List: Time Flies*

## **Stop Calling Him Frosty**

The Snowman is an exciting tale about a young boy who builds a snowman that comes to life at night. The boy and the snowman become friends and share a variety of adventures together. The book is not designed the same way as the other picture books that we have read. Instead, this book has several smaller illustrations on the pages, much like a comic book. These small snapshots allow the reader to take each step of the journey with the boy and the snowman. The characters are very relatable and provide the reader with the opportunity to dream along with the boy. Sadly, like all good things, the story must come to an end. The boy is saddened by the fact that the snowman has melted. But just like the students in the class, the thought of another fresh snowfall fuels the excitement of a new day with the snowman.

### **The Snowman**

*“I made a snowman yesterday! It was so big that the head fell off when Daddy put it on top. We had to put snow around the neck to keep it on straight.” (Mackenzie to Brianna)*

“I only made a little snowman with my sister.

We did it together. I let her put the carrot on for his nose.

Then she even let me put on his magic hat!” (Sydney to Jack)

**“I made a snow family with my mom and dad last night. It was so funny. I am the little one because I am just a boy. Mom is the medium one and dad is the big one. Now people will know who everyone is when they look at it.” (Donald to Jacob)**

"I don't make snow people. My family doesn't do that stuff.  
 I just run outside and catch snowflakes on my tongue.  
 I want to try to make one with Joshua." (Kennedy to Jordan)

*"Sometimes I like to make snow cats and snow dogs.*

*I pretend that they are pets because my mom is allergic to pets.*

*I make them little bowls of food too!" (Jackson to class)*

"I never made a snowman. I don't have  
 snow pants so I can't go out in the snow.

But I want to." (Kennedy to Jacob)

*Figure 15. Pastiche: Did you ever build a snowman?*

### **Feelings When A Snowman Melts**

sad

**angry**

disappointed

*upset*

frustrated

grumpy

**surprised**

mad

*bummed*

hopeful

*16. Discussion: How do you feel when your snowman melts?*

***First person narrative: Kennedy.*** This book makes me want to build a snowman more than ever. I saw a movie about Frosty once. This book is a lot like Frosty. The boy builds a snowman and then the snowman comes to life at night. It is practically the same thing! Maybe it is the same thing. I guess this is just like the Frosty movie but they made it into a book for fun. This Frosty looks a little different. I do like him even though there isn't a magic rabbit anywhere. This Frosty is magical in a different way. He doesn't even talk. At least, I can't hear what he is saying. I bet if he could talk he would say, "Kennedy, come play with me." It is probably what he said to the little boy in the story. In the story the characters play in the house. The snowman plays dress up in the parents' clothes and they even go for a ride in the car. They fly to a different place that I think looks like it could be the North Pole or maybe a museum. I am not sure which one it is because I have never been to either of them. If I could fly somewhere with Frosty the Snowman, I would go to New York City. My dad works there and I don't get to see him all the time. Sometimes I wonder where he is because he isn't home when I eat my dinner. I went to the city before but I just went to dad's work. I want to go there and explore with Frosty. Then I could see my dad all the time and I wouldn't have to worry. Maybe I am not allowed to build snowmen because my mom thinks I will go fly with him at night to go see my dad. I wish I could do that but I wouldn't want my mom to worry.

### **Round Table Retelling**

1. Hurray! It's snowing! I better hurry outside before it stops.  
Mom, mom, mom. Is it a snow day? I want to go outside and play. Yay! I love snow days!
2. I can jump, I can skip, I can run, and I can even build a snowman.
3. First you make the bottom. Next, you make the middle. Then you make the head. When you are finished you need to get everything from mom to dress your snowman.
4. Then, ta-dah! You have a snowman. But you can't play anymore because you have been out in the cold all day. Say, "goodbye snowman!"
5. It's getting late. I better get ready for bed. Goodnight snowman!  
Goodnight, mom. Goodnight, dad.
6. I can't sleep. I can't wait to play with my snowman again!
7. "Nice to meet you snowman," says Jamie. What? He is alive! And uh-oh, he does not know his way around the house. But he sure likes the Christmas lights.
8. Oh no! The fire is burning him up. They need to find something else to do in the house because he will melt.
9. Let's have an adventure in the kitchen!
10. They play dress up with all the fruits and vegetables in the kitchen. The freezer sure feels comfy! It is just like being in his own home.
11. Jamie and the snowman get bored so they go upstairs and play dress up with the mommy and daddy clothes. The snowman is so silly and he almost

wakes up the parents. That would be trouble. I bet Jamie would get grounded.

12. Then they go to Jamie's playroom. He has tons of toys. They have lots of fun but it is getting late and there are lots of places to visit before the night is over.

13. They fly around the world together and visit places that they never went to before. There were pyramids, palaces, castles, and museums that little kids don't usually go to.

14. But it is so late. Jamie is getting tired and the snowman's magic is about to disappear. They travel home together. They are gliding through the air one last time.

15. Finally, Jamie wakes up and he wonders if it was a dream or if he really traveled around the world with a friend made out of snow. The end!



Figure 17. Student Work: The Snowman

### **What a wonderful world**

The book entitled, *What a Wonderful World* is based off of Louis Armstrong's famous song. In fact, many of my students were already familiar with the song. This book was not a wordless picture book. Although, there were very few words on the page and the words were simply the lyrics to the song. I picked the book knowing that there were words on the page because I was curious to what my students were taking from the visual cues in each book. I wondered if they were going to rely on the words or create their own. My students were able to generate their own words to the book despite the words that already existed. In fact, my students did not even realize the words on the page because they were written in cursive. To a kindergartener, these foreign letters fit right in with the vibrant pictures on the page. This was a book that I could not resist using for my study because of the beautiful pictures. The class was excited to view such a colorful book that seemed to tell a new story with every turn of the page. Some students hummed the song as they read while others did their best Louis Armstrong impression. However, when it was time to tell their stories; my students did their best to tell a story that fit into each student's own wonderful world.

**Jacob**

Ruby  
Daisies  
Us  
Great

**Jack**

**Silver**  
**Tulips**  
**Two of us**  
**Home**

**Mackenzie**

Turquoise  
Carnation  
Family  
Awesome

*Figure 18. Poem: Use four words to describe your wonderful world.*

**What would your wonderful world be like?**

Our world is special because each one of us is special and we are in it. We need to treat our world better because if we don't take care of it, we won't have a beautiful world anymore. I am going to take care of the world by picking up trash on the playground. Sometimes I get sad at recess because I see that there is trash around the swing set and if I am playing there I don't want disgusting trash on my hands. I could get germs and get sick. -Amanda

*When I think of a wonderful world I think of the flower and rainbows like in the book. But I also think about my mommy and daddy and my sissy. They make me happy to be in the world because they are in it. The world would not be as wonderful without them. I want to make the world a better place when I am a mommy too!-Mackenzie*

My wonderful world has lots of my friends in it. When I started school I didn't have a lot of friends. I just played with my sister and my neighbors. When I got to school I made so many friends and now everyone is going

to be invited to my birthday party. My wonderful world would be like having a birthday all the time!-Ashley

I would love to live in a world full of flowers and butterflies. I would want to see a rainbow every time I woke up in the morning and I would have ice cream for dinner! I would play all day with my friends and Mrs. Oertner would sing songs for me. It would snow whenever I wanted and turn to hot if I wanted to go swimming. My wonderful world would be full of laughs and be lots of fun. I wish it was like that for real. Sometimes this world is hard and I get sad. Sometimes I am afraid. But in this book I learned that there are lots of things around me to make me happy when I am sad.-Brianna

*Figure 19. Typed Version of Student Work: My Wonderful World*

**Synonyms for Wonderful**

**amazing**

*awesome*

**cool**

enjoyable

**excellent**

*fabulous*

fantastic

**incredible**

marvelous

outstanding

**remarkable**

*stupendous*

super

surprising

terrific

tremendous

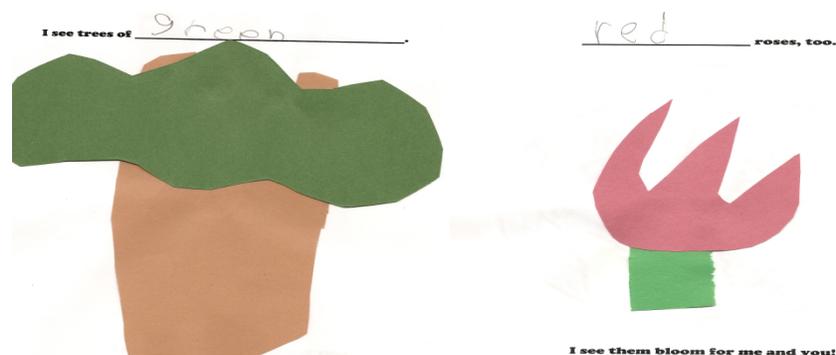
*Figure 20: List of Synonyms*

### **Round Table Retelling**

1. Our world is a beautiful place where everyone is your friends and it is ok to make mistakes. Everyone is there to help you and you help others too.
2. In our world you should take care of the trees and the flowers because they make the world beautiful. The trees give you clean air to breathe and homes to live in for people and animals. The flowers are food for animals and are beautiful to look at.
3. Flowers are like people. You need to take care of them. Even though they are different you shouldn't treat them different. They are there for everyone.
4. We are lucky to have so many pretty things in our world. We need to protect it. There are animals around us for people to use for food, for pets, and to help our world work. You shouldn't hurt an animal unless you need to. Killing animals is a bad choice.
5. The sky and the clouds are a part of our world even though you can't touch them. They give us our weather. We need the rain, the sun, and the snow to make our world work. We need them to help make our food and to keep things alive.
6. The sun and the moon tell us when to sleep and when to wake up. They make

things grow and some people like to look at them using telescopes.

7. I think our world can be better. Sometimes I see places that need extra care. We can take care of the world by planting trees, watering plants, picking up garbage, and recycling. We need to do this or our world won't be wonderful anymore.
8. But the world is wonderful when you look up at the pretty rainbows. Rainbows make me feel happy and they can make other people smile too. Rainbows cheer you up when you are sad. If you don't take care of the world there won't be rainbows anymore.
9. Your friends can cheer you up too. If you aren't good to your friends they won't be in your world either. They will be friends with other people instead. You need to be nice to the world and to your friends.
10. When I grow up I am going to make sure that I teach people to take care of the world so that it will be beautiful forever. My mommy tells me to take care of my things or I won't have them anymore. The earth is just like my toys. If I don't want it to break I need to be careful. And I promise I will be.



Gregory

Figure 21. Student Work: What A Wonderful World



Figure 22. Vocabulary List: What A Wonderful World

### Summary: The Journey

I started my study feeling like I was in kindergarten and going to my first day of school. I was nervous, full of anxiety, and questioning whether my students would take on the challenge that I was about to put before them. My surveys and interviews indicated that my students were reluctant to begin the wordless picture book adventure. They were well prepared and interested in reading but they wanted to read books with words like their big brothers and sisters. I understood their fears about wordless picture books because I was just as scared to implement my project. But as the study began and progressed daily, I learned that we were all helping each other through this topsy-turvy journey. Students surprisingly enjoyed the fact that there were not any words to read and that there could not be wrong answers. The freedom that they were given allowed students to become comfortable with their sense of voice, vocabulary, imagination, and storytelling. My students learned how to look deeply into the meaning of a text rather than just

skimming the surface. I think my students learned the same theory about themselves. There was more to this group of five and six year old than people would have ever known. They are now confident in speaking to the class, attentive listeners, and imaginative storytellers. Throughout this journey, students matured in their vocabulary and learned strategies for identifying words that they may not have known. They learned how to associate synonyms and look for words in an age appropriate dictionary. Lastly, my students gained an appreciation and love of literature. I would not be surprised if I one day open up a book written or illustrated by several members of my class. Our long journey may be over, but their lifetime of literature has just begun!

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed several forms of data throughout my study. My analysis of data occurred during and after my observations were categorized, tallied, and labeled (Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997). The majority of data collected were recorded in my field log. I documented events that occurred during my lessons. I read through my field log, and noted labels in the left hand column of my paper. I used the process of coding (1997) as I read and reread the data that had been recorded. Once all of the codes were completed for each lesson, I documented the amount of times each code was written on a spreadsheet. This was a continuous process and was repeated regularly throughout my entire study.

As I analyzed and coded my field log, I referenced student work to determine strengths and weaknesses in the current subject area. I examined daily work to determine the following day's lessons and book titles. I also compared answers from the pre-surveys and analyzed the results through tables and graphs. I distributed the same surveys during and after my study and recorded the results in a similar fashion. I reviewed the results based on vocabulary development, speaking and listening skills, and visual presentations. Student interviews were also coded and analyzed to determine student interest and student choice. I used a form of individual member-checks, which means checking my interpretations of the data with each participant (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Gardner, & Steinmetz, 1991). This provided confirmation or disproved the general themes I believed to be occurring throughout my data collection. The interviews provided individual perspectives from each child as well as their feelings and thoughts about using

wordless pictures books in the classroom.

In addition to the data collected during my study, I analyzed my data through reflective memos I wrote as I read the works of Dewey (1938/1997), Freire (2003), Delpit and Dowdy (2002), and Vygotsky (1978). Reading works from researchers and philosophers provided me with insightful quotes that applied to my study. I used this information to determine how they confirmed my findings and methodology. Reading the works of Dewey, Freire, Delpit and Dowdy, and Vygotsky, provided a variety of perspectives to use within my study and instructional practices.

After creating labels for my field log, examining student work, student interviews, and reflective memos, I looked at reoccurring themes and created bins to organize and classify my information (Figure 23). I arranged the codes from all forms of data collection into one visual. By linking the data collection and analyzing its contents, the results revealed possible outcomes (Ely, et al., 1997). After the bins were completed, theme statements were established to depict the intention of each bin. These theme statements supported the groundwork of my study.

## Bins



Figure 23. Bins.

### **Theme Statements**

**Literary Elements:** Literary elements are key concepts in wordless picture books.

**Language Development:** Wordless picture books provide an opportunity for students to develop language at an appropriate level for each individual.

**Affective Response:** Wordless picture books enhance positive and valuable responses without limiting their imagination.

**Performance:** Wordless picture books allow students to perform interpretations of books for every level of learners.

**Cognitive Response:** Wordless picture books elicit a meaningful connection to each text.

## Findings

My research study examined the observed and reported experiences of students when wordless picture books were integrated into my oral language program. I explored the development of vocabulary when using visuals and intended to find another successful method of instructing oral vocabulary. I had anticipated that in using observations and analyses of student work that I would be able to provide my students with a learning experience that both excited them and helped them develop a more mature vocabulary. I regularly reflected on my work and began to discover results as my bins were formulated. Figure 23 shows my bins and the categories within each bin that helped articulate my findings.

My study was designed to investigate the need for a more developed vocabulary in the kindergarten classroom. Throughout my teaching career, I have noticed that students entered kindergarten with varied levels of vocabulary due to different levels of experience with vocabulary. For this reason, I chose to focus on using wordless picture books to build vocabulary, since I believed there was a lack of instruction in oral vocabulary in a regular education classroom.

When I first began my study, I wanted to instruct students in developing a comfort with speaking in the classroom. I was able to do this, but on a limited basis. I realized that I was hindering my students' achievement by not providing enough opportunities for students to speak freely. I needed to allow students to speak as thoughts entered their brain rather than when they were called on to answer a question or to comment on a page of the book. I recognized that this greatly impacted my instruction when Dylan asked, "Why are you letting me talk

so much now? You didn't let me do it before!" This simple statement illustrated how important it was for me to allow my students to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and connections with the freedom to speak when the thought came to them.

When using wordless picture books as an oral language instructional tool, incorporating additional visual aids, vocabulary charts, and Venn diagrams provide students and teachers with a visual to illustrate the growth of the vocabulary. I wanted to explore whether using visual literacy, student interpretations, and presentations in a classroom were valuable ways to instruct students. I believe my study did suggest that these three modes of teaching are valuable. However, incorporating other means of literacy and varied presentations also proved to be helpful in obtaining success for my students.

### **Literary Elements**

Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Literary elements were key concepts when implementing wordless picture books because students were learning these concepts without viewing words or punctuation. "Wordless picture books could also be used in the classroom to further develop a child's sensitivity to literary elements" (Jett-Simpson, 1976, p. 19). This was also the first time that some students were learning about these concepts. Using the drawings of wordless picture books allowed children to focus on descriptive

details, developing sequencing skills and identifying story elements. Specific story elements that were presented in the kindergarten curriculum were comprehension, reflection, making connections, sequencing, symbolism, and themes. These concepts were explained on a level that was appropriate for kindergarteners. All of these elements were taught through modeling and student exploration prior to the implementation of formal observations and data collection. The topic of comprehension was explained to students so that they were aware that they needed to tell the story in a way that included details in order and made sense to others who were listening. Reflecting and making connections was taught so that students would see that books are not only fun to read, but are relevant to the lives of themselves and peers. Sequencing was explained using picture cards so that students were hearing and seeing what it meant to sequence a story. Symbolism and themes were explained using student work. Students showed pictures to the class and explained what they drew. We discussed telling the class the most important detail that picture represented with using only one sentence. Students were aware that the theme was the main idea of what was drawn. Some student work was then pulled out and used to explain symbolism. This was explained when students were telling the themes of their work without the picture showing a clear, implied theme within the picture. Amanda showed a picture of a little girl holding a flower. However, Amanda explained that the theme had nothing to do with the flower's color or type as some of the students had guessed. The flower made her feel better because it represented her grandmother.

While this may have been difficult for students to understand on a higher level or to create on their own, my students were able to recognize the symbolism in *The Yellow Umbrella* of the umbrellas representing friendship, as well as the symbolism of war in the story, *Why?*

### **Language Development**

When I utilized wordless picture books in my classroom, students were able to build their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. Stewing (2001) found that educators have developed visual literacy programs because there are individuals who are not as academically advanced as others. It is not always because they do not know how to perform the task at hand, it often because they have nothing to say. Wordless picture books build social, emotional, and academic vocabulary at a developmentally appropriate pace for each individual because a visual is provided and students are given time to perform on their level. When the study began, Mackenzie always had a lot to say but her stories did not always connect to what was being discussed. The amount of words that she used did not reflect the intellect behind her stories. As time passed, Mackenzie's stories started to sound more mature. There were times when I felt that she was speaking like an adult. One day when we were reading about dinosaurs, Mackenzie announced, "Well, we all know that this story is about the prehistoric era. It can't possibly be from now. Do you see dinosaurs roaming the earth in the present?" The student's ability to create her own story eliminated the fear of being incorrect and allowed Mackenzie to express and explain herself as listening skills, speaking skills, and vocabulary were strengthened.

“A successful picture book is one in which everything is presented to the reader as a speculative proposition, wrapped in invisible quotation marks, as if to say ‘what do you make of this’” (Tan, 2001, p. 10). Elizabeth taught the class how to look for details in each story and to play the role of detective in order to find clues that were hidden in the story. These relationships allowed the students to make connections from using wordless picture books to using books with words. In addition, many students shared stories about strategies that they have developed to aide in storytelling. While Elizabeth explained that being a detective helped her add details to stories, Brianna told the class to “start at the beginning and go all the way to the end,” and Jackson explained that he likes to “look at the book lots of times. It helps to see things over and over again.” Visual literacy was fostered by repetitive readings or showings, with time in between, followed by discussion of understanding. This allowed children the opportunity to process that every part of the story was connected to the following part of the story. Not all children walk away with the same understandings since they may have experienced the stories differently. Many researchers believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Wordless picture books provided an opportunity for students to develop language at an appropriate level for each individual. The complexity of language increased, while students’ storytelling expression improved. “Many research studies have shown that children make significant

gains in various areas of development through shared storybook experiences” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). For instance, when I first implemented my study, Donald struggled with understanding what I was asking of him. He would consistently tell me about a part of the book that he enjoyed or did not like. When we completed our final book in the study, Donald was retelling stories and using complete sentences rather than labeling items on the pages of the books or telling me about his favorite part.

Mackenzie once told me that she “likeded that book cause’ it was tilly.” She meant to say that she liked the book because it was silly. When we began reading our third book she said, “I like this book better because it is hilarious!” “Wordless picture books can be used to instruct children at different levels of their literacy development” (Hu & Commeyras, 2008, p. 5). Like Mackenzie, Kennedy developed his vocabulary in his use of past tense. He regularly used a form of past tense by adding an extra -ed to the word that he intended to use in the past tense. For example, he once said the word “watched-ed” instead of watched. However, after viewing and listening to wordless picture books and retelling the stories in the past tense, Kennedy was able to recognize that he had been using the -ed improperly. One day he noted, “oh yeah, that isn’t right” and corrected himself. Since then, he has been correcting his speech when he realizes that he has used past tenses incorrectly.

### **Affective Response**

Wordless picture books enhance positive and valuable responses without limiting their imagination. Wordless picture books rely on illustrations to convey a story and offer a large assortment of topics, themes, and levels of complexity (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). Rather than simply stating the ending to *The Yellow Umbrella*, Andrew shouted out, “Surprise! The umbrellas are really kids!” He was excited to uncover the theme of the story when it had been more complex than some of the others had thought. His excitement for the last page of the story and throughout the duration of this study was enjoyable to watch. He often had to bite his tongue so that other students could have an opportunity to speak. His “surprise” really added to the book’s ending for those students who did not understand what they were reading at that point.

These books encouraged wonder and excitement about the world, and reading became more enjoyable for the students. “They have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children demonstrate an ease with picture comments and understanding of the story. I would regularly find my wordless picture books were missing from my shelves during free time and found Jack and Kennedy hiding books behind the shelves so that they would be the first students to get them when they were given free time again. Donald never grasped the concept of reading the book for two weeks at a time and soon began asking each day, “What is our next wordless book going to be? I can’t wait for the next one!” When I asked these three boys why they liked reading these books they each had

a different response. Kennedy said, “I like reading about things that I like. You got books that I like now.” Jacob told me, “I want to take art classes so I can make books like these when I grow up. I like telling stories too!” Lastly, Donald explained that “these books are fun cause’ you don’t really know what is happening. I like getting to be the author and the illustrator. No one can tell me I am wrong.” The three boys noted that wordless picture books were liked by all of them. Their reasoning was based on the connections that they were able to make with each book. All three of the boys related this type of literature to something in their lives. They also noted the sense of comfort that these books elicit. According to Tan (2001), “it’s about showing and telling, a window for learning to ‘read’ in a broad sense, exploring relationships between words, pictures and the words we experience every day” (p. 4).

<b>Interview Questions Post-Study</b>			
How would you feel if you read a story without words?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?	15	0	0
How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?	15	0	0
How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?	15	0	0

Table 3. Post Survey Results

## Performance

Wordless picture books allowed students to perform interpretations of books for every level of learners. Using this type of visual literacy allowed children to explore and expand their vocabulary through storytelling and imagination. With no written vocabulary to wrestle with, students were able to enjoy wonderful moments telling the tales in their own words. “Picture books tend to represent that window of imagination: strange play, disruption and child-like wonderment that is always available, but only if you’re willing to look up and notice it” (Tan, 2001, p. 9). Jackson never wanted to participate in activities in my classroom. He rarely spoke to students during classroom discussions about topics in math, social studies, or science. He preferred to talk to friends about things that were irrelevant to topics. He often interrupted conversations to tell stories about playing with his trains or cars rather than what his classmates were discussing. Wordless picture books allowed Jackson to transfer his love of playing and imagination to storytelling. The imaginative world that he escapes to when playing with trucks was just as evident in his storytelling abilities. When Jackson retold his version of *Dinosaur!* he added movement, dinosaur sounds, and dialogue into a story that had very simple illustrations. He was able to tell a story that starting at the beginning, had a detailed middle, and an ending that was relevant to the story’s illustrations. He even helped students who left out portions of the story that were important. Wordless picture books allowed Jackson and other students to develop and perform stories in a manner that made sense to them.

Wordless picture books also provided students with an opportunity to tell a story that was meaningful to them that had few limitations on what was right or wrong. “In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction” (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004, p. 158). Kennedy had difficulty staying on task when we were reading *The Yellow Umbrella* and I was constantly trying to figure out how to get Kennedy involved. Then one day during indoor recess, I noticed that Kennedy was making umbrellas out of the craft supplies in our art center. When I asked him what he was doing he replied, “I am making the story.” This instance demonstrated that Kennedy was looking at the pictures and listening to the stories that the students were making but his interpretation was different. Instead of telling his story through role playing and discussions, Kennedy preferred to make props. As the other stories were introduced, students would ask Kennedy for help when making props to perform their stories. Not only did this help him understand the story in greater detail, but it helped him build his confidence and make friends in the classroom.

### **Cognitive Response**

Wordless picture books elicit a meaningful connection to each text. “Early reading behavior is linkage to the continuation of learning to read and enjoy it. The value of the child’s verbal accomplishments are internalized: the child experiences good feelings about books and reading” (Gerecke, 1989, p. 11). In my study, students were able to develop a knowledge of literary elements and familiarize themselves with the story before retelling through multiple viewing

and a variety of representations of the text. The words could not be memorized, and were instead recreated through spontaneous storytelling and imagination (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lawrence, 2004). Wordless picture books are said to “have a timeless quality that takes the listener into a world of ‘once upon a time’ where anything can happen” (Mellon, 1987, p. 47). The children were able to retract a statement, make changes, and make predictions about the story. When reading *The Yellow Umbrella*, Jack tried to determine where the umbrellas were going. He began by stating, “they are going to a hotel. Or is it a motel maybe? They are different. One is big and the other is little.” After a closer look at the book, Jack retracted his conclusion and said, “the red umbrella joined the yellow umbrella on the street because they were all going to school!” Jack’s attention to detail in the pictures allowed him to establish a conclusion that made sense and that related to his previous assumptions. He also added details to his story that were important in developing strong retelling skills.

Students examined illustrations and determined what they were able to add to characterization, action, setting, and mood. Many believe that wordless picture books set the stage for vocabulary choice, character settings and actions, displaying emotions, and helps guide children in learning about social and cultural behavior (Avery & Avery, 2001; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Gerecke 1989). Children were challenged by using inferencing skills such as reading patterns, decoding, and syntax. Students became aware of the character’s emotions and included more literacy elements through story telling. Having children tell a story orally can help students develop sequencing

skills and identify fiction story elements. For instance, when we read *Time Flies*, Brianna noted that “even though the pictures look real, this book is still fiction like *Dinosaur!*” Brianna was not fooled by the imaginative pictures compared to the more realistic pictures of these books. She recognized even though the story was being told through pictures, the stories themselves were unlikely to have been non-fictional books. Tan (2001) explains that by encouraging visual reading, the meaning is left to the reader to find for themselves, rather than being overtly stated or implied in traditional literature. The books were short, simple, and easy to read. The art itself told the story, and allowed for a variety of interpretations. Readers became interested in the imaginative play of drawings and paintings, telling stories of learning how to look at things in new ways. Further questioning allowed the reader to find his own meaning and seek closure through his own experiences. For instance, when we read *The Snowman*, Kennedy could not find the relevance of the story to his own life because he had never built a snowman before. In order to make a more meaningful connection, Kennedy decided that the next time it snowed; he was going to make a snowman with his brother. *The Snowman* elicited questions, imagination, and an experience that Kennedy would encounter for the first time. Kennedy learned that books are not only enjoyable, but are also tools for teaching and learning about new things. When we completed *The Snowman* he asked, “are there picture books about zoos? I saw a zoo on TV but I never went to one. I want to look at books about zoos so I can see if it is something I will like.” I found books about zoos, animals, and other types of visual literacy for Kennedy to examine. He looked at these books during a recess

period and determined that going to the zoo was something that he wanted to do some day. He also told me, “these books taught me a lot this year. I think you should use them for the kids next year.”

### **Delimitations**

My study was not able to specify whether vocabulary growth occurred solely through the use of wordless picture books. Since kindergarten is the first experience with formal schooling, I was only able to observe and measure the growth that my students made in vocabulary within the contexts of using wordless picture books.

In addition, my study consisted of a variety of levels of students who were involved in other activities outside of school that may have promoted oral language. Students also lived in households with a varying number of family members that may reflect the amount of listening and speaking opportunities that are presented throughout the day. Due to this constraint, my study did not take into consideration the effect wordless picture books would have on vocabulary for students who have a wide range of vocabulary development opportunities. Students who already had such wide ranges in vocabulary may have had difficulty building and developing skills through interaction with each other.

My study consisted of an unusually small group of students. I only had fifteen students and none of the students had IEP's or restrictions. Also, all of the students expected that they would learn how to read in kindergarten. Therefore, students had been more inclined to want to try using wordless picture books because they believed that this type of instruction would help them learn to read.

## Conclusion

Students are presented with new expectations each day that appear unfair, unfamiliar, and unusual. There are times when these are obstacles that teachers face when they plan a lesson or unit. Wordless picture books were both unfamiliar and unusual to the students in my class and to me. I was worried about implementing something that was different than what students had been exposed to originally and was very different than the way I was teaching in other subject areas. Ladson-Billings said, “learning can be manifested in student competency in a variety of subject areas and skills” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.111). Ladson-Billings is acknowledging that there isn’t one specific way of teaching, but instead, an obligation to help students learn, believe, and succeed by all means possible. This includes using a variety of teaching methods to reach the needs of all students. This not only gave me the courage to implement my study but also reiterates that using wordless picture books within any area of the curriculum may help students develop and expand their knowledge of any topic. These books allow educators to explore a new way of teaching in a method that may profoundly impact a student’s learning. Although wordless picture books may not be the answer for every student in every subject, my study defended that wordless picture books are effective instruments to explore when teaching oral language.

Children’s listening, speaking, and oral language skills are greatly impacted through the implementation of wordless picture books into an oral language curriculum. These books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary. A child’s

imagination and storytelling skills are pressed to new limits as these picture books eliminate the fear of being incorrect and allow the children to express and explain their thoughts and emotions freely. In the world of wordless picture books, the possibilities of vocabulary development become endless.

### **Future Plans**

Completing this study has not only enhanced my teaching abilities, but also taught me to believe in myself. It has always been easy for me to believe that all of my students would be successful. However, when it comes to my own ability, I sometimes lack the same motivation that I uphold for my students. My study has taught me new things about myself as an educator. I have learned that it takes strength, patience, and perseverance to complete such an overwhelming task. I now have an appreciation for how my young students must feel when they come to school for the very first time. The ongoing obstacles and triumphs of my study provided that ‘first day of school’ feeling for me every time I discovered or uncovered something new.

“The peasant begins to get courage to overcome his dependence when he realizes that he is dependent. Until then, he goes along with the boss and says “What can’t I do? I’m only a peasant” (Freire, 2007/1970, p. 61). The notion of freedom in my study seemed as though it was not just an obstacle to overcome but an opportunity that seemed so overwhelming and farfetched that it could not possibly end well. Instead, it was the oppressed choice of what to do with the knowledge that was already within my students and me. My students also questioned their capabilities because they thought they could not do well because

they were only five or six years old. This was because they had been told that they could not do things since they were so young. However, my study gave my students the opportunity to work alongside me as I recorded my data. Rather than simply being my subjects, they were instead my co-researchers. Not only were my notes, student work, and surveys helpful as I conducted my research, but my students themselves were extremely helpful. When students noticed that someone said something of importance, they would tell me that I should write it down in my journal. At first, I thought that it was funny, but I learned to respect what they felt had value and it led to remarkable findings in my study.

In order to provide the best education for my students, I created additional questions that I plan to explore in the future. These questions were developed as my study progressed and gave me ideas for changes and new topics to examine. *What will be the observed and reported experiences when I use teacher prompting to facilitate oral language while using wordless picture books?* When collecting my data, I tried not to influence the data by interjecting my own thoughts about the books that we were reading. I also spoke very little when students were conducting discussions or telling their stories. At times, students did need prompting and spoke freely. Their discussions and vocabulary use greatly increased as the study evolved. Students were willing to speak more openly when I asked questions. While I tried to speak very little, it made me wonder what type of impact it would make if I were to consistently open our discussions with questions or prompts.

*What will be the observed and reported experiences when students compare books with pictures to books with words?* Several of my students were presented with new experiences using the wordless texts in my study. It was evident that questions were developing because the wordless texts had provided opportunities for students to explore topics that were unfamiliar to them. One way in which wordless picture books were limiting was the fact that the books only presented the students with ideas but did not allow for clarification of their ideas. Books that have similar storylines or non-fiction books that connect to topics in wordless text would allow students to further their lines of inquiry and find answers to the questions that were developed while reading wordless picture books. Not only would students continue to learn about the topics of interest, they would also be exposed to more vocabulary that may not have been evident when reading wordless picture books.

*What will be the observed and reported experiences when students choose the wordless picture books we examine?* There were moments in my study when I questioned the book titles that I chose for my study. Every group of students was different and they had different interests. Not only was the topic of wordless picture books unfamiliar to me, but so were the topics of the books that I chose for my class. At times, my students appeared as though they were not interested in certain books because the topics were irrelevant to their lives or were not of interest. Half way through my study I added a new question to my survey. I asked students how they would feel if they chose the books that we would read. Every student in my class agreed that student choice would impact how much they

spoke about the text. At that point, I provided students with a selection of books to choose from in order to promote a more comfortable learning environment. This greatly impacted the outcome of my study at that point. In the future, I plan to give students the chance to observe the books prior to implementing them into my unit. This will ensure that the books being used are of interest and will provide opportunities for students to establish relevant connections to the text.

I plan to continue playing the role of teacher-researcher in my classroom. I hope that sharing my findings and experiences with my co-workers will inspire them to explore this role in their own classrooms. I believe that my peers share the same drive to help their students achieve success and I hope that they will explore the impact that wordless picture books may have in their own classrooms.

I regularly referred to my study as a journey. I am saddened by the fact that my journey is over with this group of students. However, I do not feel that this is the actual end of my journey. There are sure to be more twists and turns in the road ahead of me. But with each stop I make along the way, I hope that I am inspiring my students and peers to strive for excellence.

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## APPENDIX A: HSIRB Form



September 16, 2009

Abigail Oertner  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Abigail Oertner:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone [REDACTED] or through e-mail [REDACTED] should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

George D. Brower  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX B: Parental Consent Form

April 29, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on oral language development. The title of my research is "Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books". My students will benefit from participating in this study because wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary.

As part of the study, all students will be asked to examine a variety of picture books, compare and contrast vocabulary, sequence events, and identify the meaning of story elements. Students will be asked to create vocabulary charts, drawings and other artistic representations of the story, write, and present their own version of the wordless picture book. They will also produce a literary magazine about the author or illustrator of each wordless picture book. We will use a simple survey involving pictures to determine the children's feelings toward wordless picture books. A rubric will be used to monitor vocabulary development through speaking and listening exercises as the school year progresses. A second rubric will be used to monitor the progression of visual literacy. The study will take place from September 8th through December 18th, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. Please note that this will be exclusion from the study only, not the classroom assignments. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on a student's grade, classroom placement, or exclusion from classroom activities. Should you be concerned about the perceived risks associated with this study please contact Mrs. Barbara Bradley, Principal. She has reviewed the study and is available through the school office at 570-992-4960 or your child's guidance counselor at 570-992-4960.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any question you have about the research can be directed to me by phone 570-992-4960, email [aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us](mailto:aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us) or my advisor is Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-7958.

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature Date

### APPENDIX C: Principal Consent Form

April 29, 2009

Dear Barbara Bradley,

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on oral language development. The title of my research is "Pictures to Words: Facilitating Oral Language Development Using Wordless Picture Books". My students will benefit from participating in this study because wordless picture books allow students to grow at a developmentally appropriate pace for their listening and speaking vocabulary.

As part of the study, all students will be asked to examine a variety of picture books, compare and contrast vocabulary, sequence events, and identify the meaning of story elements. Students will be asked to create vocabulary charts, drawings and other artistic representations of the story, write, and present their own version of the wordless picture book. They will also produce a literary magazine about the author or illustrator of each wordless picture book. We will use a simple survey involving pictures to determine the children's feelings toward wordless picture books. A rubric will be used to monitor vocabulary development through speaking and listening exercises as the school year progresses. A second rubric will be used to monitor the progression of visual literacy. The study will take place from September 8th through December 18th, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms-no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in the study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. Please note that this will be exclusion from the study only, not the classroom assignments. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on a student's grade, classroom placement, or exclusion from classroom activities.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any question you have about the research can be directed to me by phone [570-992-4966](tel:570-992-4966), email [aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us](mailto:aoertner@stroudsburg.k12.pa.us), or my advisor is Dr. Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, [610-625-7958](tel:610-625-7958).

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Abigail Oertner has my permission to conduct this study at Hamilton Elementary School.

Principal Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D: Interviews**

1. Tell me about your favorite book: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Tell me about the types of books that you like to read: \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Tell me about your favorite authors or illustrators: \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPENDIX E: Surveys**

1. How would you feel if you read a story without words?



2. How would you feel if you could write the words to the story?



3. How would you feel if you could make the pictures from the story?



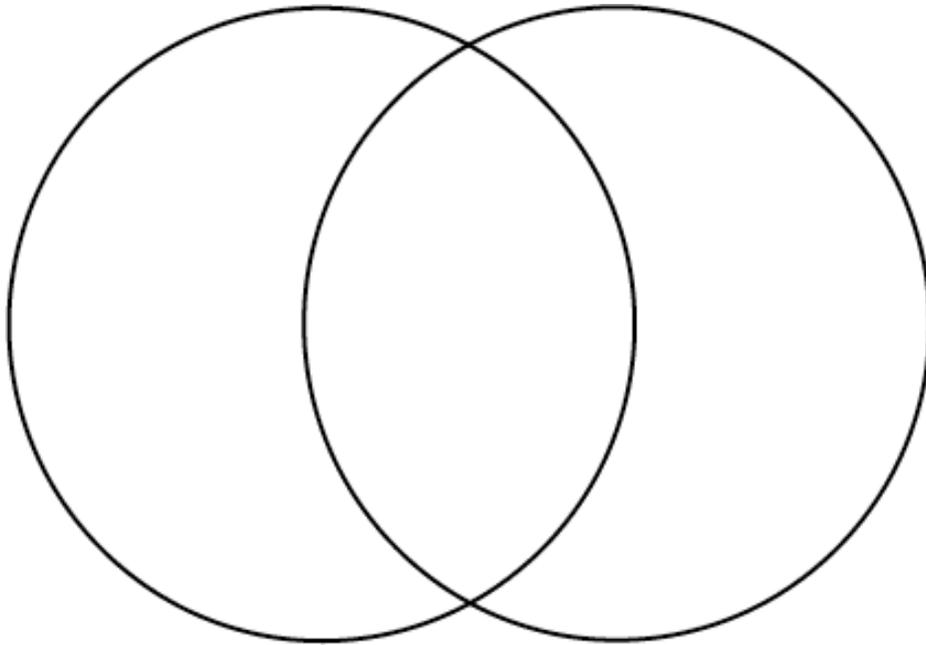
4. How would you feel about sharing your story with your friends?



5. How would you feel if you could learn about the authors and illustrators?





**APPENDIX H: Venn Diagram**

**APPENDIX I: Four Square Graphic Organizer**

<b>Comprehension</b>		<b>Setting</b>	
<b>Problem</b>		<b>Solution</b>	

**Details:**

### APPENDIX J: Wordless Picture Book Story Rubric

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Oral Language

<b><i>SPEAKING/LISTENING</i></b>	Y	N	M
Uses age appropriate vocabulary and language			
References familiar language used in the classroom			
References new language vocabulary established using picture books			
Attempts building onto prior vocabulary and language experience			
Other			

\*“Maturing” is based on students with speech, language or developmental delays that may impact achievement in these areas.

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Visual Literacy

<b><i>WRITING</i></b>	Y	N	M
Created story matches the illustrations			
Story is creative and imaginative			
Story elements are present (characters, setting, plot, problem/solution)			
Other			

\*“Maturing” is based on students with speech, language or developmental delays that may impact achievement in these areas.